

THE BIKE RIDE: PICTURES OF DISCIPLESHIP



The Lord has shown me a picture of a bicycle on a number of occasions; the last one being three days ago. I've been thinking about the relevance of the idea of riding a bicycle to our walk as disciples, and the more I have considered it the more aspects I have seen. I am going to try and draw the threads together here over a few posts, because I believe that the Holy Spirit will quicken specific aspects of them to different individuals. As you read it ask Him to speak to you.

Keep Moving

You can't sit still on a bicycle: if you do you will fall off. We are encouraged to "press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). Our faith is dynamic, not static. The Holy Spirit moves, and He wants us to move with Him. Now more than ever God is uprooting and tearing down old strongholds and old ways in the world and in the Church, because He is clearing the ground to build His Kingdom. Ephesians 5:16 encourages us to "redeem the time, because the days are evil." We don't achieve this by being static, but by engaging with God's purpose for us, like the chain engages with the cogs to move the cycle forward as we put our weight on the pedal. There are times when we doubt this purpose, and so we stop moving. The next thing we know, the faith that was so solid yesterday feels like quicksand today. But the doubt that floored us did not actually arise because the truth of what we believe is in any way questionable, but because the evil one chose that moment to send a fiery dart into our heart. We need to remember and believe the words that God has spoken to us in the past, because the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29). If we just get on our bikes and start cycling again in these "quicksand moments," despite the cloud that has descended, we will find that the path

becomes solid again and the way clear once more. The shield of faith will extinguish the fiery dart.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:58)

We are seated

Even though we are moving, we are seated – in Heavenly places with Christ Jesus. Because we are seated, we are at rest – even though we are moving. Jesus tells us that if we take His yoke upon us, we will find rest for our souls. If we have lost our rest and our peace has left us, the chances are that we have left our seats as well. All authority proceeds from His throne, and we are partakers of that authority. He has given us His name, and He has given us His peace. If we can just remember that we are seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), anxiety, impatience, stress and many other negative states of mind have nowhere to settle. (More on this in the chapter: “The Saddle.”)

(He) raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph 2:6)

Stay focussed

On a bicycle one has to stay focussed and concentrate on the task of staying on the road. If we have a lot of interests and responsibilities it is easy to get distracted, and the next thing we know we are, spiritually, lying on the ground along with our bicycle, and no longer wanting to cycle. But this doesn't mean that we shirk our responsibilities or (as long as they are healthy ones!) give up our interests: God has put us where we are, and in addition He is the creator and sustainer of all things, therefore there is not a moment when we cannot find Him, and nothing in which we cannot serve and worship Him. The secret to staying on our bikes is in Proverbs 3 vs 6: to actually seek and acknowledge Him in everything we do. If we share everything with Him, as the friend that we are cycling with, He will direct our paths, according to the rest of Proverbs 3:6. And if God is directing our paths we are not going to fall off our bikes.

***In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.*** (Prov 3:6)

UPHILL, DOWNHILL

Sometimes life is a struggle, and it seems like we are pedalling hard uphill in the lowest gear, but hardly moving at all; and sometimes it's just freewheeling all the way as every button we press seems to make something happen, and everything we do works the first time. It can seem like the same applies in our spiritual lives: one day the heavens seem like brass, God is busy somewhere else and hasn't got time for us, and in the flesh seems to be winning on every front in its war against the spirit; whereas on another day you sense the presence of God with you in an almost tangible way, you see Him sovereignly sort out a mess in your life, or you see someone healed or lead them to the Lord. We all want every day to be like this, and there can be a temptation to think we are "getting something wrong" if it isn't happening.

The accuser is always looking for a place where his lies can stick, because this is not the reality at all. We are promised peace with persecutions, and His presence – whether we feel it or not – in adversity (Isaiah 43:2). Pauls tells the Corinthians that he "dies daily" and "stands in jeopardy every hour." (1 Cor 15: 31-31) We've signed up to a training camp, not a holiday camp. If life seems to be a struggle our words of comfort are not "There, there; it will all get better soon," but "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13); and that we can "count it all joy" when life is difficult because "the testing of (our) faith produces patience" (James 1: 3).

In His grace God does give us wonderful "downhill days," because He knows that we need them; and there are times when do indeed reap in joy after sowing in tears (Psalm 126:5). But when Jeremiah asks why things are so hard, the Lord answers:

*"If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you,
Then how can you contend with horses?
And if in the land of peace,
In which you trusted, they wearied you,
Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5)*

Having said that, of course not many of us relish the prospect of the uphill sections of the journey. As we fly downhill with the wind in our faces we don't say: "Hooray! There's a steep climb ahead!" So what is God's perspective? His ways are not our ways and His thoughts not our thoughts. He doesn't measure how far we have come or how fast we are going, or even how high we have climbed. And it is God who gives the increase, not our own efforts, so we cannot take the credit for any fruit that we may have borne.

What matters most to our Father, and in fact what matters most to us as well, is this: that we stay upright because “***the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness;***

The upright will see His face.” (Psalm 11:7) We particularly need to remember this when it seems that the going is easy, because it’s on the downhill runs that the falls can be most painful.

THE MOUNTAIN BIKE

Our bike is not a road bike; it’s a mountain bike. God wants us to go up the mountain to seek His presence, and He wants us to ride on the paths that He shows us. I’ve written elsewhere about not being conformed to the world, so I won’t repeat it all here; but essentially the relevance of the idea of a mountain bike to thoughts on Christian discipleship is that the mountain bike is designed for the narrow way, not the broad road of the world’s thinking.

Long before Coronavirus, prophets of God all over the world were announcing that ‘God is about to do a new thing.’ There is material on it here as well – in particular the guest blog “You have not been this way before.” Now that new thing is upon us. I am sure that this is just a beginning; there will be more changes to come. But we are setting out on a path without a map and without roadsigns: only the Holy Spirit can tell us where to go, so we need to listen to His voice. If we aren’t used to hearing it, now is the time to learn.

As Jesus leads his off-road church further up the mountain track and away from the road there will be a separation between those who are following Him and those who are staying on the road that they have always known. It will be gradual, and for a while those on the road will say ; “It’s OK, they’ll see sense and come back down soon,” while those on the mountain will say: “Surely they will pay attention to what the Lord is saying soon, and come up here with us!” And some on the track will go back to the road, because they long for the smooth ride, while some on the road will turn off up the mountain to seek the presence of the Lord.

As the track goes higher the going will get harder yet more exhilarating, and a time will come when the distance between the two is too great and the crossing over will stop. The riders on the road will have become wedded to the world and its ways, while the Bride of Christ will be up the mountain, waiting for the Lord to return.

The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills. (Hab 3:19; Psalm 18:33)

TWO WHEELS: WORD AND SPIRIT

Many people are aware of the prophesy attributed to Smith Wigglesworth, from 1947:

“During the next few decades there will be two distinct moves of the Holy Spirit across the church in Great Britain. The first move will affect every church that is open to receive it, and will be characterised by a restoration of the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

“The second move of the Holy Spirit will result in people leaving historic churches and planting new churches. “In the duration of each of these moves, the people who are involved will say, ‘This is a great revival.’ But the Lord says, ‘No, neither is this the great revival but both are steps towards it.’

“When the new church phase is on the wane, there will be evidence in the churches of something that has not been seen before: a coming together of those with an emphasis on the word and those with an emphasis on the Spirit. When the word and the Spirit come together, there will be the biggest move of the Holy Spirit that the nation, and indeed, the world has ever seen. It will mark the beginning of a revival that will eclipse anything that has been witnessed within these shores, even the Wesleyan and Welsh revivals of former years. The outpouring of God’s Spirit will flow over from the United Kingdom to mainland Europe, and from there, will begin a missionary move to the ends of the earth.”

The two wheels are the Word and the Spirit. The word and the Spirit together are what carry us forward. We cannot make progress if we just rely on the scriptures that we read or hear preached, and we cannot make progress if we just rely on supernatural intervention from Heaven to change our lives. Jesus said His words are Spirit and Life, and if the life of the Holy spirit is going to impact us through the word we have to have a genuine expectation of a supernatural encounter with God as we read it or hear it. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Psalm 119: 130 says “The entrance of Your words gives light,” but that light does not come to us through our human understanding, but through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, the Word is only half the bicycle. And unless we “receive with meekness the implanted word (James 1:21), the Spirit has nothing to activate in us and any supernatural experience we may have will just be a spinning wheel going nowhere.

Hebrews 2: 1-4 says this:

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and

wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”

The writer to the Hebrews heard the gospel – “so great a salvation” – from “those who had heard” Jesus. This may have been one (or some) of the eleven, or any of the other disciples gathered with them in the upper room at Pentecost. But whoever it was that preached to the writer to the Hebrews, the word that was preached was confirmed by God “bearing witness with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.” They had the whole bicycle: the word and the Spirit.

I believe that there is something special about to happen in the new season that we are in; and it is what will bring this about. The Lord is leading His church off the main road of the familiar and up the mountain track of “the new thing” that He is doing. Across all the denominations and all the different church traditions – pentecostal/charismatic; evangelical; liturgical – there will be those that follow, and those that don’t. And they will all have one thing in common: a heart’s desire to follow Jesus. And the pentecostal will walk with the evangelical; the evangelical will walk with the liturgical; the liturgical with the charismatic. For each one, this unity will be a new thing. And the wheels of the Word and the Spirit will turn, and the harvest will be gathered in.

***“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD’s house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say,
“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths”*** (Micah 4: 1-2).

PEDAL POWER: COMPELLED BY LOVE

“Let everything you do be done in love” (1 Cor 16:14)

One of my grandchildren, who is not yet three, has a balance bike. It is a toddler's bike without pedals, on which she takes her first steps in learning to keep her balance before graduating to a “proper” bicycle. She can't go far on it, but she is learning the first principles of riding a bike.

For us, the pedals of discipleship are love. The heart of Christ is the love of the Father, who sent Jesus into the world to pay the price for our sin so that we could spend eternity with Him. Sometimes I forget that God didn't give me eternal life just so that I can have a blissful time in Heaven when my life on this earth is over, but so that I can spend eternity with Him, as He will spend eternity with all of His children. I cannot be a disciple of Jesus unless I carry His love, the love of the Father, in my heart. Unless I do, I have no power to move forward on the path.

I write a lot about the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit, but we must always see that power as an expression of God's love. He heals, makes whole, and delivers because He has compassion on our pain, our brokenness and bondage. He speaks prophetically into our lives because He wants us to see that He has a plan and a purpose for our lives, to give us a hope and a future (Jer 29:11). He brings revelation through words of knowledge and words of wisdom because He knows we cannot see the way or the truth for ourselves. He gives us the gift of tongues because He loves to see the edification that comes to His children from that connection between His Spirit within us and our own. He gives us faith for miracles because He loves to see us reaching into His abundance and believing that He is who He says He is, and will do all that He has promised to do. But He makes it clear (1 Cor 13) that all of these gifts are worthless without Love. It's a love that serves without pride, seeks only to bless and to give, and thinks only of the well-being of others, even those whom we consider our enemies. It's the love that has died to the flesh. Prophecy, faith, miracles, tongues, all the supernatural manifestations of the life of the Holy Spirit within us, are absolutely worthless unless they are delivered and expressed from its heart.

God has already seated us in heavenly places in Christ, and it is His good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. In Him we have everything we need as we move along His paths to bring His Kingdom to others, but it is only love that matures us, and it is only love that can take us forward. The late Bob Jones, who was a senior prophet with a ministry attested by many miraculous signs, died (for the first time – he died finally in 2014) and went to heaven in 1975. He saw a line of people on what looked like a conveyor belt on their way to eternal darkness, and a very much smaller line, the one that he was part of, walking towards Jesus. The Lord asked each person just one question, and it was the same question every time. It was this: “Did you learn to love?”

Are we learning to love? Without love we have no pedals, and we are no more than toddlers on a balance bike.

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.” (2 Cor 5: 14-16)

APPLYING THE BRAKES: TAKE EVERY THOUGHT CAPTIVE

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10 4-6)

The brakes are one of our weapons of warfare that are essential, but not often talked about: they are the “check” that we have been given to apply to everything that goes through our heads. Before we draw the sword of the Spirit, before we hold up the shield of faith, the Word encourages us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (If we are thinking in terms of the spiritual armour of Ephesians 6, we can see this as part of the function of our helmet of salvation: the helmet is our filter that will only allow Kingdom thinking do go on in our heads – if only we would remember that we are wearing it...)

Sometimes the Holy Spirit tells us sovereignly when to brake: we just sense that He is saying “No. Not that.” We’ve all had the times, probably too many to count, when we’ve had that check, ignored it and carried on our own way; then found out when it’s too late and we’re picking ourselves up off the ground why the Lord was stopping us. But we also know the far more satisfying corollary when we feel the check, stop, and then find out what would have happened if we had carried on. Those are good moments on our journey. However I don’t think the Lord wants us to rely solely on His intervention to know when to stop, because His instruction is to take every thought captive, not just the ones He points out. And this is not just about our sanctification: it is, as I have said, about warfare.

It is often said that the main battleground in the spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged is the mind. Sin always starts with a temptation: **“But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”** (James 1: 14) Sin was crouching at Cain’s door, and he let in in (Gen 4:7). It crouches at our doors as well, and we must recognise it for what it is and keep it out.

Any seed that is left in the right conditions will take root and grow. The devil will sow negative thoughts in our minds at any time, usually seeds of temptation to do or say something unrighteous and unloving. We may not do anything with them at the time, but perhaps we entertain them. They take root and grow bigger. They start to look enticing; we entertain them some more; they start to grow, and like dandelions they get more and more difficult to pull out, until ultimately they give

birth to sin and death. These are the thoughts that need to be taken captive and rejected as soon as they land, before the root starts to form.

Again, we may be in a conversation that covers sensitive topics. Something is said that maybe piques the flesh and a defensive reaction rises up. Do we entertain it and let it give birth to destructive words? If we do, sin is crouching at our door, and will jump in as soon as the words come out, because the door is open. Or do we take that thought captive to the obedience of Christ and refuse to give it room? To choose Life in these circumstances we have to die to the reactions of our flesh, but the rewards are always worthwhile. These moments are like points on a railway track, where we have a choice to make: if we choose the wrong way we can be led down a track that will waste time, cause emotional damage and end up just hitting the buffers. If we choose the right way we grow in Christ and sharpen the discernment that makes it easier to take the next thought captive to make it obedient to Christ.

As the spiritual battle around us intensifies, so too does the battle for our minds. One of our best defences is to make it second nature to keep our hands constantly close to the brakes. We have to remember that it is our spirits that are in control, not the slope of the flesh's path that is enticing us: at every moment we choose to either use them, or to carry on careering down the hill.

***Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*** (Psalm 51:6)

HOLD ON AT ALL TIMES: THE HANDLEBARS

“Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.” (2 Peter 1: 5-7)

We have all seen cyclists – usually young men or boys – cycle along without holding the handlebars. I remember when I was a boy and first learnt the skill. I also remember that, as a rule, it was only a skill I employed when I knew other people were watching... But there are two circumstances that every cyclist riding “no hands” has in common: this particular skill can only be accomplished on as smooth terrain, generally a road or another paved surface; and it is not something that can realistically be attempted when cycling uphill. As Christians, we have left the paved surface of the road, and are heading up the mountain on a dirt track. If there is one thing we need to do, it is to keep hold of the handlebars.

There are many exhortations in the New Testament, whether from Jesus, Paul or any of the other writers, to persevere in our faith. Perhaps the most frequently quoted is from Paul’s letter to the Philippians:

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3: 13-14)

The word translated as “diligence” in the introductory passage is *spoude*, which means earnestness, eagerness, being full-on, not just in the desire to accomplish something but in the energy and persistence applied to carrying it out. Elsewhere Peter writes “be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” (2 Pe 3:14) Paul exhorts Timothy to be diligent in pursuing godliness “so that (his) progress may be seen by all,” (1 Tim 4:15), and to the Galatians he writes “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” (Gal 6:9). References to being committed and wholehearted are set like precious stones throughout Proverbs. The rewards held out by the Lord to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation are all for those who “endure.” And these references only scratch the surface of what is a very deep-veined theme running through the whole of Scripture. Diligence is the name written on our handlebars: if we don’t hold on, we will fall off.

At this point there might appear to be a tension between the fundamental truth that we are saved by Grace (the Cross of Christ) and not by works (staying on the bike) However there isn’t one. The bike itself is a gift from God. The desire to ride it and to stay on is a gift from God, just as faith itself is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8; 2 Peter 1:1). And Psalm 37:24 tells us: *“Though he fall, he shall not be*

utterly cast down: for the Lord upholds him with His hand," so even our ability to stay on the bike is by the Grace of God. The very words that are given to us by the Holy Spirit encouraging us to be diligent and to endure also give us the desire and the ability to carry them out. I think it can reasonably be said that those who fall away are the ones who never really got on the bike in the first place – who confessed with their mouths that Jesus Christ is Lord, but never really believed it in their hearts. (Romans 10: 9) So if you, like me, are picking your bike off the ground and getting on again for the fiftieth time this week, don't beat yourself up over it and call yourself a failure. The good news is, you never were a success in the first place! All of that glory belongs to the Lord. The fact that you are getting on your bike again is proof that you are, by the grace of God, being diligent.

So, holding onto the handlebars, we press on towards the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We carry on pedalling along the mountain track. Sometimes there are downhill stretches and easier sections, but the call is upward and the overall direction of the track is always to take us ultimately "further up and further in," as Aslan says in the final book of the Chronicles of Narnia. And this leads us to the other essential function of the handlebars: they are what gives the bike direction. We don't just hold on "with all diligence" in order to stay on the bike; we hold on to stay on the path. And we always look forward: looking back brings disaster. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, we steer along His track to the top of the mountain.

Being born again isn't about boarding a train in this life and stepping onto Heaven's platform in the next one: it's about the slow process of growing to maturity in Christ as we consistently reveal to the watching world that He is the one who is keeping us on track. The higher up and further in we go, the closer to Him we get and the more like Him we become, so that "**Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.**" (Isaiah 2:3) The Mountain of God is the Mountain of His presence, where Love rules and His Glory dwells. It's where He met with Moses and gave the Old Covenant to His people, and it's where He meets with us to lead us forward by His Spirit today. There is one simple test that will tell us if we are on our bikes or completely off track, and it's the question I referred to in the chapter on the pedals: are we learning to love? Jesus has individualised lessons for each one of us, and they will all be somewhere along the route that Peter maps out in the scripture that opens this section. But learn them we must if we are to progress up the mountain, because

***They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.* (Isaiah 11:9)**

This is where our direction must be set. We can keep moving, with both wheels on the ground, our feet on the pedals and our hands close to the brakes, gripping the handlebars tightly. But whenever we hurt or destroy we've lost our way.

THE TYRES: BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

“But for those who are righteous, the way is not steep and rough” (Is 26: 7, NLT)

A bicycle is not going to get very far without tyres, and those tyres need to be filled with air. For us, as we cycle along the track on the Mountain of the Lord, the air in the tyres is the breath, the *Ruach*, of the Holy Spirit. Without labouring the point made repeatedly on these pages, we do not progress far in our Christian walk unless we are filled with the Holy Spirit as instructed in Ephesians 5:18; and that filling has to be repeated and ongoing, as the tense of the Greek verb used translates as “be being filled...” We cannot move if our tyres are flat: they need to “be being filled” – pumped up – with the *Ruach*, the breath of God.

The old “penny farthing” cycles of the latter part of the nineteenth century had a massive single wheel above which the rider perched precariously, that was driven directly by pedals that were affixed to the axle and had a solid rubber tyre. In lots of ways it is a good picture of dead religion, running along a single wheel of the letter of the law, no chain (the connected body of Christ – that’s the next article), without the Holy Spirit, uncomfortable to ride, and certainly impossible to take onto the mountain track.



The penny farthing: a picture of religion.

For a more detailed study on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, see "[The Name of the Father](#)," but for the purposes of this article we'll just limit ourselves to some basic principles of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. And, as with the other parts of this series, these are just a few (relatively) concise notes for you to unpack further, either on your own or with other believers.

So what do we have in our tyres?

Love

"God's love is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." (Romans 5:5) The pre-eminence of love in the life of the Christian disciple is a given: I don't need to add here to the millions of words that are already written on the subject: it's enough that Jesus has commanded us to love one another. What is relevant here is that we cannot love one another as commanded; or love the world as God did by sending His Son, unless it is with the love that He has filled us with. God's love prefers others, serves, gives unstintingly, blesses, builds, and doesn't seek approval or reward. These are not qualities of our flesh. If we have compassion on the poor and needy without reaching into the heart of God for His resources we are just another social action group whose work will, ultimately, not stand. God in Christ loved His friends by washing their feet, and reached out in compassion to the fallen world. We need to pray for His compassion to fill our hearts if we, as His disciples, are going to do the same.

Our identity

God has given us the Spirit of Adoption, by which we cry out "Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15) The Holy Spirit fills us with the revelation of our identity in Christ: it is only by the Spirit's power that we know that we are children of God. Anyone can believe in their heads that they are a child of God or call themselves by that name. Some religious worldviews would say that we are all God's children, because we are His creation and man was made in His image. But sin marred that image and broke the spiritual bloodline. Every man and woman is God's creation and is a child of the first Adam; but God is Spirit, and it is only as brothers and sisters of the second Adam, Jesus Christ the Son of God, that our original spiritual family line is restored. Galatians 3: 26 makes this clear: "**For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**" Every Christian is of the Seed of Abraham (See Galatians 3: 29), yet when the Jews claimed that Abraham was their Father Jesus retorted that their father was actually the devil. (John 8:44) It is only by the Spirit of God, through the blood of Jesus, that we can be children of God. And as true children of God, let us be filled with the knowledge of His parenthood.

God's faithfulness

Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until “The Promise of the Father” was poured out from on high (Acts 1: 1-5). The promise was of redemption and blessing for himself and all his children, who would be numerous beyond count, and can be found in Genesis 12: 1-3. When the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost this was like the uncorking of a great cask of blessing that had been stored up in Heaven since the time of Abraham, and it has been pouring ever since. Every time a believer is filled with the Spirit, whether for the first time or subsequently, God is re-affirming that He keeps His promises. And this affirmation is in itself another promise: it's the very promise of Heaven, the deposit or guarantee of our eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Cor 1:22). Meanwhile in this life, the promise that fills us is the promise to bless. Whatever obstacles or pitfalls might lay across our path, it tells us that He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4) We carry within us the promise that, by the power of His Spirit, ***“in all things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*** (Romans 8:37) Filled with blessing, faithfulness and promise, our tyres will take us over everything that comes our way on Earth, and they will carry us on to our eternal destiny in Heaven.

Power

Paul tells Timothy – and us – ***“You do not have a spirit of fear, but of love, power and a sound mind.”*** (2 Tim 1:7) The Spirit that is in us is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. We all know this Bible verse in our heads, but do we have it in our hearts? If we have within us a deposit of the power of the God who created all things, we don't want to just know this truth as a fact, but we want to experience it as an aspect of the breath that fills our tyres, the *ruach* that we are riding on. What did I experience today of the power that raised Jesus from the dead dwelling in me? When I prayed, did I just mumble the first thing that came into my head that matched the need I was considering, or did I wait for the Spirit of God to reveal His perspective and release His provision? What interactions have I had with other people, in or outside the church, that Jesus may have wanted to touch supernaturally through the operation of a gift of the Holy spirit? Paul says to the Corinthians: ***“Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”*** (2 Cor 13:5) Many of us in the church today could probably benefit from following the same injunction.

A sound mind

The word translated as “sound mind” is *sophronismos*. Sometimes translated as self-control or sobriety, it is more than that: it is actually an admonition to walk in full control of one's faculties; to be disciplined. The full set of meanings listed in Strong's concordance under the verb *sophronizo* are 1) “restore one to his

senses,” 2) “to moderate, control, curb, disciple,” 3) “to hold one to his duty,” and 4) “to admonish, to exhort earnestly.” Did you spot the word “disciple” tucked into the list? I don’t have an Amplified Bible translation to hand, but if we used the Strong’s definition of the original Greek for the noun translated as “self control,” or “a sound mind” to do our own amplified version, we could say that the Holy Spirit gives us “a restored mind that responds to an earnest exhortation to stay on course and not to wander out of control and go off track.” In other words, a renewed mind that responds to being discipled. Or quite simply, a discipled mind.

As well as filling us with God’s love and power, His fatherhood and His faithfulness, it is the Holy Spirit who disciplines us. Jesus called Him the Counsellor or The Paraclete, the One who Comes Alongside. But it is up to us to keep our tyres pumped up.

THE CHAIN: LINKED TO THE BODY

"I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:23)

The focus of Jesus's ministry was always to glorify the Father, and to demonstrate that He was the Son whom the Father had sent, because He loved it so much, to bring eternal life to all who accepted Him. His master plan – His only plan – was to build His church to destroy the works of the enemy and reveal the love of the Father that He poured out into the hearts of His children by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is the chain that makes the wheels of the bike go round: unless we are linked in with other believers our discipleship is not going to progress.

Paul prays: ***"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*** (Eph 3: 15-17) The pre-requisite to knowing the love of Christ and being filled with all the fullness of God is being “rooted and grounded in love.” The arena in which we fulfill the command to love one another and keep pedalling forward (as I wrote earlier in this series) is the local church, where Jesus is Lord, the Father is glorified, and the life of the Holy Spirit flows; where believers pray for one another, serve one another, minister to one and other and are accountable to one another.

If there were a prize for the most-quoted verse of scripture, Matthew 18:20 would probably be in contention for runner -up: (the winner, of course, being John 3:16.) ***"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*** Jesus “in the midst” is the essence of church. I think if we all took discipleship a lot more seriously Jesus would probably be a lot more evident in the midst than He often is, but that’s not for this chapter. I think what is important here is for us always for us to remember where we are headed as we cycle up the mountain:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." (Eph 1: 7-10)

God is gathering us together in Christ, and His vehicle is the church. ***"He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."*** (Eph

1:22-23) This is the goal of our discipleship, and it's why we cannot follow Jesus on our own. It's why Jesus prayed "May they all be one as you and I are one" (John 17:21). And it's why we cannot be walking in the Spirit if we "bite and devour one another" (Galatians 5:15)

Because the heart of God breaks at division in His church. Revival will sweep the nations when brothers and sisters in Christ set aside petty doctrinal and stylistic differences and gather round the standard of our Saviour to destroy the works of the devil in His name. But when one ministry denounces or criticises another, they are allowing those very works of the devil into their own ranks. For what is more important: what we think we know about what God thinks, or whether we obey His commandment to love one another? Whether we criticise and condemn one another, or whether we are "*kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you?*" (Ephesians 4:32)

The Lord needs His chain to be well-oiled. Jesus is always there, ready to pour the oil of the Holy Spirit onto each one of His links. We need to be connected to one another with links that are supple and yielding. Without the oil of His anointing we become rusty and rigid, set in our ways, insensitive to one another and out of touch with the three cogs on the crankshaft – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is for each one of us to keep seeking the Lord so that we remain well-oiled individually in order for the corporate chain of the life of the Body to function smoothly. Again, as I wrote above, it is not for one link to assess whether another is functioning as it should, or even whether or not it should be there. We are nothing on our own: it is only through our connections to those three cogs and to one another that we have purpose. Paul writes this to the Galatians:

"If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load." (Gal 6: 3-5)

Jesus says to the church at Sardis: "*I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.*" (Rev 3: 1-2). The "things that remain" are Faith, Hope, and Love, and the greatest of these is Love. (1 Cor 13:13). These three are the gold, silver, and precious stones that remain from our works after the wood, hay and stubble have been consumed in the fire. (1 Cor 3:12) We are alive in Christ to the degree that we are linked to one another in Love, and the body of these connections is the Church of Christ. To be disciples we must be in the chain, and we must be vigilant to overcome any thoughts and attitudes that would tempt us to break our connections.

THE SADDLE: SEATED WITH CHRIST IN HEAVENLY PLACES.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2: 6-7)

Are you born again? Because if you are, (and if you aren't you need to be) this is what happened when Jesus entered your heart: you were raised up, united with Christ, and seated with Him in heavenly places. God picked you up and put you on the saddle. When you were raised out of the waters of baptism it was a symbol not only of your new life in Christ as you live out your discipleship on the earth, but also of God's own hand lifting you from the "miry clay" of sin to be seated with His Son in the Spirit. And to be absolutely clear, Scripture gives us more detail of exactly where in the heavenly realms Jesus is seated. When God raised Him from the dead by "***the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead,***" He "***seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.***" (Eph 1: 19-21).

Since we are seated with Him, our saddle is there as well. So what does it mean to be seated?

It means the job is done. The death and resurrection of Jesus completed the work of salvation for all time, and we sit with Him, sharing in that completed work. He won the victory at Calvary and we share in the spoils. Nothing we did put us in that seat – even the faith that we had to believe in Jesus was a gift of God. God lifted us, and God seated us. And the power with which He lifted us with now dwells within us, and is available to us when we "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:4) However we must also remember that Jesus is not just sitting with His feet up at the right hand of the Father now that His work is completed: He is busy interceding for us (Heb 7:25). So as we sit there with Him we can be engaged in the same activity, and we can be talking with Him about what He wants us to pray for.

Being seated means we are in the place of authority. Jesus is seated "***far above all principality and power and might and dominion.***" Not just a bit above, but far above. I have never been given revelation on the topography of the heavenly realms, but those who have tell us that the second heaven is the area of the demonic principalities and powers, whereas the third heaven – where Paul was taken and "***heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter***" (2 Cor 12: 4) – is where Jesus is seated, and where we, in the Spirit, are seated with Him. We are not just above the forces of the enemy and their destructive works on Earth, we are literally on another level. If we think about demonic activity from an earthly or carnal perspective, we can easily feel intimidated or uncertain; and this makes sense because the second Heaven is obviously on a "higher" level than our earthly abode. This of course is exactly

what the devil wants. But if we look at the enemy from where we are seated we have a very different picture, and it is no longer us who are intimidated, but him.

Finally, being seated means being in the place of rest. I am sure you have seen someone on a mountain bike, pedalling up an impossible-looking slope, with their legs moving faster than their wheels, but nonetheless moving forward in their lowest gear, remaining seated, and not even appearing to exert themselves.

Hebrews 4 talks about the rest of God, and verse 3 tells us that "***we who have believed do enter that rest.***" Later in the same chapter the writer exhorts us (v. 11): "***Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.***" (ie the disobedience of the Israelites.) Peter too exhorts us to "***be diligent to be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.***" (2 Pe 3:14) If we keep short accounts with God and with one another "***the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin***" (1 John 1:7) and our peace remains with us. Even though we may be pedalling hard, the saddle remains a restful place. And when we are in it, whatever the path looks like, our God "***will supply all (our) need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus***" (Phil 4: 19). The right gear will be there on the bike when we need it.

We do not need to get out of the saddle to exert more pressure on the pedals, and we certainly do not need to get off the bike to help God by pushing it up the hill.

THE FRAME: BY FAITH

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (Heb 11:3)

This morning I saw a hearse coming towards me on the road with a long queue of cars behind it. I was glad I was driving in the opposite direction. Then, very briefly, I saw the number-plate: on it were my initials. My first thought – because the flesh tends to butt in before the spirit – was: “That’s you, Bob! Could that be an omen?” But then the Spirit spoke to me with the truth: “You are already dead, Bob. You were crucified with Christ. It is not you who live, but Christ who lives in you!” So by the time the line of cars had passed, I was thinking: “Halleluia! I’m dead to my flesh, and alive in Christ!” This is what the Word of God says; it’s what my experience of the Holy Spirit confirms every day; and it’s what my heart believes even if my head is assailed by doubts. It is the confession of my faith. Faith is the frame that holds the entire bicycle together.

By faith we understand... that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. Hebrews 11:1 tell us “**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” Faith is a substance. Whether we believe this or not is our choice. But if we can allow the substance of faith to become a reality in our hearts we can look into it and see that which our brains cannot fathom. “The Just shall live by faith” was the revelation given to Martin Luther and is the central plank of the Protestant reformation. The scripture occurs three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38), and these in turn refer back to Habakkuk 2: 4: “**Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.**” So what do we see when we look into the substance of faith?

Faith is not so much an idea that our minds can grasp, as the very substance of a dimension that our spirits walk in. If I go out into my garden I walk on grass. If my spirit enters the Heavencies I walk in faith. It is where Truth is defined by the Word of God and not by the word of science, and where Life is defined not by the ageing and wearing out of the body, but by its resurrection. In this dimension, we see the rule of Heaven established on Earth:

*“Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
And princes will rule with justice.
A man will be as a hiding place from the wind,
And a cover from the tempest,
As rivers of water in a dry place,
As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.
The eyes of those who see will not be dim,
And the ears of those who hear will listen.
Also the heart of the rash will understand knowledge,*

And the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly.
(Isaiah 32: 1-4)

We see the King of righteousness Himself

*The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.
His delight is in the fear of the LORD,
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;
But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.* (Isaiah 11: 2-5)

And in this dimension of faith, as “***the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.***” (Romans 8:19), we see the redeemed, sin-free world that creation is earnestly expecting:

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.* (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

I make no apology for quoting these scriptures at length, as I believe they are among the most beautiful verses in the entire Bible. They describe the society and the landscape of the Mountain of God where our bike ride is taking us. And this place is real: its substance is faith. If we can allow our spirits to walk there we will find that our own judgements won’t be “by the sight of our eyes or by the hearing of our ears” either, but they will come to us by the spirit of the King of the Mountain who dwells within us.

Free of the curse of sin, beyond the reach of the devil, and untrammelled by the limitations of the world and the flesh, the substance of faith determines the

abundance of God's supply, whether this is of provision, healing, spiritual gifts or any other blessing. Ephesians 1:3 says "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.**" Every spiritual blessing has already been given to us in heavenly places. They are a reality. Their substance is faith. When we read about them in the Word of God we are reading the Maker's handbook on all the resources that we have in our personal cupboards of His provision in Heavenly Places.

Jesus tells us "**whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.**" (Mark 11:24) Our English word "receive" has a fairly passive connotation: there is a sense of holding out one's hands for something to be placed into them. The Greek word, *lambanō*, that is used here, is far more active. Here are the primary definitions. They are all involve actively taking hold of rather than passively receiving:

1. to take with the hand, lay hold of, any person or thing in order to use it
 1. to take up a thing to be carried
 2. to take upon one's self
2. to take in order to carry away
 1. without the notion of violence, i.e to remove, take away
3. to take what is one's own, to take to one's self, to make one's own
 1. to claim, procure, for one's self

Jesus is telling us to take hold of those things that we ask for, believing that they already exist – which they do, made of the substance of faith. He is telling us to reach into our heavenly "provisions cupboard" and take hold of that spiritual blessing which the Father has provided. I remember a healing meeting with Ian Andrews in the late 1980s. If I remember correctly, he said that God had showed him a warehouse full of all the body parts that exist, and when he prayed for healing he just reached into the warehouse and took hold of a new part to replace the one that was malfunctioning. He believed he received, and he had what he prayed for. On Earth as it is in Heaven: what was made of the substance of faith in the heavenly realms became flesh and blood on Earth.

Of course, that is easier to write than to do. If you're anything like me, most of us blunder around and get hold of something occasionally; but as John Wimber discovered, the more we blunder the more chance we have of actually taking hold of what God has provided. I'm sure Ian Andrews did a lot of blundering, and probably still does some! And of course we are always in a battle: God may have provided; we might be reaching out into the right place, but the devil is standing in front of the cupboard. Sometimes we have to fight for what we're reaching for, and keep praying until we know in the Spirit that the battle is won. Proverbs 23: 12 says "Apply your heart to instruction, And your ears to words of knowledge." The word of knowledge is really helpful in enabling us to take hold of the substance of faith, so if you are praying for people ask the Holy Spirit for that gift – and take hold of it! I have seen a small number of miraculous healings when I have prayed for people, including a broken toe being instantly mended

and a deaf ear being opened; and they have always followed a word of knowledge.

This is one of my pet topics, and I could keep writing – but you might not keep reading. The frame of faith touches every part of the bike – the wheels, the handlebars, the brakes, the saddle, the pedals. If we can understand that faith is a substance and that we do not have to ask God for what He has already given but learn to take hold of it instead of just holding out our hands; and if we can really believe in our hearts that the Word of God is all true and is describing a dimension that our spirits have access to, then I believe we will progress further and faster in our discipleship as we walk – or cycle – after the spirit and not after the flesh.

Bob Hext Sept 2020