

THE MESSAGE

La Rivière, Leen

THE MESSAGE

Consists of 2 books:

-The Kingdom in Deed (1995)

-The Kingdom of Righteousness (1996)

As, once again, there is a growing need for reflection on the content of Christian communication, both books are being published in one volume with the title: THE MESSAGE.

The books deal in depth with the message of Jesus Christ.

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This is Volume 4 from the series 'Biblical principles'

Volume 1 – Christian and Creative

Volume 2 – Music and Ministry

Volume 3 – Praise and Worshippers

Volume 4 – The Message (this book)

Volume 5 – Creative Leadership

Volume 6 – Faith (the church) and the public arena

Volume 7 – Prayers

Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicized edition copyright 1989,1995, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the churches of Christ in the United States of America

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With introductions from Dennis Peacocke, Calif; Rev John Peck, UK, Dr. John Smith PHD, Australia, Prof. Seerveld, Canada

INTRODUCTION

Faithful Christians base their life and their actions on Jesus Christ. After 2,000 years His actions, His sayings, His stories continue to inspire millions of people. He has an impact on their personal faith as Saviour and Redeemer, but also on their everyday lives as human beings and the society in which they live.

To understand all of this, we need to study His message. So WHAT has Jesus said and thought?

From 1993-1996 I took a 'study journey' through the Bible to search of this Message of Jesus.

Even from my initial readings I saw that

1. Jesus hardly ever 'preached'
2. Jesus was an artist

Because He used the most common and popular art form from the East: storytelling. And by means of these stories He communicated His message. These stories we call today 'parables'.

And what was the message of these 'parables'? In each and every one the content is to do with 'The Kingdom of God'.

In the **first book** '*The Kingdom in Deed*' I reveal my journey of discovery in all these 'parables': what is here the message of Jesus and why this message talks again and again about 'The Kingdom of God'. It is a fascinating journey, and it touches me deeply.

But after reading this first book, when it was out as the first Dutch edition, and rereading again, it occurred to me that searching for the Kingdom is 'doing the Kingdom' and the relationship is here with righteousness and justice.

So in **part two**, '*The Kingdom of Righteousness*' I report on this second journey of discovery. Even now rereading the English version it touches me deeply again.

As these books belong together as the two sides of one coin, they appear in this English version together.

This message of Jesus is so valid for today: family life, society, economics, politics, civil society, unions and association, but also for us as artists.

I asked two special persons to write a foreword for this new edition.

- **Prof. Jan Peter Balkenende**, former Prime-Minister of the Netherlands. As a Professor and as Prime-Minister, he has always been involved with all methods of communication. Also, he has always been inspired by the Gospels. So what is his opinion about this book 'The Message'?

- **Ralph van Manen**, leading singer-songwriter of the Netherlands, is constantly participating in all forms of communication. Ralph finds his inspiration too in the Gospels, so what will he say about this book?

May this book become an inspiration for many

Leen La Rivière, leen@continentalart.org
AD 2012

Introduction by Ralph van Manen, singer-songwriter

Leen is not a superficial Christian. You will become aware of that, if you read his books. Such books take a lot of study and sometimes years of thorough analysis and preparation. He looks far ahead and that delivers some fascinating insights!

Leen rethinks in this book the text of the Gospels. And that results in the great panorama of the purpose of God's Kingdom being of radical importance for our times. The 'Old' Book, is suddenly totally new and fresh.

It is a panorama of God's grace, but also challenges us to be responsible and to have integrity.

I advise all to read this book with an open mind and be prepared, now and then, to look into the mirror. Leen's statements fearlessly clean the floor of 'spiritualised' dust, and there is no room for spiritual 'bourgeois' mentality so often seen in believers and congregations.

The writing of this book is an excellent form of biblical stewardship

For His honour,

by Prof. Jan Peter Balkenende, former prime-minister of The Netherlands

Sociologist Anton Zijderveld (Erasmus University, Rotterdam) wrote many years ago that we live in a 'staccato' culture, moving too fast from one hype or development into another; a culture without moments of rest or reflection.

This important observation is valid in a time where so many people face so many questions. Globally there is the problem of the climate, the finiteness of fossil fuels, the growth of the world population (9 billion in 2050, and shifts of economic and political powercentres. Closer to home we deal with hard-heartedness, alienation, populist tendencies, feelings of unsafety and insecurity about our own existence.

In contrast, positive aspects for society are: hope, perspective and prospects with expectation. These tendencies can as well be recognised. There is a clear call to the world of trade and industry to do business ethically, with integrity and responsibility. There is a felt need to work on new alliances between governments, enterprises, civil society and religious groups and to look for concrete meanings for a durable life for everybody. There is a moral duty to make choices for 'us' and 'later', instead for 'me' and 'now'.

Such hope-giving perspectives are connected to thinking about responsibility. Responsibility for our environment and habitat, for the destiny of people in need either far away or nearby, for a durable economic development, for safe living areas, for respect, tolerance and empathy.

This ethos of responsibility cannot go without morals, values and norms giving direction so that the ideals of people can create changes in peoples and structures. Here especially the Christian command to love is essential: to love your neighbour as yourself, and also to see the other as more excellent than yourself. Dr. Martin Luther King once said about life's purpose for every Christian: 'To make freedom and justice a reality for all of God's children'.

To build the 'good society', the Bonum Commune, we must start with a deep inner conviction.

It may be true that parts of the Western world show developments of secularization and de-churching, but this does not mean that Christian inspiration and meaning have lost their intrinsic value.

Leen La Rivière stands totally in this tradition of faith and work based on the promises of Christ. Over a long period of time he has shown just what Christian-social inspiration can do for how people think and what people do, for the development of visions in a fast changing society and for having a moral compass. Faith, creation of vision and creativity are in line. Leen La Rivière's message is one of trust.

This book offers a great and undeniable contribution to hope, perspective and expectation. The subjects he discusses deal with points of rest and moments of reflection, all of which are so needed today.

Every day we need to build the Kingdom of God and its justice. This book contains important themes. A message of hope in a world of confusion. A message of taking up your own responsibility. And a message of serving God in daily life, to His glory.



Voil. 1: THE KINGDOM IN DEED

Jan. 1995

Voil. 2: THE KINGDOM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

by

Leen La Rivière

Jan. 1996

Dedicated to my friend Steve Fairnie † 22 febr. 1993

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Foreword to Leen La Rivière's book on the Kingdom of God

By Dennis Peacocke, California

Some years ago I attended a Christian Leaders conference in the United States composed of Catholics, Anglicans and Evangelicals dealing with the issue of 'Peace And Disarmament' from the Christian point of view. A day-and-a-half into the conference, the chairman decided to lead the forty or so attendees into a wide-open discussion regarding our deepest feelings on the church and world-events. However, there was one ground rule: we could not talk about the possibility of the kingdom of God on earth! While the group seemed to consent, I inwardly went ballistic, only to gradually fall back to earth and to privately concede that once again unreality and a lack of courage had struck believers in the body of Christ.

Not so for Leen La Rivière. He chooses to discuss the most fundamental of all Christ's issues, that is, the invasion of fallen man's society with the kingdom of God. Even more to the point, the invasion of that kingdom now and not simply in the 'sweet bye and bye'.

While holding to the traditionally accepted theological borders of a kingdom which is 'here and not yet', Leen challenges us all to squarely face the only really strategic question for modern believers: how much of God's kingdom dare we hope and work for now, prior to Christ's return, in a world coming off its hinges? Ultimately, for serious believers, this is the supreme question of relevancy. Indeed, Christ declared the arrival of His kingdom some 2,000 years ago. What does it look like and how is it to further yet unfold though our lives as that 'yeast hidden in the bread', or 'mustard seed planted in obscurity'?¹ This is the question Leen encourages us to wrestle with.

That the kingdom of God is not currently, and always, the central theme of the Church's teaching and practice reveals the degree to which the demonic conspiracy against truth has operated against man. As Leen points out, the kingdom was John the baptist's passion, Christ's passion and Paul's passion. Indeed, even the cross of Christ's is centrally positioned as the door to fallen man's access to God's kingdom rather than simply a random, colossal display of God's love for His creation. The co-conspiracy of the world-system and demonic principalities working through both that system and the religious nature of man in the Church, have combined to obscure this truth. We have either not clearly seen 'salvation' as the door to God's kingdom, or we have

smothered it in a sea of pious emotionalism and human sentimentality. God's love is both practical and focused.

Perhaps the clearest example of this conspiracy to obscure the centrality of the kingdom is illustrated in the popular evangelical emphasis on being 'born again'.² As Christ points out, being born again is non-negotiable and essential but as the text of John 3:3 points out, it is the means to an end rather than the end itself. We are born again so as to be able to "see the kingdom of God'. Similarly we are to be 'born of water and the spirit'³ not so as to just go to heaven or simply speak in tongues but again so as to be able to 'see the kingdom of God'. How we have focused on the means instead of the end for centuries, by millions of God-loving people stands as an unmistakable testimony to the amount of spiritual confusion and warfare which surrounds the very study of God's kingdom.

So what is the Kingdom? In the broadest terms, it is God's will and way being done on earth as it is in heaven though the holy Spirit using Christ's partner, redeemed man.⁴

God invaded both earth and time in Jesus Christ, recovered them both through the cross of His reconciliation and returned to heaven's throne. But He left no void: He left the redeemed community, empowered by His Spirit, to fill out and further tear open the hole His penetration had pierced into the fabric of the world's fallenness. And so it shall be until He returns, in every sphere of human activity.

May Leen's book further tear at that hole and help widen it. May this book further raise questions and indeed churchmen's bloodpressure! May the debate spread like a divine disease until the lump of the Church be leavened and changed. And then the world shall see the gospel rather than simply hear it.

1 Matthew 13:

2 Joh. 3:3

3 John 3:5

4 Rom. 8:17

A Preface to 'The Kingdom In Deed'.

By John Peck, England

When I first met Leen La Rivière, sitting at ease in the sun at a Greenbelt Festival, I had no idea what sort of man I was getting involved with. In this era of specialisation, it is seldom that you come across someone who combines a keen artistic sense with an aptitude for politics, the risk-taking enthusiasm of a visionary with organisational skills. And a writer as well...

You would think that such a person would present something profoundly complex. In fact, the language of this book is deceptively simple, and disarmingly different; but in it Leen is pleading for a total commitment. 'Really', you say; 'how often have we heard that exhortation'. But this is different; this is not for a merely religious commitment. Rather, it includes a *secular* commitment to Christ.

The book begins with some bible-studies on the Parables of the Kingdom. Perceptive they are, but straightforward enough. Except that they are preparing you, dear reader, to have that Kingdom idea as the focus of your thinking about the Gospel, rather than, for instance, your individual salvation, or your devotional life, or your personal relationships.

After that, if you follow his thinking carefully, and begin to build on it for yourself, you are likely to be drawn into a somewhat unnerving adventure - a Christianity which is more than enthusiastic religious activity, helping old ladies across the road, and keeping out of the hands of the police: more even than high ideals and moral standarts. It will involve facing those apparently neutral areas of your life with hard questions about ways and means: '*What are the interests of the Kingdom in this? How are they to be promoted?*' I am honoured to have the opportunity to recommend that you read this book right to the very end.

Introduction to Leen's book

By John Smith, Australia

It always feels good to recommend the writing of a man whose heart and life are one with his ideas and ideals. During fifteen years of sharing with Leen, in the European Christian Artist movement he has parented and mentored with his wife, Ria, I have seen his longing for his Kingdom to "come on earth as it is in Heaven". Their commitment, their dream and their life is this.

The ARTS, the nerve ends of the soul of any society, have been their focus. To visualize, to dramatize, to dance, to sing, to paint - all for the unveiling of a Kingdom of grace, inclusion and love, has been their passion. It is therefore not surprising that Leen should choose the picturesque storytelling of Jesus parables to arrest our attention in a challenge of the alternative Humanity which Jesus calls us to be. This book is not exhaustive. It is not scholarly defence of a particular exegetical method of interpreting the text. It is however, a wonderful series of provocative points about life and the Kingdom.

In a time when misguided teachers of the bible seem to prefer Paul's commentary of life in Christ to the supreme teachings of Jesus Himself, it is refreshing to pick up a book which centres on Jesus' declared view of life. As someone has said, the GREAT COMMISSION must always be in submission to the GREAT COMMANDMENT. The teaching of His inclusive Grace and love are really all we can ever build our lives upon.

You may not agree with his interpretation of some parables, but the weight of evidence supports his basic conclusions. This book will do damage to worldly ambitions and selfish politics, if it is heeded.

The Kingdom of God will only be fully realized in the eschaton. In the time we await that Divine conclusion, we have orders to be agents of that Kingdom, living by its values, submitted to its King, proclaiming its order or agenda and celebrating its realistic hope. The Kingdom is about things that can be seen and heard.

This is a practical book. It provokes renewed thought and revived hope for the followers of Jesus to literally make a difference by living His life in the real world by the power of His Spirit. In one sense Bono Vox was right when he wrote a decade ago 'WE MUST FINISH THE WORK THAT CHRIST BEGUN...' This is a short dance, a mini concert of celebration hope and the challenge to walk in His ways in His world.

Introduction: The Kingdom of God

I am not a theologian, but a seeker of the truth, indeed, the truth shall make us free.

In my work with all facets of music and the arts, which are heavily influenced by the society and culture, I was confronted, quite particularly, by topics concerning 'the kingdom of God' — which in my opinion is the heart of Jesus' message, also sometimes called the 'gospel'.

But what is that and how do I myself work with it here and now?

This little book is a record of my journey of discovery.

For some people it will contain nothing new, for others it will.

What is in this book has helped me very much to understand my task and influence in God's light.

May it help all of us to be a shining light and a salting salt.

Leen La Rivière

When Jesus was asked about the parable of the good seed and the weeds he said: '*the good seeds are the children of the kingdom*' (Matt. 13:38)

1. The Whereabouts of the Kingdom of God

Where is the Kingdom of God?

This is a question which every Christian thinks about at some time. We say it with a sigh in the Lord's Prayer: 'Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven'.

In any case it is certain that the *kingdom of God is something which is coming*.

This is clear. Only after the Lord has taken dominion, which is His, over the whole earth, shall this kingdom be established.

This means waiting for His return and waiting for the new heaven and the new earth with righteousness

But if the only thing to do now is wait, what sense is there in being on earth?

In reading all of the Bible verses about the Kingdom, it becomes evident that the *kingdom of God is already here*.

How can that be?

We find remarkable texts such as:

- '*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*' (Matt. 6:33). This means that we can find it in the here and now, and realize something of it.

- '*But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*' (Matt. 12:28). Hence, the kingdom of God can manifest itself in a concrete way here and now. It is so concrete that we can be free, be human, find room for ourselves... fantastic!

- '*Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*' (Matt. 18:4). A huge challenge to be humble, unincumbered, and to have a childlike trust which ends up determining our position in the kingdom.

- '*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*' (Rom. 14:17). From this passage we gather that it concerns our behavior and motivation here and now.

- '*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power*' (I Cor. 4:20). This means that by the power of the Holy Spirit the dimension of the kingdom can become visible now.

It is certainly not visible only in order to be talked about. No, but to walk and act on the authority of the Holy Spirit.

- *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves* (Col. 1:13).

- Jesus said: *'The kingdom of God is within you'* (Luke 17:20-21).

This "dualism" is at the heart of the message of Jesus: the kingdom is here and it is coming.

2. Jesus: The First Manifestation of the Kingdom

It already began with John the Baptist who called out: *‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’* (Matt. 3; See Matt. 3:11-15).

When John was taken captive, Jesus began to appear in public.

‘And Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people’

(Matt. 4:23, cf. Luke 4:43, 8:1, 16:16). What strikes me here is that the whole context is the good news of the kingdom: a much greater and wider panorama than the barrenness I often meet with: namely the good news that “you are saved”, and that’s it!

Nothing is further from the truth.

The good news, the gospel, goes infinitely further than the knowledge of being saved.

The gospel of the kingdom relates not only to the way the reign of Jesus will look in the future but speaks very clearly about the *here and now*.

The good news which Jesus brought was that His reign can be effective now. (And shortly, after the second-coming, over the whole world.)

Its present coming appears from the many signs and wonders which occur.

(Not only the miracles of Jesus. He sent his disciples out with the same message and signs of the kingdom; see, for example, Luke 9:10, 10:9.) How easily we forget that the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom!

3. The Content of the Gospel

Jesus used many examples to make clear the nature and the implications of the kingdom. But in one place we find the entire content of the message of the kingdom; it is known to us as 'The Sermon on the Mount' or 'The Beatitudes' (Matt. 5:1-12).

The whole thing is pure dynamite; even if Jesus had never healed or brought anyone back to life, these words alone would have been powerful enough to turn the whole world upside-down, rightly called good news, the gospel of the kingdom.

'Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

Glorious! Every time I read this it moves me tremendously. It gives me goose bumps.

It is remarkable that this sermon leads into the following:

'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out

and trampled by men.

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven' (Matt. 5:13-16).

What is actually going on here is that Jesus is putting the application into the hands of the people: you and me.

- You are the salt.
- You are the light.

Salt

Being salt: being invisibly present and by means of deeds, decision making, preserving or taste enhancing, being active. This is directly applicable to all the areas of trade, industry, education, the media, politics, labour movements, etc. We need more salt — more Christians who stand up and have a positive influence, each in his own area.

If we don't do this, we will be trampled down.

(Your faith, your identity, your norms and values are put in jeopardy.)

Light

We often associate the principle of light with evangelism outreach, preaching, Bible teaching and the like. And why not? Nevertheless, the Bible text suggests a wider application:

'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds...'

Hence, this light should become apparent from our deeds and is again connected to the content of the Sermon on the Mount: carrying this out and doing this is what is meant by letting your light shine. (Light is separate from its object; salt infiltrates it.)

4. More Reconnoitering

'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near,' said Jesus, (Matt. 4:17); and in the Sermon on the Mount (see chapter 3) he explained what repentance meant.

We need conversion both *internally* and in regard to our *actions*: to think and to act differently.

The Sermon on the Mount is dynamite.

Some people think of the term 'blessed' as meaning something heavenly, sweet, unctuous or brave.

Lets try to express it for once in a contemporary way. As a concept, 'blessed' concerns blessing, shalom, viz. *'God is with you.'*

Then we get, for example, *'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, God is with you in this; you will be satisfied, God will help you with the completion.'*

If you actualize the Sermon on the Mount in this way it has some profound societal and political implications.

And if you think your way into this program of basic perspectives this will change society *fundamentally*.

As it was once the hope of the poor and oppressed, it will now mean hope for many many more.

The Sermon on the Mount is extremely relevant!

The Sermon on the Mount: its content, give clear rules for behaviour, a credible word.

It is a message which makes clear the purpose, direction and challenge of the kingdom.

Its relationship with right (law) and righteousness is remarkable!

The challenge to God's children to be peacemakers is also remarkable: bridge builders, those who bring harmony, daring to mediate, working for reconciliation in particular situations and trying to overcome factionalism.

Learning to act and live it out: *'But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven'* (Matt. 5:19). *'For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Matt. 5:20).

There's a lot to be done before it becomes superfluous.

Therefore, do it!

We can put the Sermon on the Mount into practice with enthusiasm.
'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 7:20).

5. Images of the Kingdom

Not everyone understood Jesus.

There were various reasons why he spoke in parables.

‘The disciples came to him and asked, Why do you speak to the people in parables?’

He replied: The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables’ (Matt. 13:10-13).

Thus it appears that from the parables we can conclude something of the character, principles, goal and functioning of the kingdom.

‘But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear’ (Matt. 13-16).

Let’s look at the parables more closely, since they are the keys to understanding the kingdom and to a new dimension of abundance and superfluity.

6. The Sower

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matt. 13:18-23 and Matt. 13:1-9).

The seed is the message of the kingdom.

From this story it appears that it has different outcomes for different people.

The seed which falls in good soil will produce much fruit. Still, watchfulness is called for.

- Good roots are required, there is no room for superficiality; not cosmetic, but a thorough approach, especially in regard to your own roots and motives. Thankfully, roots and motives can be sanctified, purified and ennobled just as men purify precious metals in a crucible.
- The seed can fall along the path where it will be picked up and fail to get rooted. The pressures of everyday life can keep it from germinating!
- Thorns and thistles can choke it: unbridled thirst for success in one's career, or for money, luxury and pleasure, in other words, hedonism, can choke the seed.

What can we do about this?

We should turn things around! If you have an incredibly busy life, take time and periods of rest in order to regularly seek the kingdom and to meditate on it.

It is often very valuable to realize for what and for whom you are striving.

Yourself? Your own pleasure? Or do you desire to serve a higher goal? Wake up! Don't be a captive to your own egotism.

To me this passage poses a question: What are you really doing! See to it that you are rooted in the truth (John 1:17, 3:21, 8:32, 14:6, 17:7, Eph. 5:9, 6:14, Col. 2:7, 1 Peter 5:10). For this truth makes you free (John 8:32, 1:17, 14:6).

7. Sowing

Jesus told them another parable: The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?

An enemy did this, he replied. The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up?

No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn'

(Matt. 13:24-30).

An interesting story.

We would start weeding as soon as there were weeds. The Greek text speaks of a weed that looks a lot like wheat. Hence, one could very easily start pulling up everything, the good and the bad at once. The difference is not visible at first, only when plants are mature does it become clear, and then the weeds can easily be pulled up.

The wheat becomes golden brown and the weeds are green.

The explanation and application are of great importance:

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.

He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear' (Matt. 13:36-43).

- The field is the world. The world is God's (Matt. 11:25-27, Acts 17:24).

The kingdom is not the local church or congregation. If the church were the

only place the kingdom was revealed it would wither and become a ghetto. Indeed, God has plans for a Church; I'll return to this later.

- God sows His children (we human beings)!

In other words, we should let ourselves be sown in all the facets of life; community, society, the social playing field, politics, labour movement, the media, education, the arts, culture, science, philosophy, business, etc., to take root in these areas; and by living according to the ethics of the kingdom, bear fruit in *this* place.

- The devil also sows his children (his followers) in the processes of growth of this world.

- Until the Lord returns, there will be an (ethical) conflict between these two kinds of children.

- By personally growing in God's harmony and also by growing in influence in the places where we work, and are active, we neutralize the influence of the evil one there.

- Look at a wheat field sometime before it is harvested; there is more wheat than weeds. I say this intentionally because I very often meet people who are afraid of the world and only feel safe on Sundays in church.

- God wants everything to be matured.

Only then is there separation and harvest. Thus, God simply has patience.

The more we grow up, the clearer the difference becomes for everyone between the deeds and goals of God's children and others.

God also has patience because repentance and conversion are possible.

A child of the darkness can turn and begin to live in the light of God (I Peter 2:9, John 12:46, Acts 26:18, Eph. 5:8, Col. 1:13).

- Sometimes we wonder why God does not intervene? He doesn't because he wants evildoers to repent, and because this evil has not yet reached 'maturity'.

- At first, things look alike. The devil looks like an angel of light, he can impress and deceive.

But the closer things come to maturity the clearer it becomes that *that* 'light' is evil.

In any case, gather the courage to let yourself be sown!

Enter into the 'world'! Become fruitful.

The kingdom resembles a two stage rocket:

- Through our surrender to Jesus, the kingdom comes in us and we are a part of his kingdom.

- After that, we establish the kingdom by our deeds, their effects and influence in the places where we live and work.

There, we *are* the kingdom.

8. The Mustard Seed

‘He told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches’ (Matt. 13:31).

This well-known Sunday school story continues to fascinate.

It portrays very vividly the way the growth process works.

It does not rely upon big, strong or impressive things; the kingdom does not depend upon these.

It begins (in your life and the things you do) with something very small. But that very small mustard seed grows to become a tree which provides protection and nourishment for others!

That growth process takes time. For this, we too need to have patience. How quickly we say: ‘Lord, I want to bear fruit, now; I want to do something great this year’.

We need to take root and be established. We grow in plain view of everyone, with trunk, branches, leaves, blossoms and fruit. This has to be accompanied by the growth of strong and deep roots which are unseen (Eph. 3:17; Col. 2:7). There is a need for spiritual deepening so that there is growth of identity, a stable character, and we *are* the norms and values.

Nevertheless, we shouldn’t think condescendingly of the little mustard seed: ‘Oh Lord, I just started;’ or ‘who am I Lord, use him or her, since they are so much further developed.’

No false humility; we mislead ourselves this way. *‘If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move’ (Matt. 17:20).*

Mustard-seed-faith can move mountains. And with this faith we stand in the midst of the world to make the impossible come true.

9. Yeast

He told them still another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough
(Matt. 13:33).

Yeast was once called leaven. What does leaven or yeast do in the flour? Flour has all the necessary qualities to be nourishing; but take a little bit of dry flour, you'll choke on it!

Flour needs water and yeast (water is the symbol of the work of the Holy Spirit).

After being kneaded (if anything is really going to come out of it, we too must let God form and knead us) you have to leave dough alone.

This is an appropriate comparison. For how often and how easily do we chide, interfere and measure each other to see if we are

- spiritual enough in order to....
- Christian enough in order to....
- anointed enough in order to....
- educated enough in the Bible in order to....

The women in the story had to cover the dough and let the yeast do its work.

Just trust in the work of the yeast.

This is an important encouragement (or reprimand) for every child of God.

- If the work of the kingdom has started in you (this is the message of Jesus), trust that it will do its work.

- If you have planted the seed of the kingdom with someone else, in one way or another, trust that it will do its work.

You can now only pray for water, the work of the Holy Spirit, in order that the leavening process results in good dough.

After awhile you have good dough, and bread is made out of it.

There appear to be two kinds of yeast.

- The thinking of the Holy Spirit about the kingdom.

In this case it is a positive process which brings about a total transformation.

- The thinking of the scribes and pharisees: formalism, mannerism, legalism, methodism (I don't mean the Methodist Church). Jesus warns us emphatically against these (Matt. 16:6). Such thinking spoils good "dough". Don't let

yourself be infected by these ways of thinking, this leaven.

The yeast of the kingdom may do His work in us so that it works all through us and grows to completeness and maturity.

Trust in this yeast, entrust yourself to the Holy Spirit, the thinking, the leavening process of God.

P.S. There is a third kind of leaven, namely, that of the Herodians. It is the conviction that for the sake of nearly absolute power, anything may be sacrificed and destroyed which stands in the way of one's goal. 'The ends justify the means.' This is what Herod and his party practiced. He murdered almost his entire family, for fear of losing his political power.

10. A Treasure

‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field’ (Matt. 13:44).

Wouldn't it be great to find a treasure. In order to use that treasure, however, you have to own it.

In the case of this example the person sold everything he had in order to be able to buy the field, in order to become the owner of the treasure.

The point is clear: The kingdom is something so fantastic and unique that you can and will give everything you have in order to be a part of it.

The message of the kingdom of God is a great discovery.

A kingdom which makes us free! Free to develop all of our talents; free to really live. Free because we can be sure we will be a part of it eternally.

Free to bear fruit.

For this kingdom, I am ready to give everything!

The value of the discovery is that the treasure turns out to be in the midst of this world, which is the field.

Right in the midst of this world we find how valuable and how true the message of the kingdom is.

11. The Pearl

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it’ (Matt. 13:45).

Today pearls are not so valuable since modern methods of growing artificial ones have been developed.

In the past, however, things were different. It was a ‘pearl in the crown.’ The pearl was one of the crown jewels.

When a very special one was found in an oyster it was worth a fortune.

It is understandable that the merchant dealing in pearls bought the very special one and sold the rest for it.

It is funny that in this parable of the kingdom, a comparison is made with a clever businessman.

In this parable the kingdom has a tremendous worth, comparable with crown jewels.

Another good comparison is that of the pearl itself; pearls grow in secret, layer by layer, and they even begin with an impurity, a grain of sand which gets into the oyster. Aren’t the works of God wondrous! From an impurity comes a crown jewel. Aren’t we too made from an ‘impurity’?

12. The Net

Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down in the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have you understood all these things? Jesus asked.

Yes they replied.

He said to them, Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old (Matt. 13:47-52).

In this parable various things intrigue me.

The kingdom of God appears to call and to gather many people.

Just as with the harvest, when the net is pulled up, only then is there a sifting of the good and the bad.

In other words, people just live and work, bringing about both good and not such good things. In this too, there is a sifting.

The net is only pulled up when it is full, when the time is ripe. Here too the fishermen appear to have patience.

The Lord certainly wasn't the same as the scribes.

But even a scribe can become a disciple of the kingdom.

His thinking would be renewed by the Holy Spirit. Such a man has learned a lot from such an experience.

Hence, there will come out of his combined life experiences many new and old things which can be fitted into a new framework. God can indeed make all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28).

It can sometimes be very useful to let the net be dragged through our lives.

What will come to light?

Sometimes we think that everything we did in the period of our lives before we turned to the Lord Jesus, and our faith changed our lives, had no meaning.

Old things can also be valuable; we must leave that to the sifting work of the Holy Spirit.

Conversion, it just so happens, is not amnesia.

13. Judgement

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me! he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.

But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? In anger his master turned him over to the jailers until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart' (Matt. 18:23-35).

This is what we too will do, we will never be so completely fair with everyone that we will be guiltless. We owe God a great deal.

And what if judgment were held today? Is there anything we could give God that would blot out our own sins?

There seems to be nothing left but to throw ourselves down and ask for mercy. And indeed, Jesus pardons us. Jesus is the expression of God, he expresses compassion and loving kindness. 'Lord have mercy.'

If we receive such mercy from God, then the judgement will be whether or not we have acted in conformity with God's character and have shown forth God's character to others, forgiving them just as clearly from the heart.

The kingdom is a judgement on the human way of behaving: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

The kingdom is a situation in which we let grace hold sway instead of rights, coming from the heart. May our hearts be full of this new way of thinking and acting in regard to others.

14. Equal Pay

The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market place doing nothing. He told them, You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went.

He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?

Because no one has hired us, they answered.

He said to them, You also go and work in my vineyard. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. These men who were hired last worked only one hour, they said, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. But he answered one of them, Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?

So the last will be first, and the first will be last (Matt. 20:1-16).

Obviously this story flies in the face of Western economics.

Come on: payment in accordance with work!

Heavenly economics appear to have a strong social dimension. This should make us stop and think. We very easily only see that which meets the eye. He who works longer gets more, and he who works shorter gets less.

The Lord looks at the heart. All of the labourers wanted to work. And this intention was rewarded equally.

Think for a moment about the parable of the talents: the one who earned 10 received the same reward as the one who earned 5; Both of them did their 100% best and both earned 100%, although there was a numerical difference. A hard lesson, since we so easily look up to people who have advanced

degrees and often neglect those who are handicapped.

Hence, everyone who worked in the vineyard received the same pay; the highly talented and the unemployable, the ones with top scores and the handicapped; those who were able to work forty years and those who could only work one.

The vineyard, the field, is the world and to God every achievement is equally valuable. Thank the Lord that He doesn't look at things according to our system of human values.

There is a hard lesson at the end of the story.

Those labourers who already worked so long in the vineyard were jealous of and mad at those who could only work a short time.

The character of the kingdom has to change our bad hearts:

we need to be thankful that others can also be successful. We need to be thankful for the gifts and accomplishments of others and for the reward he or she receives. In God's kingdom it is not the might of the powerful but the weakness of the humble which counts.

15. The Tenants

Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them, They will respect my son, he said.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance. So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, they replied, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures:

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?

Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (Matt. 21:33-45).

This is a condensed history of how the people of Israel dealt with the prophets and Jesus himself.

The lesson we can learn from it concerns the type of tenants we are.

We are only stewards of all our gifts, our lives, our life purposes and our ways of working. Do we realize this? Is it the attitude we live our lives with and the way we understand our life circumstances?

As tenants and stewards, do we really give God the glory in all things?

'Everything I have, I have received from the Father', says one of our Dutch children's songs.

Do we realize that we are only tenants and not owners?

For this reason let us treat our gifts, our lives, our work, other people, the

world, the environment in such a way as to yield fruit and honour to God.

The other lesson is that even if we have already given everything, the right results do not automatically follow.

The people of Israel had everything they needed to succeed at their task of being a witness in this world. What a revelation they received!

What a great foundation they had in the Ten Commandments.

However, things went wrong because the letter kills but the Spirit makes alive.

(II Cor. 3:6)

The people were led astray because their hearts were not circumcised, because they were not changed from within (Deut. 10:6, Jer. 4:4, Rom. 2:29, Phil. 3:3).

Even if you should know everything about the kingdom, if the Spirit of the kingdom is not within you, the fruits which you need to bring forth will never be produced.

Are we good stewards with respect to our own hearts?

16. Those Invited

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

Then he sent some more servants and said, Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.

But they paid no attention and went off one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find. So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding cloths. Friend, he asked, how did you get in here without wedding clothes? The man was speechless.

Then the king told the attendants, Tie him hand and foot, and throw him, outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are invited, but few are chosen' (Matt. 22:1-14).

There's a celebration. Invitations were given but those invited did not come. It is understandable that the king was furious and was finished with such arrogant people.

And here is another paradox of the kingdom: everyone, good and bad, drifter and poor, beggars, refugees and travelers are invited to come to the celebration. And *they* came. There is one condition: everyone must wear wedding clothes (which are free).

And those who were so dressed (this is a picture of accepting faith in Jesus; cf. Gal. 3:37, Rev. 3:4-5, 18) could enter into the eternal celebration.

A beautiful side of the kingdom is revealed in this: it is a wonderful privilege to be allowed to take part in the celebration, and every Tom, Dick and Harry is invited; moreover, we are also provided with the clothes.

Do we understand this call of the king?
Or do we turn away in arrogance?

17. The Wise Virgins

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

At midnight the cry rang out: Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him! Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.

No, they replied, there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the others also came. Sir! Sir! they said. Open the door for us!

But he replied, I tell you the truth, I don't know you.

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour' (Matt. 25:1-13).

I can still remember how in Sunday school I was always worried about which group I belonged to.

Was I wise or foolish. Did I or didn't I have oil?

The conditions surrounding both groups were the same.

- Both groups were pure, unblemished virgins.
- Both groups were waiting for the bridegroom (the return of Jesus).
- Both groups had oil (the Holy Spirit and the Word of God).
- Both groups fell asleep.

The difference between them was an extra jar of oil.

The question we need to ask ourselves after we have gone through our checklist is: do we have extra oil?

Here are some other closely related images:

- Allowing yourself to be inspired more through the fulness of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the kingdom; thinking, meditating internally (John 3:34, 6:63, Rom. 7:6, 8:14, I Cor. 14:1, II Cor. 3:17, Gal. 5:16, Eph. 1:13, I John 3:24, Acts 8:2, II Tim. 1:14).
- Being overabundant in the character of the kingdom (John 10:10, I Cor. 15:58, II Cor. 3:9, 9:8, II Peter 1:8).
- Being overabundant in the fruits of the kingdom (our deeds) (John 15:5,

Rom, 7:4, Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9). For more on this, see the next chapter.
- Being doubly ready (can I meet Jesus `today?').
Then we are wise virgins!
Are we really?

18. Talents

Again, it (the kingdom) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. Master, he said, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more. His master replied, Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

The man with the two talents also came. Master, he said, you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.

His master replied, Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

Then the man who had received the one talent came. Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.

His master replied, You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

Take the talent from him and give it to one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt. 25:14-30).

Every human being receives talents to work with, natural gifts, spiritual gifts. We all have gifts. The question is whether we use them or not.

We receive neither too few nor too many. We receive a number of gifts in accordance with our abilities. The question is *not* how many gifts, but whether we make use of them: developing ourselves and getting involved is what

counts. It is remarkable that when a person goes to work with the talents he or she already has, the talents increase.

In the story, both of the good workers acted in accordance with the kingdom: they made a 100% increase.

It is also remarkable that we can bury or freeze our talents. In such cases, fear has a paralyzing effect.

Many people are paralyzed by some form of fear (What an insult to the master).

The good news of the kingdom is extraordinarily encouraging: the perfect love of Jesus drives our fear. (1 John 4:16, Rom. 8:15)

And if we are afraid of the day of the coming of the Lord Jesus, then there is always His loving call: 'fear not' (Rev. 1:17-18, Matt. 10:31, 14:27, 28:10, Luke 12:32).

Even if you only have one talent, go to work and use it! This is the *will* of the kingdom. The good news is: I am free to go to work.

P.S. the owner did not even say how to work with it !

19. Upside-Down

At certain moments Jesus used the prophet John the Baptist to make clear how everything was changed by the kingdom.

'I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' (Matt. 11:11).

We often look up to the great heroes among the prophets of the Old Testament. But the least in the kingdom is greater than any of these, among who John the Baptist is the last and greatest.

The Father gave the royal rule to the Son and now reveals the secret of the kingdom to 'little ones'.

This is emphasized even more in the question, who will be the greatest and the least in the kingdom?

'At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea... See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven' (Matt. 18:1-6).

The answer is clear: become like children. In other words, regain that child-like trust, the uninhibitedness of a child and that natural responsiveness. Let them be our example.

'Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

What is it you want? he asked.

She said, Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.

You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said to them, You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places

belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father. When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:20-28).

Who will be great or small? That will be determined by the way we serve. Not by ruling (others rule, examine, direct, manipulate us) but by serving and by giving our life to serve and liberate others.

By our deeds and by false rules we can close the kingdom to other people.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see... The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to' (Matt. 23:1-5, 11-13).

How important it is that faith, actions, speech and being are *one*. And there must be a serving attitude and not a ruling one like the Pharisees had.

It was accomplished not by the great but by the little children.

20. Statements About the Kingdom

The message of Jesus was the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23).

In the previous chapters we looked at how Jesus used parables to make clear different aspects of the kingdom

(Luke 4:43, 8:1, 9:11, 16:16).

It was not an elitist faith; he spoke to the crowds (the people) about the kingdom.

If Jesus had only spoken in parables we would be able to place him in the pantheon of great world teachers along side Confucius, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), Lao-Tse and others.

But to the horror of the teachers of his time, things were different:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.' (Matt. 7:28-29)

His message had power, authority!

The *signs* of the kingdom followed his words (Matt. 11:2-5, Luke 9:2, 10:9).

This was true not only of Jesus but also of his disciples:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions.... As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give' (Matt. 10:5-8).

In other words, there was restoration, healing, liberation, salvation, faith action, endurance (pressing on), dependence upon God.

Yes, indeed, the people could really see, the kingdom of God was at hand.

People's responses should be that of *believing*, i.e. accepting, embracing this gospel of the kingdom.

A Roman army commander came to Jesus in Capernium; through his faith, his servant was healed:

'For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one,

Go, and he goes; and that one, Come, and he comes. I say to my servant, Do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then Jesus said to the centurion, Go! It will be done just as you believed it would. And his servant was healed at that very hour' (Matt. 8:9-13).

Notice what Jesus says here: If the children of the kingdom (in this case, in the first place, the people of Israel) do not believe, they will be cast out. How much more important is a complete trust in Jesus Christ.

The message of the kingdom had a terrific significance, it attracted many people, especially the poor, the despised, the outcasts (this irritated the ruling spiritual elite).

Yes, for the despised, the word and deeds of Jesus were truly good news.

'Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him' (Matt. 21:31-32).

The outcasts go ahead of the so-called 'righteous' in the kingdom. Why? Because they believed John and Jesus. Through this faith we become and we are the little children of the kingdom and we can find rest with Jesus:

'At that time Jesus said, I praise you, father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (Matt. 11:25-30).

Jesus is Lord (Acts 10:36, Rom. 10:9, Col. 3:24, I Tim. 6:15, Rev. 17:14, 19:16), he is above all the rules made by men, he is even above the rules

pertaining to the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5), which in his time were the most sacred ones. He is not primarily concerned with these human rules, but whether we do the will of God or not! (Matt. 12:50).

In this way we are brother, sister, mother (closest family) to Jesus and the kingdom family.

But the powerful and the rich have a hard time entering the kingdom of God:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, Who then can be saved?

Jesus looked at them and said, With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible' (Matt. 19:23-26).

The cares of wealth, luxury, covetousness, etc. can so easily choke the seed. Even if it appears impossible to enter the kingdom, anything is possible for God; the rich and powerful can be converted too.

' Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?

The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (Matt. 25:34-40).

We inherit the kingdom through our faith and our natural actions which we do for the needy (and not to be noticed). By serving others we glorify God and we put the kingdom into practice.

Then we are blessed! Think once again about the Sermon on the Mount.

What power and might is in our individual actions - they can open the gates of the kingdom for others.

Back to ourselves: Jesus says that it is better to enter the kingdom with one eye than to go to hell with two (Mark 9:47). Tear out anything which leads you

into sin; in other words, dare to make hard choices and final decisions

And such hard choices are necessary, because if you put your hand on the plough and also turn to look back, you are not suited for the kingdom (Luke 9:62). If you plough (i.e. become active) you have to set your sights (have vision and faith), otherwise you won't be able to plough straight furrows and you'll make a mess of the field.

Faith is necessary for the kingdom and for discerning situations. When the trees begin to blossom, you know that (spring) the kingdom is drawing near (Luke 21:31).

Do we recognize the signs of the times and whether Jesus is drawing near?

It also means a second birth: a new way of thinking: *'Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'* (John 3:3-5).

Hence, let us, above all, *'seek His kingdom'*; search for that kingdom, make the priorities of the kingdom our number one goal; then all other things will be given to us besides (Luke 12:31). Because so often we get caught in the *'struggle for life'*. What a profound encouragement are the words of Jesus: *'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'* (Luke 12:32).

This gives us freedom and power, a power Jesus had: 'But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you' (Luke 11:20).

What power!

To Peter, keys of the kingdom were given.

Why?

Because he understood, acknowledged and believed who Jesus was and he received the greatest spiritual power:

'But what about you? he asked. Who do you say I am?

Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matt. 16:15-19).

But this same authority is given to all believers:

‘I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them’ (Matt. 18:18-20).

Through us the powers of the kingdom may be revealed, not to impress but to bring freedom and salvation to the people:

‘He who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come’ (Matt. 24:13-14).

‘He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well’ (Mark 16:15-18).

It struck me that between the resurrection and the ascension, Jesus spoke to his disciples during a period of forty days telling them everything concerning the kingdom of God! That's how important the message of the kingdom was.

‘In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So when they met together, they asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them: It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes...’ (Acts 1:1-19).

And still, the disciples don't understand everything quite yet. Their

expectations were still not in agreement with the real meaning of Jesus' message.

Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God; and what did they imagine? They thought that now, after the resurrection, Jesus would become king of Israel. They missed its spiritual meaning. They went on being 'worldly' in their thinking and still thought of the kingdom as a particular location.

The answer Jesus gave was hence very appropriate: *'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'* (Acts 1:8).

His concern was not with words, not with rules, nor with one location; his concern was with a new Spirit, the Holy Spirit of kingship, which gives us the power to live out the kingdom and to be it.

It is, hence, a kingdom of *power*, a reign that comes about by spiritual warfare, prayer, petition, and righteous deeds.

To our question: Lord, where is your kingdom? We receive the same answer: you will receive power to be it.

21. The Consequences

The disciples didn't just believe in the kingdom of God; at Pentecost they were also filled with the power (the Holy Spirit) of the kingdom (Acts 1:5,8, 2:4, 16-17).

As a result new followers of the kingdom were made. It was not the *Pax Romanum* (which could only exist due to oppression), but it was the *Pax Dei*, from within, so that the kingdom can be lived out and put it into practice; and this shook the kingdom of the world down to its foundations.

These men were not rebels, they could be arrested without resistance, tortured and burned at the stake - as Nero did; their inner power overcame everything. They looked after their parents, their children, their neighbours, their neighbourhood, foreigners, drifters, the poor and the sick.

They worked for good instruction, education, they worked hard, bringing about a new work ethic. These expressions of the kingdom were convincing, since they came from within, from an unknown inspiration.

Indeed, this kingdom was not of this world; precisely as Jesus (the spiritual power) said to Pilate (the cynical worldly power) (John 18:36).

The disciples proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom. (You will have noticed if you read the previous chapter carefully that this is much wider and more comprehensive than just being 'saved'.)

- Philip preached the gospel of the kingdom in Samaria (Acts 8:12).
- Barnabus preached about the kingdom in Antioch and said that following it could result in persecution (Acts 14:22).
- Paul spoke in Ephesus about God's kingdom (Acts 19:8).
- In a speech to the elders in Miletus, Paul summarized his teaching as 'the preaching of the kingdom' (Acts 20:25).
- When Paul was under arrest in Rome he preached from his house, emphasizing the kingdom of God (Acts 28:23,31).
- Paul referred to the kingdom in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 14:17), to the Corinthians (I Cor. 4:20; 6:9-10, 15:10), to the Galatians (Gal. 5:21), to the Ephesians (Eph. 5:5), the Colossians (Col. 1:13, 4:11), the Thessalonians (I Thes. 2:12, the Thessalonians (II Thes. 1:5), and to Timothy (I Tim. 1:17, II Tim. 4:18).
- The writer of the book of Hebrews mentions it. (Heb. 12:28)
- James writes about it (James 2:5).

- Peter writes about it (I Pet. 2:9-10, II Pet. 1:11).
 - John mentions it in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 1:9).
- Yes, it was and is good news:
we have been brought into the kingdom of His Love (Col. 1:13).
We are in a new situation, one in which Jesus is King and Lord, saved!

22. The Character of the Kingdom

Based on the teaching of Jesus, his followers said various things about the kingdom (Acts 1:3).

‘For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification’ (Rom. 14:17-19).

Righteousness, peace and joy from the Holy Spirit: characteristics which have to be revealed in and through us.

And that is a complete *process of growth*. Through the Holy Spirit we receive personal forgiveness: revelation, wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, discernments, etc. (I Cor. 12:4-11).

But there are also gifts for the faith community: apostles, prophets, teachers, powers, healing, administrative gifts, etc. (I Cor. 12:28-31).

With the use of all these gifts, the process of bearing fruit comes about. Then fruits of the kingdom begin to appear:

‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control’ (Gal. 5:22).

‘Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord’ (Eph. 5:9).

This process of growth takes energy. But by means of the power of the kingdom there is energy for change and growth:

*‘For the **kingdom** of God is not a matter of talk **but of power**’ (I Cor. 4:20)*

This stands in direct opposition to our old practices, when, in our thinking and actions, we were still a part of the worldly kingdom:

‘The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourself cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.’

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:7-11).

‘You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other’ (Gal. 5:13-26).

‘Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person- such a man is an idolator- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God’ (Eph. 5:1-5).

‘I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of

God...' (I Cor. 15:50).

Actually, no one comes into the kingdom of God on the basis of their human nature. No, we must be born again, which changes us into new people. Just as Jesus said to Nicodemus: *'In reply Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God..... I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'* (John 3:1-5).

Entry is made possible through faith in Jesus (John 3:15-18), and by the work of the Holy Spirit.

'For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Col. 1:9-14).

'For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory' (I Thess. 2:12).

'We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering' (II Thess. 1:3-5).

Even though some will be persecuted and oppressed, through faith, there is perseverance!

'And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped

the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies' (Heb. 11:32-34).

'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:28).

What hope, power and faith can we derive from the eternal, unshakable kingdom of God: Good news, that gospel!

And that even had a very social context; look at what James says:

'My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, Here's a good seat for you, but say to the poor man, You stand there, or, Sit on the floor by my feet, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it... What good is, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead' (James 2:1-10, 14:17).

'His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in

increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' (II Pet. 1:3-11).

It is very clear from this passage the way the process of spiritual growth works, it comes out of the actions that are undertaken.

First of all there were the twelve apostles who spread the good news of the kingdom further; then the elders, deacons and ordinary people.

Paul also had helpers: 'Fellow workers for the kingdom of God' (Col. 4:11).

And through the centuries the challenge finally comes to us, to become a part of the kingdom of God and to pass it on to the next generation.

23. King and Lord

A kingdom has a governor.

Who is the governor of the kingdom of God? Jesus Christ, the Messiah. This was foretold long before his birth by the prophet Isaiah.

'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this' (Isa. 9:2-6).

Here are a few statements about the kingship and rule of Jesus:

'Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.' (I Tim. 1:17)

'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word' (II Tim. 4:1).

'The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom' (II Tim. 4:18).

'But about the Son he says, Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom' (Heb. 1:8).

'Then Peter began to speak: I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. This is the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good

news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all' (Acts 10:34-36).

'That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved' (Rom. 10:9-10).

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism' (Col. 3:23-25).

Jesus Christ 'is the Lord of lords and the King of kings' (1 Tim. 6:???, Rev. 17:14, 19:16).

'For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living' (Rom. 14:7-9).

'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (1 Cor. 15:22-26).

'... 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, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way' (Eph. 1:19-23).

From all of these passages it appears very clearly that Jesus is the King and Ruler of the kingdom. We often abbreviate this by calling him 'Lord' or 'the Lord'. We don't mean by it just one more little 'boss' but the risen Savior, who overcame everything and has absolute power over heaven and earth.

That He now sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven and has authority is important, but it is not always evident in the world.

Even though Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has dethroned the devil this is not to say that his lordship is established yet in every respect. At present there is a time of grace, in which every person can choose to entrust himself to the Lordship of Jesus or to the 'angel of light,' satan, whose machinations ultimately only bring evil and destruction.

But Jesus will come again and establish a new heaven and a new earth with true righteousness (Rev. 21:4-8; II Pet. 3:13). Then he will truly reign over every aspect of the world.

'The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and these were loud voices in heaven, which said: The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign' (Rev. 11:15-17, 12:10, 15:4, 19:6).

Then at last there will be real peace and real righteousness.

24. A Royal Priesthood

And now in this time between resurrection and second-coming what is our task as believers?

Should we sit back as faithful yes-men and wait until the big boss sends us out with a mission?

Let's look back at the story about the talents. The owner picked the men out (made them free), gave them talents (gifts and possibilities), and then sent them off into the world. He did *not*, however, tell them what they should do. In other words, they were completely free and had room for their own creativity, complete responsibility including that for the consequences. They had free reign over themselves, their gifts, their situations. One chose to do nothing, which was his demise. The others went to work and they appear to have made a one hundred percent gain. The point is not the result. In his response to the one who did nothing it appears that the point was that one should make use of one's talents, hence, exercise one's own responsibility.

The anger of the boss resulted from the fact that the one man sat in the corner and did nothing. The rebuke is crystal clear: 'you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest' (Matt. 25:27). In other words, if you won't bear your own responsibility then entrust someone else to let your gift be used.

If you understand this principle that the Lord makes you free to bear your own responsibility and to make your own crucial life decisions (not for new impurity, ungodliness, but for decisions based on the spiritual principles of the Bible; the Bible isn't simply a time-table! *You have to think, you have to act!*) then suddenly these fantastic texts become clear, that we will reign with Jesus as kings.

Hardly imaginable: we will reign with Jesus as kings. As he was and is, so shall we be, we are allowed to be, we are allowed to act and walk. Instead of being ruled by sin (Rom. 5:21, 6:9), we will rule it through the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

'For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5:17).

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if

we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself (II Tim. 2:11-13).

This is it now but also soon in His eternity, (Rev. 5:10, 20:6, 22:5). We have and will receive a very interesting responsibility.

The Bible even goes a step further to explain *how* this reign is presently exercised: at various times it is said that we are a *royal priesthood*: it is a reign of service, full of royal worthiness. It is a spiritual power, a reconciling authority.

If you read the following texts slowly, how do you feel? You feel Great! You begin to stand up straight; it does something to your behaviour, your expressions, your countenance. Yes, we are called to such greatness! This is good news! Absolutely.

'As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (I Peter 2:5-6).

'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God and Father-to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen' (Rev. 1:5-6).

'And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth' (Rev. 5:9-10).

25. Provisional Conclusions and Applications

a. What is the gospel?

The gospel is the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God. It is also the message of the lordship of Jesus Christ, the one who has overcome sin and the devil.

By faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven, the rift with God is healed, so that we are free, free to be ourselves, to develop ourselves, to make real choices and to be able to take responsibility.

Furthermore, we are citizens of the kingdom; this entails the spiritual authority which goes along with that, so we are able to be a radiant light and a preserving salt in every area of this world.

b. The gospel is also the good news that death is not the end and that after working in the here and now there will be an eternal life. Death, as the last chilling fear used by the devil, is overcome.

c. The gospel is the good news that Jesus will one day return to actually reign over this world: He is coming! But until that moment we are His ambassadors who live out his command and, wherever possible, put it into practice.

d. What is conversion?

First of all it is the call to repent. First we were worldly, directed towards ourselves, now we direct ourselves to the kingdom of God with Jesus as King and Lord.

Once we were slaves of our bad, sinful behaviour; then, we were saved from this through the reign of Jesus, we received new life and real faith. And the result is a second birth: a renewed person who will live forever.

Our old behavior and thinking is forgiven, and it will no longer stop us from becoming the person God intended us to be.

c. Provisional conclusions: After having looked at the foundations and principles of the Kingdom, in chapters one through twenty-four, we will now look at various applications in the following chapters.

'REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND'

26. The Kingdom and Beauty

The boss of the kingdom is God.

It strikes me that in various places in the Bible we find mention of: His beauty or magnificence (Isa. 33:17, 33:21, Ex. 15:11, 24:16, Ps. 63:3, 104:31, 138:5, Hab. 2:14, Matt. 6:13, Rev. 19:1). Why? So often we think of God as the Person of the word. It is certainly incredible that the Eternal wants to talk with us (Ps. 50:1, 85:9, Luke 4:36, 24:32, John 11:42, 16:1,33). But why does He so definitely want to communicate with human beings like us?

We are created in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27).

We are an expression of his creativity. Yes, God is the God who creates and this character-trait is in us all. Without God, everything would be formless. With God, everything is a dynamic process of becoming. We are reborn, new creations (II Cor. 5:17). And our expressions can also be a part of the kingdom.

Does God also like our creativity? Our expressions?

Our art?

To this a resounding *yes* is spoken. Yes, the kingdom of God is all about our creative expressions.

Even more, God values them very highly.

The Pictorial Arts

At the time of creation, the world was one great art work. God repeatedly says on each day of creation 'See, it is good.' This word used here also means handsome, beautiful.

The tabernacle (of Moses, Ex. 25, 26, 35:36-38) and the temple (of Salomon, I Kings 5:17-6:38, 7:13-51, II Cron. 3:1-4, 22) were very special works of art. Even the holy of holies was full of sculptures.

People and foreign rulers came from far and wide to see this work of art.

God is a patron of the arts; this is evident from the coming New Jerusalem, which will descend from heaven (Rev. 21).

Breathtaking beauty, unimaginably impressive.

It is remarkable that the peoples and the rulers (Rev. 21:25-26) will bring things of value (the word also indicates objects) and uniqueness into the New Jerusalem: art works, folk art, inventions, etc. Everything has a place! What a fantastic city to spend eternity in! God is the God of creativity and (pictorial) arts. (In order to understand this topic more fully see my book *Royal Creativity*, 1987, Continental Sound/Christian Artists.)

Music

God likes music, and how He longs to hear our songs. He dwells in the songs of praise of His people.

How clear this is from the Psalms! Music plays a huge role throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments: many kinds are mentioned, e.g. instrumental music (David played the harp for Saul, I Sam. 16:14-23), popular verse, lamentations, protest songs, love songs, dance tunes. *Musicianship will continue on into the new heaven and the new earth; so it would appear from the book of Revelation (Rev. 5:8-9, 14:3, 15:1-4); music will continue to resound through all eternity. Yes, God is a God of creativity who puts Himself in the tones of endless numbers of musical styles, vocal and instrumental. (To understand this subject more fully see my book, *Music and Ministry*, 1986, Continental Sound/Christian Artists), *Revivals & Music*, 1991, Continental Sound/Christian Artists.) and *Praise and Worshippers*, 2012, Continental Sound/Christian Artists.*

The Dramatic Arts/The Art of the Stage

Is God also a God who places importance on the bodily forms of expression? We have to search a little in the Bible, but there are important things to be found. Everyone knows the story of David dancing in honour of God, when the ark was brought back to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:5, 15-16). But there are many more passages about dance, mime, acting, etc. Yes, God likes our bodily forms of expression.

(For a more extensive treatment of this subject see my booklet: *Pas-de-Deux*, 1994, Continental Sound/Christian Artists.)

Other Art Forms

The Bible is full of other forms of art, all of which are highly valued by God.

Poetry: some of the Psalms, the Song of Songs, I Cor. 13.

Prose: Esther, Ruth, among others.

Story-telling: e.g. the parables (as far as that goes Jesus was a great artist). The parables really offer a great challenge to us to restore the honour of the art of story-telling. Such parables challenge the listener to choose a particular side and by so doing an interaction is induced with one's motivations, faith and life; and 'truths' are communicated in a special way.

Jewelry, and Fashion: examine sometime the clothing of the priests and Levites.

God believes in a diversity of cultures.

At Pentecost (Acts 2:5-12) a miracle took place, not that all the cultures were

eliminated or made to conform to the Hebrew culture, no, but that everyone understood the message in his *own* language. What went wrong at Babel was restored here in a special way; for the believers, then, it was the impetus to take the gospel to other cultures. Later this was confirmed at a meeting of the church (Acts 15:1-20) in which the apostles declared that believers who were gentiles did not have to observe the Jewish law; in other words, one did not first have to become a Jew in order to follow Christ. From that time onward, cultural diversity was a reason for the growth of the number of Christians. Since the nineteenth century, this has also been applied in missions with the result that the number of Christians has grown rapidly on all the continents, apart from demographic developments. (In Western Europe alone, there has been little growth.)

Yes, God's kingdom is a kingdom of creativity and creation. We have the nature of the Father. He is pleased when we are creative: at this time *here*, and soon *there*.

27. The Kingdom and Women

Because of the fall the harmony which was intended was lost: between God and man, between man and nature, and between man and woman. Misuse, manipulation, struggle for power came about (Gen. 3:16), instead of equality (Gen. 1:26). Not the divine fashion of a serving-rule, but that of brute force took over; not the exercise of spiritual authority but that of authoritarian rule. The idea was that men and women, however different, would live with equal dignity, and together they would *rule and care for the creation* (Gen 1:26-28, 2:15). Sometimes people claim that the Bible is precisely the book that oppresses women and opposes emancipation. **Nothing is farther from the truth.**

Through the whole of Biblical history, God has called women to occupy every office, in spite of the fall:

- *Leadership of the people of Israel* out of slavery into freedom:

Miriam was one of the leaders along with Moses and Aaron (Ex. 15:20, I Cron. 6:3; she was also a leader, otherwise she would not be included in this list; Micah 6:4 recognizes her leadership).

- After occupying the promised land, the tribes were led by *Judges*: one of them was a woman, namely, Deborah (Judges 4, 5).

- *Royal highness*: Esther was queen and saved her people through her actions (the book of Esther in the Old Testament).

- *Doing business*: the woman in the book of Proverbs was no powerless chattel but a hard working woman successful in her business (Prov. 31:10-31).

- *Romance*: in the Song of Songs, the tantalizing beauty of a woman is sung about and the equal role of man and woman in the play of love is portrayed (i.e. the Song of Songs in the Old Testament).

- *Care*: there is talk of being like 'a mother of Israel' (Judges 5:7, II Sam 20:19), the apex of care and commitment.

- Israel was a beautiful virgin (cf. Hosea) but she behaved like a cheap whore.

- *Surrender*. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the great example of surrender (Luke 1:28-38, 49). In her day, being pregnant out of wedlock was the biggest scandal imaginable. All generations will honour her.

- *Prophet*. Being a prophet was the highest possible spiritual office, the closest to God. Miriam was a prophetess (Ex. 15:36). Ann was a prophetess (Luke 2:36). The daughters of Phillip were also prophetesses (Acts 21:9). They spoke as such and gave instruction. Deborah was a prophetess (Judges 4:4), as was Huldah (II Cron. 34:22) and Anna (Luke 2:36).

- *Travelling Evangelists*: Aquila and Priscilla were a married couple who traveled around building up the churches (Acts 18:2, 18, 26, I Cor. 16:19, II Tim. 4:19). The fact that Priscilla's name was mentioned indicates that she had

a definite job (She is sometimes even named first).

- *Leaders*: There were also women who led services; so it would appear from the end of a few of Paul's letters: 'Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house' (Col. 4:15); 'Claudia and all the brothers greet you' (II Tim. 2:21. The listing of men's names with a woman's name included in it indicates that this woman also had a position of service.) 'The elder to the chosen lady' (II John) is addressed to a woman. References to 'my little children' in the letter should be understood as referring to members of the congregation rather than to her own children.

- *Following Jesus*: In the cultures of the time of Jesus (and nowadays too, actually) it was considered extremely improper for women to follow after or travel around with men. Jesus made no objections. He gave women true value. 'There was a whole group of women who followed Jesus' (Luke 8:1-3, 23:27, 49, Matt. 27:55, Mark 15:40-41).

- *Leadership Team* (New Testament): Paul at least once took a woman with him on one of his missionary journeys, it would appear from one remark. He also says that other apostles did so at times (I Cor. 9:1-5).

- *Respect and Worth*: In various places Jesus departed completely from cultural conceptions and traditions:

1. He spoke (at first alone) with a Samaritan(!) woman (John 4:4-42).

a. Jews did not have commerce with Samaritans.

b. You did not speak alone with a woman. The way in which Jesus addressed her was particularly respectful.

2. He honoured the faith of a heathen woman. A Jewish rabbi did not have dealings with heathens (Matt. 15:21-28.)

3. The woman who was caught in adultery was not condemned by Jesus (John 8:2-11). (Why didn't they bring the man with them too? The fact that he was not brought along demonstrates, in my view, that it was a set-up whereby a man, a situation, or a weakness of the women was used at the orders of the Pharisees). Jesus appeared to be very understanding of human weakness. Only, go and sin no more. He restored the woman's own worth.

4. Prostitutes and tax collectors (the outcasts of the culture) were real people for Him (Matt. 21:31, 11:19, Luke 15:1, Matt. 9:10, Luke 7:37-50); he associated with them, celebrated with them; he even ate and drank with them (thereby violating the cultic rules).

5. On the cross He asked His disciple John to take care of his mother Mary (John 19:26-27). After Jesus was gone, as a widow, she could die of hunger if there were no children to take care of their mother.

6. Mothers and children were welcome to be with him (Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17).

7. *Legal position*. You can't just dump your wife; Jesus said pointed things about just sending away or divorcing wives (Matt. 19:3-10). He referred back to how it was in the beginning: men and women were equal!

8. *Serving*: In marriage, you are not simply the boss: as a husband you love your wife and as a wife you love your husband (I Cor. 7:1-5) Note- a wife has authority over her husband's body!! The so-called strong husband should take good care of his wife, (I Pet. 3:7; husbands must honour their wives. They are delicate vessels and fellow inheritors of grace, just like men.) (Eph. 5:25, 28-33, Col. 3:19.) The husband should be like a priest for the family (he shouldn't play the pope, but act with spiritual insight, bringing reconciliation, overcoming contradictions, sacrificing himself and thus being an example and not a dictator). To be a priest is also to be a spiritual umbrella under which others can develop themselves.

- *In Christ* there is neither male nor female! (Gal. 3:26-28; notice, women too are sons of God, and hence, in everything heirs of Christ.) In other words, through faith and the message of the kingdom, everything is returned to the original creation design. The gospel is hence also the message of the equal worth and dignity of man and woman.

- *Legal protection*: In ancient culture women did not count. It is all the more remarkable then that in the books of the law of Moses, women received a clear legal position. A woman could have ownership of things; she could inherit things and continue the good family name; she could not simply be sent away by a mean husband. When there were rumors of adultery, the question had to be looked into seriously. If an unmarried young woman was taken by a guy, then he had to stick with her. In respect to these laws too, women enjoyed much protection which stood in stark contrast to the cultures of the day (Ex. 21-23, Lev. 18, Lev. 20, Num. 5, Num. 6, Num. 27:1-11, 36:1-13) which were full of abuses, incest, temple prostitution, female sacrifices, fertility rites, child sacrifice, etc. etc. The Ten Commandments also provide protection for women (Ex. 20:1-17, Deut. 21:10-14, 22:13-30, 24:1-5.)

- The prostitute who hid the spies that came from Israel received a place in Israel and even became one of Jesus' forebears (Joshua. 2:1, 6:25, Matt. 1:5).

- *The book of Ruth*: A wonderful ideal. This foreign woman is also one of the ancestors of Jesus (Ruth 4:13-17, Matt. 1:5).

- The gospel of the kingdom is just as much for women as for men. Read about how many have been wonderfully saved, e.g. Mary Magdalen (Luke 8:1-3).

- Both men and women believed the gospel (cf. Acts 8:12).

- The New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-2), the greatest work of art of all times, is compared with a gloriously dressed bride. If women were an inferior creatures, the New Jerusalem would not be compared with such a fantastic bride.

In Acts, we frequently read about women who came together to serve God (Acts 16:13, 17:4, 12), and of groups of women who were honoured by God. In this too, their position of equal worth is apparent.

Through the salvation of Jesus, everything is returned to the original creation order: so that men and women together will rule and protect, and hence exercise their authority. Both are of equal worth and thereby as men and women both are unique, complementing one another!

I myself can only observe that if we take the intention of the Bible seriously and put it into practice in our lives there would no longer be any feministic or emancipation problems. Women in office or in leadership positions, a problem? You *can not*, in my opinion, base this on the Bible.

28. The Kingdom and Righteousness 1 (Social Action)

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:33).

The kingdom is, to a large extent, recognizable by the seeking of a Biblical righteousness. Are we seeking *that* righteousness? Are we pursuing it? Are we practicing it? Biblical righteousness is found above all in the person of Jesus Christ. He was that righteousness (John 16:8-10; Rom. 3:22; II Cor. 5:21; II Pet. 1:1), and he spoke about it. He is also our righteousness (= reconciliation with God). Through a personal relationship with Him, by following Him, and putting His words into practice, we give form to this righteousness.

Jesus' program of righteousness comes to us supremely in the Sermon on the Mount (see chapter three). It is a deeply resounding witness of the concern God has for us, for humanity. The Sermon on the Mount fits perfectly with the Ten Commandments and the call of many of the prophets of the Old Testament, who spoke of doing justice, righteousness, caring for foreigners, the poor, orphans, the sick, for widows, keeping the tyrants and rich in check. In the New Testament, this is finely repeated in the book of James. Jesus too makes a number of very clear social remarks about the kingdom:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me

nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, Lord when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? He will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life' (Matt. 25:31-46).

By treating the least in this way, we give them a new worth as people. In my opinion, this is one of the central points of the kingdom.

Righteousness is not only a religious experience (reconciliation with Jesus), but it is also very concrete and practical.

And this is where the problems start. In my book `Reflections' (*Nadenken* 1990, Continental Sound/Christian Artists), I make an appeal for a new thinking through of many societal problems; this is important because people, particularly in Evangelical circles, concentrate on the development of a personal faith and limit concrete acts of faith to evangelism, missions and assistance to drug users, and similar things.

The Biblical call to action is much greater and wider, comprehending *every area* of our lives! And it *also* touches social, economic, societal and political restoration.

A first step is to work in your own personal circle. That's where acts of charity should be given new form. Our witness concerns precisely the way we are and live, and should not resemble the verbal violence one meets with in `Jehova's Witnesses'.

A second step is action undertaken by the church community: the organization of the deacons. This is the first form of structural help for the poor, mistreated and needy. Paul called upon us to do this.

A third step is organized action in regard to injustice. Many problems are not incidental (such problems can be solved by setting up a one time task force) but structural.

What can you do about structural problems to give righteousness concrete form?

Through the centuries, Christians have found various answers.

In the Middle Ages guilds were organized. Within such guilds there was care, training and protection. Some guilds were the predecessors of trade unions.

The French Revolution made short work of the remains of the guilds, and the church also suffered greatly at its hands. The French Revolution did not bring freedom, but rather greater disappointment and poverty. After this, in the nineteenth century, there were no forces to lead capital and the industrial revolution into the lines of righteousness. Everyone knows about the terrible results this had in creating an industrial proletariat. Is it strange that Marx received so much attention? The mistreatment of men, women and children was it an indictment? It is understandable that approximately one hundred years ago, Christians started to deal structurally with these wrong circumstances. The first social congress organized by Abraham Kuyper (a Dutch Christian theologian and Prime Minister) and the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* were milestones. Christians did not want revolution but change along the Biblical lines of righteousness. They did not throw bombs, destroy machines, but in consultation (that was and is a testimony) they worked for ways to give practical content to the Biblical command to care for the poor, to combat the terrible dehumanizing working conditions, poverty, etc. Many evangelical organizations began their work with prostitutes, drug addicts, etc., which bore much blessing, at this time.

In essence, the Christian labour movement is just an organized way of dealing with structure problems.

What were the most important questions one hundred years ago?

- renewing of societal life;
- new awareness and maturity of the workers;
- working for their interests.

This should be achieved by means of negotiation and only in the last instance by strikes.

A great deal has been achieved via the labour movement and the fantastic commitment of many upright Christians; we can only be proud of what's happened in these one hundred years.

In some evangelical and reformed circles people go out of their way to avoid the Christian labour movement. Why is this?

- Sometimes there are misconceptions, e.g. 'the labour movement is only about greed, power, revolution, strikes'.
- Sometimes people do not realize that the Christian labour movement is born out of a very evangelical impulse and that resounds still after one-hundred years.
- Sometimes people forget that you can't solve structural problems individually.

Together, with one another, we have the possibility of witnessing for righteousness and of giving it concrete form by taking action.

- Sometimes people think that the labour movement is no longer necessary in our time. This is completely contrary to the reality of the matter.

Unfortunately, even though many injustices have disappeared, many other problems have taken their place:

- the huge number of unemployed and unemployable people;
- the newly poor, without much opportunity;
- the many foreigners in our country;
- care for God's creation (the environment).

The Christian labour movement translates this into a few directive ideas, which give policy and action distinct form:

- righteousness;
- freedom;
- stewardship;
- durability;
- participation;
- solidarity.

It is worth reading what the Dutch Christian Labour Association (CNV) literature and other Christian Labour Unions say on these matters. Every Christian: evangelical, reformed and catholic will discover how integrally the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount and the call of the prophets are concretely and practically worked out in these directive ideas. (of the christian labor association)

Even I, who came from a Christian background, but stayed at arm's length from the labour movement, can only state after thorough study and reflection: yes, the Christian labour movement can be Biblically supported, is needed and necessary, and has great importance now that we have to deal with the great problems of the twenty-first century.

It doesn't help locking yourself up in your own church like a fortress. Neither does it help to make Europe into an 'invincible fortress'.

The great challenges for us lie in the way we translate the story of the good Samaritan into our direct surroundings, in our work, in our working conditions, in our place, in our national politics, in Europe, in the world. The office of all believers puts the responsibility into our own hands, my hands. And therefore I must act. Hence, praying, reflecting, discussing, policy making, developing plans of action, influencing processes, making choices and voting.

29. The Kingdom and Righteousness 2 (Political choices)

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt. 6:10, from the Lords Prayer).

In the tradition I came from, people did not vote. Politics, voting, etc. were associated with power, domination, oppression, cheap compromises (instead of standing firm) and considered the height of conformity to this world. As a born-again Christian, politics was the last thing one would engage in. No, *'You, however, did not come to know Christ that way'* (Eph. 4:20). Hence, you were expected to close yourself off from the evil world outside, as a holy elite. If there were people having problems along the road, then, just like the priest and Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), you passed by on the other side, because your discussions were so much higher and holier than 'the world', since they were about the character of God, salvation, His return and your devotion. Dirty our hands? No...

By thinking in this way I did not notice that precisely the person whom the Jews looked down on (the Samaritan) was the one who was willing to get his hands dirty in trying to solve the problem. And what does Jesus say? If you want to love God above all and your neighbor as yourself, do what the Samaritan did, because he showed mercy at work!

How I held myself above everything by means of my reasoning 'because Jesus did not start a political party, so neither should we become active in politics'.

How stupid and superficial my thinking was.

Indeed, His kingdom was not of this world, as Jesus says to the ruler in his time, Pilate, who could only reply cynically, 'what is truth?' (John 18:36-38). And on the basis of political expediency, he let them crucify Jesus. (While Jesus is precisely *the way, the truth and the life.*) In spite of this, Jesus wanted His followers to live in this world and be 'salt' and 'light' in every aspect, only, without being *from* this world, that is, full of the spirit of the world, e.g. lust, jealousy, spite, evil, gossip, cheating, dishonest in business (Gal. 5:19:10-11), etc.

The discussion with Pilate about power was in great measure a political discussion (John 19:10-11).

Look again at the part of the Sermon on the Mount which contains the

beatitudes.

This part is dynamite; it is a real appeal and challenge. It is the social, political and economic program of Jesus' kingdom, which is applied through us in the here and now.

Sometimes it is asserted that the Sermon on the Mount is only 'proclamatory'. Even then it still calls us to perform very practical deeds. Not deeds which are empty expressions, but deeds which translate the Sermon on the Mount into matters of righteousness. A righteousness which is not only theory but the DOING of righteousness. This doing is based on expressing the idea of 'love for our neighbour', which is to do something for or together with the other person.

Thinking through this call brings the kingdom about in deed.

What were things like in the first centuries? To begin with, Paul made use of his rights as a citizen; that too was a political decision! James also took a definite social and political position (James 2:6). If one reads the church fathers and the letters in the New Testament, it rapidly becomes clear that it was definitely not only slaves and plebeians that accepted the gospel; it was also the middle classes, the craftsmen, farmers, fishermen, merchants; and even after the first century, among the Christians, there were involved in local government and the army, etc. There were even believers among the families of the Ceasars and the Senators.

It could have been a peaceful revolution if Ceasar had not decided that he was God, forcing everyone to acknowledge him as such. Refusal led to persecution. Many, like Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, preferred the fiery furnace rather than bowing to an idol. It is sad that things got out of hand; nevertheless, the blood of the martyrs (with their courage and bravery) are the seeds of the church. The courage to choose for this and to live and to die for the ideal of the kingdom was also a political choice (i.e. not to recognize Ceasar as 'Lord') which impressed many. Eventually this led to a totally different situation.

Christians made different choices which really had a great political influence. That, eventually led to the situation in which the medieval church also had to have political power and control of the state. This led nowhere.

History teaches that the state must not control the church, just as little as the church should control the state. But Christians find themselves in both areas. Each, however, has a lot to say to the other, because in both areas we need to seek and think through the question of what their purpose is; upon this basis, norms, values and culture can be given form.

How blind I was. I read right over the Biblical examples of the men of God who bore political responsibility and achieved things which were a blessing to a people (and not for God's people only).

Examples:

- Joseph even reached the position of ruler of Egypt. And when he was able to leave, he remained in his position.
- Daniel was the chief advisor of the kings of Mesopotamia, which is like being a cabinet minister today.
- Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego were like government commissioners.
- Mordechai was the chief counselor (minister) of the king of Persia.
- And we should not forget the Judges of Israel. They were spiritual and political leaders.
- It is remarkable that even heathen potentates like Cyrus and Nebukadnessar were servants of God in their political choices (Isa. 44:28, 45:1. Cyrus is even called the anointed of God! Jer. 27:6-8).
- Special mention should be made of the ancient prophets who made a number of political statements. A very important one came from Ezekial when he wiped the floor with the leaders of the people (Ezek. 32). This passage speaks over the heads of the people to all political leaders, telling them how they ought to treat the people. John Smith once said that this text should be read at the opening of every parliament each year. The misuse of power and position is shown forth for what it is.

Throughout all of history, and up to the present day, there have been Christians involved in politics who acted with integrity. Personally, I am most impressed by the evangelical, William Wilberforce who struggled two hundred years ago in parliament to abolish slavery. This member of the lower house was successful!

Motivated by his faith, he was a great philanthropist who practiced mercy wherever possible.

Regardless of how I looked at things, how ever many years I thought through my position, I was always brought to the conclusion that as a Christian we cannot withdraw ourselves from politics; it too is a domain where righteousness has to be practiced. Politics is precisely the sum of rules agreed upon to allow society to function.

If you think through the message of the kingdom, you will find there is every reason to work for a just society. From your faith, there is a direct connection to the input from your vision of life or world view, for your choices and decisions.

Strangely enough, in the ordering of a state, the same considerations are

involved as those in a labour union: viz. the questions of justice, solidarity, mercy, love of your neighbour. And what does this mean practically, in terms of legislation regarding criminal code, foreign policy, national policy, education policy, subsidies, the arts, media, health, the poor, the poor in opportunity, etc.?

In a changing political landscape, and with great international changes going on, many questions have become extremely timely!

The question I want to ask is what does the kingdom have to do with politics?

It is answered with Jesus' answer: do as the Samaritan: dare to take your hands out of your pockets and help; get involved and don't withdraw.

What are some of the possibilities of political action for Christians?

- voting behaviour;
- become a member of a group or organization;
- take part in research commissions, voters associations;
- take part in leadership training;
- city council member;
- take part on a commission;
- national politics (parliament);
- etc.

Besides this there is still the role every Christian can play in local politics without immediately joining one or the other party. For example, if a local council takes a decision which is contrary to justice, take action (gather signatures, petition, organize discussions). The church should facilitate your work.

Let us do all of this only with the goal of being a blessing, e.g.

- imagine that they are going to close a youth hang-out, play ground, skating rink, football field, etc.; go into action;
- take action for safety, the environment, etc.
- take action to promote the sheltering and integration of minorities, etc. Here to, our personal deeds can be an illuminating light.

30. The Kingdom and His Worthiness

I just keep coming back to the Sermon on the Mount (see chapter 3); What it expresses is the great respect and unique valuing God has for human beings and for particular kinds of actions. It makes you stop and think. Moreover, when you look at the life of Jesus, you are struck by the high value he places on children, women and even foreigners. What a shining example. Yes, the kingdom is a reign of dignity that can shine through us to others.

The dignity translates directly into valuable things like the fruits of the Spirit (see chapter 15, 18, 22). Fruit grows; in other words, it can take time for our lives to be transformed from egocentric ones to ones reflecting the values of the kingdom. What an inner peace this gives, knowing that we no longer have to be driven by ourselves (or others). Finally, you may lead your own life being led by God's hand, a life with new norms.

Since from these values there is a thread leading to the norms which we will make use of for ourselves, our lives with others and the wider community. True norms appear then to be derived from the gospel. Here it appears how practical the kingdom is.

The norms and values of the gospel give us a new identity. Identity is the way you are (the factuality) which is something different from the way you feel about yourself (feelings and image development must be subordinate to your faith and action). And this new awareness will give you an oasis of rest in the midst of turbulent times, because you know 'who you may be in Christ' (1 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 2:16, 3:26, 5:6).

And in this oasis of rest, which you can experience, there is suddenly room again for enjoyment, creativity, to have pleasure, to laugh and to cry. How rich, deep, great and good is life then at God's hand, the life of the kingdom.

Yes the kingdom transforms us into people with a royal dignity, which gives me a new worth as a human being. (See also the passage from Matt. 25:31-46, about caring for the least.)

31. The Kingdom and the Church

There is no place in Scripture where it says that the kingdom will be the church. Hence, we must be careful about how we determine the importance of the church congregation.

Jesus did not himself say anything about the forming of faith communities; He only called all of us to spread the gospel of the kingdom and to live it.

The apostles did mention the existence of a variety of small (house) churches (the primitive church) and a few large churches.

And if you think about it, meeting together as church congregation is a logical thing, since here is a place people can be instructed from the Bible and worship God (the liturgical aspect). A church also has the necessary social aspect (a refuge), and the very important transcendent aspect (receiving forgiveness and forgiving others.)

What is the church for me?

The 'ideal' church congregation is wonderfully described, in my opinion, in the letter to the Corinthians. *'When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church'* (1 Cor. 14:26).

From this verse it appears that the gatherings were very creative.

Not a one-man show, but there were contributions from many different people. How far this is from some of our contemporary churches. Why do young people often leave our churches? Could it be because they don't get a chance to contribute, because we don't make use of their creativity and gifts? Why should young people or other church members not be allowed to make a contribution? Why shouldn't they be allowed to think and pray about liturgy, reading, preaching, music? And why can't the congregation be a creative congregation with a lot of music (from classical to religious-rock music), with drums, mime, drama, and visual arts? A church in which the gifts begin to be used (spiritually and creatively) will be a growing church (see my book *The Creative Church*, 1993 Continental Sound/ Christian Artists), a church with a Word for the world, a word which attracts many people once again: the gospel of the kingdom.

And that means, moreover, practical work for the kingdom: deacons, social work; this too is a Biblical witness.

32. A Look Back

In this book I have tried to show how my thinking has developed in recent years.

From music (my booklet called *Music and Ministry and Revivals & Music*), to every branch of creativity and art (*Royal Creativity*), then many new questions (*Reflections*) to the roots and foundations of the Gospel (the first 25 Chapters of this book) and from there to logical applications and consequences.

This is my life journey over the last twenty-five years (1969-1993). Everything which I have wrestled and prayed through in these years and which have also formed the work of Continental Sound/Christian Artists, which was allowed to be an inspiration for many people.

Are all the questions now answered?

No, and there are a great many which have not yet even been touched on, the kingdom in action, the kingdom in deed.

This is the record of my personal journey. This is what I have thought and lived through myself.

It is quite possible that there are many things shared in common with others; but I have intentionally not looked at them. On a certain day, I very consciously began to ask: What really is the Gospel?

I went from one astonishment to another. You do not have to agree with me wholly (or even partially), but if there is nothing to discuss it's going to get pretty dull here.

Of course, there were many whom I could have quoted: Bernard of Clairvaux. Thomas à Kempis, Theresia of Avila, Luther, Calvin, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Schaeffer, Rookmaaker, Floyd McClung, etc., but how would that have helped me? No, I had to take my own route, praying and reading the Bible.

Personally, my only sentiment is one of thankfulness for this journey of discovery, it was very enriching!

Leen La Rivière

33. Close

Through the years I was allowed to be the director of many activities. Many of them were innovative.

As a result, the work of Continental Sound, Christian Artists Europe, Seminars, Conferences and the Arts Union (Kunstenbond) is now going on.

What first began as the activities of Leen and Ria La Rivière is now a widely branched out movement, supported by a large group of board members, volunteers, full-time workers and a central office.

On October 23, 1992, after a period of penetrating discussion, all of the board members adopted the following mission-statement:

'Called to be a part of the kingdom of God means: putting into practice, love, compassion, freedom, solidarity and righteousness; the result of which is the influencing and forming of the culture in a creative and/or proclamatory way'.

At the end of this book I want to give God all the glory; the inspiration comes from Him to develop your gifts, and to take your responsibility as a human being, to become mature, to accept your priesthood as a believer, prayerfully and in deed.

To honour him I want to recite the most beautiful prayer I know:

'But when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,

hollowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

[For yours is the kingdom, and the power,

and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.]

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins' (Matt. 6:5-15).

Yes, the kingdom is from God, may it come Lord!
It challenges (me) in deed!



THE KINGDOM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jan. 1996

by

Leen La Rivière

"But seek first his kingdom and His righteousness"
(Matt. 6:33)

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FOREWORD

by Calvin Seerveld

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This book is a medley of meditations on many New Testament passages calling us humans to do justice in society at large. Just as faithful artisans in medieval times illuminated the capital letters of manuscripts with wonderful embellishments, Leen La Rivière embroiders here the central theme of just-doing with pertinent, concrete appeals to modern life. The reader is walked through the many splendoured directives of Jesus Christ and Paul, and helped to hear God's call in vivid, direct language.

The LORD God enjoins every man and woman to exercise in faith the mercy, justification and peace believers in Jesus Christ receive as God's gift with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). That is, says La Rivière (sect. 34,39,44), people whose hearts are circumcized by God's Word, receive the ministry of reconciliation in the world (1 Corinthians 5:17-20). So, do not content yourselves by living in a 'believers' ghetto,' but take up the adventure of quietly doing justice to the poor and giving away your goods to the unfortunate. Practise economic stewardship (sect. 15); claim citizen rights as Christians to correct injustice committed against the weak (sect. 14,32). Followers of Christ are enlisted, as a matter of fact, in the cosmic, historic battle of God's Kindom against the Powers of Sin (sect. 40). But don't get a heroic complex: just be faithful in forgiving opponents, in treating outcasts normally, prayerfully righting what is wrong around you, without a lot of fanfare (sect. 10,12,22).

Without a born-again faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of the universe underlying societal reform, says La Rivière, human attempts at 'social engineering' will fail in their pragmatistic utopian plans to bring happiness (sect. 13,18,33). We humans are not called upon to save the world. God self will finally do that. Disciples of Christ only need to take little steps in just-doing (Bob Goudzwaard said, in a Toronto speech, April 1966), and God will provide larger steps for us reformers to take toward reconciliation one cannot presently see.

This collection of meditations hints at the truth that legal, political and economic justice need to be opened up and deepened by ethical concerns of compassion for those dealt injustice, along with a faith-deep awareness that only Jesus Christ's sacrificial deed of gaining redemption, holiness and

wisdom for us who believe, will secure the result of shalom (sect. 36). Otherwise, 'justice' will degenerate into a repressive legality by the powerful, or fragment into the partisan minorities each claiming their 'pound of flesh'. Such pseudo-justice is not the truth that shall make humans free.

La Rivière presents a vigorous appeal to all and sundry to make earnest with God's command to love your neighbour as yourself (Romans 13: 8-10), and to bear one another's burdens, enabled by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:5-6:2). He also has his feet on the ground in noting the profligate injustice and callous disregard of God's will both in secular society and in the self-satisfied church. What needs more discussion now is how christian leaders could set priorities among the plethora of problems which governments and labour movements, schools and businesses and families face. We do not need slogans - right. We do not need inflexible, detailed rules. But we do have to formulate policies which follow principled decisions (e.g., interconnected spheres of limited authority in society; subsidiarity rather than oppressive hierarchy in power relations). We cannot just trust the middle-class to weather the storms of the monopolistic Darwinian market economy constricting the cultural world today. The holy Newer Testament scriptures historically describe the need for Christ's disciples to pull together a new community/body of Christ from Jews and Greeks and the nations of the world; so there are few examples there of what needs to be done in our differentiated, industrialized society. But more attention to Older Testament passages, I think (cf. Appendix 1 about 'The 'outdatedness' of the Old Testament'), where God's leaders were engaged in directing a concrete (disobedient) community of believers on earth, shall provide instructive directives for us to consider. I hope that Leen La Rivière will follow up 'The Kingdom in Deed' and the 'The Kingdom of Righteousness' with reflections on 'God's Covenantal Rule of Generosity' (cf. Micah 6:8, Isaiah 55, Romans 12-15).

INTRODUCTION

In my previous book 'The Kingdom In Deed' I sketched my journey of discovery in trying to understand the Gospel in its context. It was encouraging to receive so many enthusiastic reactions.

After reading through the book a number of times, I began to sense that there was an element left unilluminated. This became extremely clear to me in the first text I quoted in 'The Kingdom In Deed': **'but seek first His kingdom and His righteousness'** (Matt. 6:33).

This heralded a new search: the Message of the Kingdom (also called the Gospel) appeared to have everything to do with righteousness. But what is this righteousness? How is it related to injustice? What do the Old and New Testaments say about it? What does it mean in practice for every-day life? Is the power of the Gospel, on the one hand, the proclamation of the Kingdom and on the other righteousness put into practice in our actions?

The text from Matthew is even more striking if we look it at in its totality:

'So do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' (Matt. 6:31-34)

Daily life is a little bit like a door. The hinges are the Kingdom and righteousness. If this is what we seek and act out, by doing this such righteous and social relations will be the visible result that people will indeed have food, shelter and clothing.

The message of the Kingdom appears to be extremely practical.

In the chapters that follow I will try to explain how this works and what this means in practice for believers.

This new book is the compliment of 'The Kingdom In Deed'. I hope that it will help us to understand part of what putting the kingdom into practice means.

'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness...' (Roman. 14:17)

Leen La Rivière

1 WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Before we begin going through the Old and New Testament to see what righteousness is in practice, it is worthwhile considering the Biblical meaning of 'righteousness'. It is not exactly what our spoken language expresses, but is the original content of the concept.

It is striking that in the Greek there are a number of almost inseparably related concepts.

- dikaioneme = righteousness
 - dikaion = just(ice)
 - dikaioneme = justification, justice
 - dikaioneme = juridical state, juridical order
 - dikaion = justifying
- The same is the case with the Hebrew
- sedaka = righteousness
 - saddiek = just

These words all share the same strong stem which concerns justice. Because all of these concepts overlap, I will consider them as a whole in this book.

The same is true of the contrary (adikon/ adikia/ antidikos) -unrighteousness, injustice, unrighteous: and also the concept of enemies or adversary. It is remarkable that for a particular sin the Hebrew uses 'awon', which means unrighteousness.

Righteousness/justification appears as a concept in many situations; for ~~example~~ straight path

- fair dealings (in regard to your neighbour)
- helping those who are destitute, needy, poor and orphaned
- showing compassion to the destitute (e.g. by canceling their debts)
- in the context of God's acts of redeeming human beings
- in overcoming evil powers and forces
- pardoning people for their sins (which takes place in its most complete form in Jesus Christ)
- living by faith, standing on the Covenant.

It appears to be related to standing in the right relationship with God and in the

right relationship with your neighbour. It is related to the decisions you make, your way of life, the way you lead and govern, preserving the community. It is both legal and ethical.

It can be corrective and up-building. By walking in the ways (the deeds) of righteousness, a person is justified. There is justification for the just person who is, among other things, compassionate. This seems all very simple but almost the whole Bible, when read thoroughly, rotates around these concepts, the experience and practice of them.

The Christian faith is not something merely for private experience but clearly asks to be put into practice.

Hence, you could say that it is the acting relationship of God in regard to people, of people in regard to God and between people, of people and their dealings, things and the creation.

In the following chapters I will try to point out the various aspects of this righteousness.

2 A BRIEF HISTORY

Righteousness cannot be understood apart from the coherence of the Old and New Testament.

The Old Testament

First of all we see the first aspect of righteousness in the creation-fall-departure from paradise. Besides judgment there is the first promise of healing, restoration. The fall turns on righteousness.

In the lives of the patriarchs (the covenant with Abraham), we find the topic of righteousness; think, for example, of his discussion (negotiation) concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Joseph's life was bound up with righteousness. The departure from Egypt and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai are among the most important examples of righteousness.

The destruction of the perverted and corrupt Canaanites was a matter of righteousness. From the time of entering the promised land up to the Judges and the period of the Kings, the history of the people revolved around the righteousness of the covenant and the law. If the people kept the law there was blessing. If they did not practice righteousness (the right relationship with God and right behaviour towards their 'neighbours') there would be oppression, judgment and finally deportation. The position of the king of Israel and Judah was unique in comparison to that of the kings of other lands. The other kings were absolute rulers, like God. The kings of Judah and Israel really only occupied a high office, which was subject to the rules of righteousness. Moreover, as anointed, the king was a picture of the coming messiah, the Anointed one. The law presented crystal clear rules concerning righteousness or justice showing how to act in regard to the poor, widows, sick, foreigners, the land, slaves, debtors, women, children, spoils of war.

Concerned social action and equality under the law were essentially principles of the covenant.

After the exile, Ezra and Nehemiah are extremely clear in regards to righteousness (see appendix 1).

The New Testament

The new covenant made salvation or reconciliation into a universal principle.

Righteousness involves everyone, the whole cosmos. Jesus did not lock himself away with his small group in a ghetto. He raised the radical question about the deep internal meaning of righteousness. What's at the basis of 'thou shalt not kill?' Hard-heartedness, jealousy, hatred. Why is there unfaithfulness, divorce? They come from covetousness. By transforming the heart internally, true deeds of righteousness can come about. These are not deeds done to earn eternal life or from a paranoia about following rules. Rather, out of an inner transformation, by the Holy Spirit; this is the way the Kingdom and His righteousness takes shape. That this seems absurd to those who slavishly follow rules (see his discussions with the Pharisees and Sadducees) will be clear. But the poor masses did understand his message. People were transformed, they began to act differently and the Christians, with this Message of holiness and righteousness, turned the world up-side-down. They even set that message above the power of the state if the state did not honour justice. The Gospel of the Kingdom and His righteousness still has something to say to Caesar, even now. Still, this was no incitement to revolutionary violence.

During times of oppression the sense of anticipation of God's Kingdom has been very great; indeed, one day the Lord will literally re-order this world according to justice and righteousness. In spite of persecution the Christians appear to have unleashed an empire-wide non-violent revolution. Even today the internal power which comes from the certainty of salvation, internal conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit, selfless commitment, are the power and the weapons of righteousness. It is not that we can or should establish the Kingdom of God on earth, but every believer is an agent of the Kingdom and righteousness in this world. We take an active part in this world as image-bearers of God, not by being put in a strait jacket but through grace, a free choice and His mercy and compassion.

3 GOD IS RIGHTEOUS

*'God is the **Righteous One** and He is **righteous.**'*

(Isa. 10:5, 33:22, Jer. 11:20, 23:6b, Lamentations 1:18, John 17:25, II Thes. 1:5, Rev. 16:5, I John 2:1, Acts 3:14. Its chief form is found in the Ten Commandments. Its full expression is the Torah. Its deep spiritual meaning is found in the Gospels (the Message of Jesus). Its practical application and consequences is found in Acts and the New Testament letters.)

You could say that God is the norm. In Him is the origin of the norm, the truth, what justice is, and what values are.

These are not shifting forms. God is the absolute standard according to which everything ought to be measured. And He wants His creation to be like Him.

Seeing who He is, also makes it crystal clear that what He desires is that we reflect what He is. (*'Be ye holy as I the Lord am holy'* Lev. 20:7, I Peter 1:15-16). It is very significant just how much He hates injustice, unrighteousness, wickedness. All of the Old Testament prophets hold up a mirror, as it were, before the people: if you practice unrighteousness you come into conflict with the Righteous One. The actions of the people were continually compared with the being of God.

The people were continually challenged to follow the Righteous One internally, in their hearts and externally, in their behaviour (actions).

Obviously, this has very practical consequences: If we practice righteousness, society is strengthened; People flourish, there is peace, safety and fruitfulness. If we commit injustice, the logical consequence is chaos and destruction.

Hence, these principles of the Righteous One appear to be very practical and true for today. (*'You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness...'* Heb. 1:9.) The ancient people experienced first hand what the consequences of their attitudes, lack of faith, behaviour and deeds were -- read the Old Testament. This can only lead to a call to see all the things that we can learn from it for today. It is a call to us as individual persons. Next it addresses our actions regarding our family, neighbour, work, environment, society, political system, continent and world. Only on the basis of God's norms is there personal happiness, development -- and through their consequences society becomes a blessing.

(The Ten Commandments are the absolute basis of righteousness. In the New

Testament they are summarized as follows: *‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’* Matt. 22:37-40. The whole of the Bible shows how vertical and horizontal righteousness come together in one point. Only in this way are just relationships possible and just actions achievable.)

4 THROUGH Christ WE ARE MADE RIGHTEOUS

*'But now a **righteousness** from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This **righteousness** from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified** freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'* (Rom. 3:21-22)

'For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.' (Rom. 3:28)

'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Rom. 5:1)

*'But now a **righteousness** from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This **righteousness** from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his **justice**, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about -- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as **righteousness**. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits **righteousness** apart from works: Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man*

*whose sin the Lord will never count against him. Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as **righteousness**. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that **righteousness** might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the **righteousness** that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: I have made you a father of many nations. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, So shall your offspring be. Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why it was credited to him as **righteousness**. The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit **righteousness**--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been **justified** through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.' Rom. 3:20-5:1*

The Bible is crystal clear about the fact that no one can try so hard, e.g. by righteous deeds (or good works), so as to satisfy God's norm. So much for all of our diligence and efforts. Trying to achieve righteousness through our own efforts leads to a dead end.

God wants to give us His righteousness. But this can only take place through faith. By believing in Jesus Christ, by giving yourself to Him, the process of transformation begins. We can be justified through Jesus. Through Jesus the turnabout begins. Then we can stand in a right relationship to others. Only then can we begin to act from out of and for this righteousness.

Actually, this is something totally extraordinary: The righteous God goes to work on our behalf just to show forth His righteousness. And that takes place in the form of Jesus Christ. Jesus, who was not merely a mystical or historical figure; Jesus who was not part of a fairy story or a tall tale; but Jesus the king of kings and Lord of Lords, the Holy, the God and king, the Risen; he who is and was and is to come; Jesus the way, the truth and the life, the only way! Jesus the mediator, who died a terrible death in my place.

By believing in Him, by giving yourself to Him, by following Him and by letting His Spirit lead and inspire our deeds, we are made righteous. And then, all at once, our actions appear to bring forth righteousness. By following the Merciful One we become merciful. By accepting grace, we let others take part in grace. Through his forgiveness, we forgive others. (Rom. 9:30-10:4, 8:30,33; cf. 1 Peter 3:18. This is mentioned emphatically in the Lord's Prayer; (cf. Matt. 6:9-14.) His love casts out fear and in this way the bruised reed can grow again. You receive sight, you can stand again and live. Past, present and future begin to look different.

In the Old Testament (e.g. Ezekiel 18:4-30) it is also stated emphatically that everyone is held accountable, that everyone is responsible for his or her own actions and without exceptions shall be judged. Hence, it is very important that we do not simply do what other people tell us to do, nor simply follow the main stream or 'every wind of doctrine', but that we try to take seriously our own responsibility. This is also true of our faith in Jesus, our surrendering to Him, our following of Him, and receiving guidance from His Spirit.

Justified by faith (Acts 13:38-39; 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more,' Heb. 8:12; Compare with Heb. 10:16.) and your sin forgiven: what a wonderful prospect suddenly appears! What room to exist! Finally you can really live freely. You can have a life with depth, meaning and purpose.

5 THE SPIRIT CONVICTS

*'But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, **he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:** in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of the world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will guide you into all truth. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.'* (John 16:7-15)

Look at what is underlined.

As it is used here, 'world' is a comprehensive notion. It includes people, the (societal and social) relationships of people, and a spirit, a power of the devil ('world spirits'). The Spirit, the Counselor makes an appeal on this territory. Then it appears that faith and sin have a lot to do with each other: through faith in Jesus the problem of sin is resolved. Righteousness and truth also appear to have everything to do with each other. The resurrection and assertion were proof of who Jesus was. In this way our faith is built up. Judgment and the devil also appear to be related. The liar, the imitator, the devil, the evil is judged.

The result is that through the Holy Spirit we can understand the truth. By following the Holy Spirit we are on the right road of total truth and righteousness.

The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-11, 12:28-31) and in the process of developing them, fruit is produced (Gal. 5:22) which can be encouraging and edifying for others.

The Holy Spirit is not a mystical guru, a vague 'inner light', nor something 'new age'. No, this power of God is made known to us by Jesus; he places us, as it were, in the midst of this world as a witness (John 15:26; Acts 1:8). Each of us may receive the Holy Spirit very personally (Acts 2:16-21; Micah 3:8). Veni Creator Spiritus

6 LIVING BY FAITH

*'I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a **righteousness** from God is revealed, a **righteousness** that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The **righteous** will live by faith.'*
(Rom 1:16-17)

It is remarkable that from faith new faith comes forth. It increases, it builds up, increases in strength, energy and commitment. Faith appears to be a very constructive factor which adds to the quality of life. Faith assures that our lives are not static, but rather very dynamic. Faith does not create separate pillars but a solid foundation. This solidity provides precisely the possibility of openness and development for the individual as well as for the group. The stronger the faith the more dynamic it can be. Why? Because faith in God is the stable foundation upon which everything can rest.

Through faith (a gift of God) there is peace with God (Rom. 5:1). By means of this rest, we get greater strength, more power, because we know we are justified. This makes it possible that we don't have to just remain hearers of the Gospel but can be true doers of it (Rom. 2:13).

The righteous shall live by faith (Rom 1:17; cf. Rom 10:6-11). By faith the righteous shall begin to live; live in the fullest sense of the word. He who is saved, free, renewed, can now really be the person God meant him to be. His development as a whole person, who has received gifts and mercy can begin. Yes, through this faith, this elan of the Spirit, the righteous can become a unique person.

Those who think that faith is opium for the people, a lollipop, an anachronism, have, unfortunately, understood nothing about it at all. Faith stimulates your personality and sees to it that you begin to develop an eye for the welfare of your neighbour. This aspect also starts to grow and thereby becomes the motivation of missions, help, social renewal, solidarity, relief work, etc. The just shall live by faith: a creative life whereby people may enjoy everything and all of our personal talents can come to fruition. This faith appears to be very important: we are justified by it (cf. Gal 2:15-3:11, Phil. 3:9) and it is the door to life in the present and the future; it is a fantastic adventurous life, full of rich experiences.

7 WORKS WITHOUT FAITH ARE DEAD

How can this be? We just saw in chapter 6 that righteousness comes through faith and not through our 'works' (activities).

It is valuable to read in the Gospels about how Jesus responds to the Pharisees and Sadducees (see Matt. 23, Luke 16:10-15, 18:9-14). He responds very sharply to the idea that one can become righteous through works alone. Some of the people even thought that by being born of the seed of Abraham, everything would naturally be alright. Jesus dismisses all such notions: first we have to believe, first the heart must be circumcised. As a result of this, certain actions have to follow. Actions cannot, however, replace faith.

'Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by actions, is dead.' (James 1:17)
*'You see that a person is **justified** by what he does and not by faith alone.'*
(James 2:24)

First we must believe and then a change take place in our inner being. From this, actions must follow. James is very clear about what these actions must be: a wide range of practical ways of helping people and fairness in work relationships (James 1:22, 27, 2:12, 14:17, 4:17, 5:4-6).

Why is the Bible so emphatic about this? (See, for example, Rom. 2:13; Matt 5:19-20). As believers we constantly run the risk of only polishing up our inner lives; we are so quick to seek meditation, sanctification, and to avoid the world. We lock ourselves away so easily in Christian Ghettos. Righteousness means keeping the doors and windows open and we need to practice practical righteousness and justice in this world. We need to care for the poor, for the sick and to be active in politics, in labour relations and in social actions.

8 YOU RECEIVE MANY GIFTS

*'For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the **gift of righteousness** reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.'* (Rom. 5:17-19)

At first, everything was subject to death and destruction. But through grace we receive the gift of justification. We receive it as a present. This justification offers us a new ability. As justified people we are gifted with righteousness. But such a new ability must be given practical application just like the gift of wisdom, or the gift of prophesy (Rom 12:7, I Cor 12:10, Rev. 19:10).

And the result? Through Christ you may reign as a king. You have authority. (But you must not act in an authoritarian way.) We are rulers full of sympathy and empathy.

If you know this, you begin to feel and act differently. As a bruised reed, you may straighten yourself up again. Your shaking knees become strong again (Isa. 35:3, 42:3). You have courage to stand again, you straighten up your back. You feel a new sense of dignity. (See my other book, *The Kingdom In Deed*.) You will no longer be ruled by the situation. You need fear nothing. You stand differently in the world. What an enormously strengthening effect righteousness has, because you know you are OK; you know that from within.

Is this two-stage gift (justification and authority), for everyone? Yes, every heart can believe unto justification (Rom 10:10) and everyone can be saved (Rom. 10:13). These are the facts that can comfort everyone who doubts.

10 ACTION!

*'Be careful not to do your acts of **righteousness** before men, to be seen by them' (Matt. 6:1).*

Jesus made a qualification concerning human acts of righteousness. Whether it is relief work or working with the poor, we should do these things unobtrusively. They are not instruments for public relations. Everyone should put those aspects of righteousness into practice which are on his or her path. What these aspects are, depends upon each person's position in society. One person works in the business world, the other in the graphics industry, or in a hospital, in politics, or in the labour movement, etc.

Regardless of where we are at work and how we live, we must practice righteousness there, without making a lot of noise.

In this way we fulfill another task Jesus gave us: *'You are the salt of the earth'* (Matt. 5:13). (The principle of salt and light are illustrated in the verses preceding this one: Matt. 5:3-12, i.e., the Sermon on the Mount.)

It is our actions which need to 'salt' this earth just as salt gives taste to food and preserves it. We should be unnoticed but indeed active.

We should also be active participants in all the culturally formative processes, e.g. social, economic and political. This too is righteousness in action.

11 MERCY

*'But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have **not** come to call the righteous, but sinners.'* (Matt. 9:13; cf. Matt. 12:7)

It is very easy as a believer to get in God's way. When we know that we are saved, born again, it can happen that we experience a period of euphoria. We want to tell everyone that they too must be saved. This very easily puts us on a pedestal and we begin to feel better than people who think differently or who are unbelievers. And then soon we begin to behave as an elite, elevated above the worldly crowds. It should be clear that this is completely fruitless. Jesus rightly puts us in our place: He came *not* to call the righteous, but sinners. At most we are sinners made righteous. And this is in opposition to every form of spiritual pride and fanaticism. Righteousness is revealed in the fact that we show forth and practice mercy on all sides. We do not escape this world, but try to deal with everyone in a normal(= human, humble) way.

The Pharisees did not understand this: *'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'* (Matt. 9:11; Jesus even had a name for being a party goer; cf. Matt. 11:19). People considered it to be completely unacceptable for a spiritual leader to be at parties and feasts and to take part in public life (in contemporary terms: from theatre to bar, the treacherous world of finance or high-tech industry).

You can only have mercy and be merciful if you really care about people (Matt. 23:23-28) and act human/humble towards them. Do we actually do this? If I am honest, I have to admit that I avoid certain people or situations and fail to have empathy.

I want to be inspired by Jesus: *'When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them'* (Matt. 9:36).

12 RESPECT

*'Anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a **righteous** 'man's reward.'* (Matt 10:41b)

How easily we develop a sense of our own superiority. How easily do we place ourselves above others. How easily do we fall short in seeing the dignity of others. How easily do we fail to honour others for what they are and what they do.

For Jesus there is no respect of persons. Everything and everyone is valuable. Even the smallest and the least have tremendous value in the Kingdom of God. One of the rules of the Kingdom of God is that we show respect for that which is different from ourselves.

As Dutchmen we are infamous for the ease with which we cut down everything and everyone that rises above the average. 'Just be like the rest of us," we say.

I am repeatedly struck by the way in which Americans show honour to those who have achieved a lot. However, it's not my intention to pay respect only to people who have supposedly achieved a great deal. Righteousness means that we deny no one respect, appreciation, love, care or support. We must express this respect in words and deeds; read Matt. 25:34-46 carefully.:

'Then the King will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of these least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. They also will answer, Lord,

*when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? He will reply, **I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.***

13 FRUIT

'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.' (Rom 14:17)

Often we confuse cause and effect. The source of righteousness, peace and joy is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-12, 28-31) and fruits (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 6:22; Phil. 1:11).

These gifts help to mobilize all of our own natural gifts. All of these gifts serve to build up others and the community.

The fruits are things which grow on their own to the extent that we are occupied and active in regard to the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The fruits are, for example, love, joy, peace, long suffering, friendliness, faithfulness, goodness, meekness, self control, righteousness, holiness and justice.

Sometimes people think that the Holy Spirit has a lot to do with emotions, extatic feelings and unusual behaviour. Very occasionally such things are mentioned in the Bible; but they have nothing to do with a normal spiritual life. The Holy Spirit appears to be mainly involved in changing us internally, changing our thinking and our character (Rom. 12:1-2). This is a gradual process of renewal and growth which takes a lifetime, and which continually produces new results (fruits). This does not happen, however, independently of our will. We must repeatedly make a decision to take the next step, a decision to let yet another aspect of our character be transformed, the execution of which is in our own hands.

Jesus made it very clear that ultimately we would be judged on the basis of what came out of us from the inside (Matt. 12:34-37). He included words, deeds and behaviour all together. Our 'old nature', which the Bible refers to as 'the flesh', only brings forth bad things: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, theft, deceitful behaviour, blasphemy, murder, etc. (Gal. 5:19-20; Rom. 3:20, 7:18, 8:6-7; Matt. 15:18-20).

Our inner selves, the source of our thought, lives and actions must be changed. This can only take place by entrusting ourselves to the Spirit of God. There we can find the power and the energy to bring about this impossible process or re-creation.

Liberalism, socialism, humanism and communism all basically assume that people are essentially good. If people in society turn out very badly, then that's always the fault of the environment. These 'isms' basically believe that if the quality of life is improved this will automatically lead to a happier, better humanity.

The whole process of 'social engineering' of the last two hundred years has clearly shown that the opposite is true. A higher standard of living did not bring more happiness. And in places where absolute norms and values, the call to conversion and righteousness have diminished, crime rates have risen along with countless forms of abuse, everything from exploitation to suicide.

Changing yourself is possible, being different too. Righteousness can be achieved through the Holy Spirit.

14 ON THE WAY

'What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, Son, go and work today in the vineyard. I will not, he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, I will, sir, but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted? The first, they answered. Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.' (Matt. 21:28-32; **the way of righteousness** is also mentioned in 2 Peter 2:21, 2:15.)

In this passage Jesus refers to the way of righteousness. It began with the appearance of John the Baptist. He called the people to repent and explained that that involved a different way of life.

Today many people who talk about 'conversion' understand it as a moment of turning around. The call to conversion is very Biblical but it is not the end point. How easily people think: 'I'm converted now, I have arrived'. There are some who then do nothing else except study the Bible and pray, and wait for the return of Jesus. What a waste of a life, what a fruitless happening.

Conversion is something different. It begins with a conscious turn around and after that there is a life-long process of conversion. Two thousand years ago this was called 'the way' (Acts 9:2, 22:4, 18:25-26, 16:17, 19:9,23, 24:14,22, ICor. 12:31; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 10:20, 13:18; 2 Peter 2:2,15,22; Matt 7:14, 22:16, Luke 1:79; John 14:4,5, 14:6, 16:13). Why? Because it was a path you must walk along. And while traveling with God you are faced with many challenges and decisions. The people of the way took up their responsibilities and so they became, step by step, a transforming factor which changed the whole Roman Empire. It was not the way of violence but of change from the ground up: care for the poor, the sick, care for the widow and orphan, visiting the prisoners (who lived in very inhuman circumstances) care for slaves, care for family, marital faithfulness, putting an end to the exploitation of children, no temple prostitution (with all the diseases passed around in that way), education, honest business practices, no extortion, etc. No wonder 'the way' attracted so many people.

We now live in a society which looks suspiciously similar to the late period of the Western-Roman Empire. A general ethic (morality) is no longer present. All truths are equally true, and hence absolute truth does not exist. Nothing is absolute, nothing is holy, everything is subject to corruption. When the absoluteness of the faith is cast aside, the only option left is for the state to constantly increase its powers in order to maintain 'law and order'. Central state power, then provides the only cohesion of society. But that's not going to help much because centralized state power consists of 'people'. Lobby groups and corruption will automatically increase and disintegration will finally follow. When there is an absence of faith, in the importance of laws, this only results in more transgressions and the law becomes impossible to maintain. Then, even the severest punishments finally don't help. Moreover, such a strong centralized power can too easily change the laws, hence 'law and order' politics is no use.

The separation of church and state was only meant to insure that each 'sphere' governed itself. This has been misused by various political groups or currents to bring about a so-called 'value free' society. Once the foundation of values has been demolished (faith is only permitted as a private matter) then the structure will collapse.

The basis of our laws, public justice or righteousness, must come from somewhere. To deny this is to deny your own background. Our society came about on the basis of faith in God, the correctness of the Biblical codex (e.g. the Ten Commandments) and the belief that at the end of life a final, truthful and object judgment by God will take place. Inner conviction and 'objective' rationality saw to it that as much as possible things were done in accordance with the rules of righteousness and justice. There was a moral consensus based on the absolute character of God's Word and His recognizable historical deeds. Of course, this did not eliminate abuses, but in the course of time things did correct themselves, for example, the abuses of the popes in the fourteenth century; the inquisition in the sixteenth century; the slave trade in the eighteenth century (evangelical Christians in England and elsewhere worked against slavery in Parliament until it was finally forbidden by law).

Are we at the edge of a new crisis? I think we are. In the short term, tougher legislation and greater state power will help. But finally, unless the moral foundation is restored, I fear, in the long run, the worst in regards to corruption, crime, drugs, child abuse, injustice, intolerance, misuse of power, anti-social behaviour, violence.

As believers we must straighten up our backs and, as in the first century, again clearly show in our lives what 'the way' is. That will be lighting light and salting salt.

It also means that we must not let ourselves be further marginalized and, just like Paul, claim our rights as citizens. And as such, we must begin to take positive action in every area of life.

'Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming... But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness' (2 Peter 3:11-12).

This perspective will see to it that we will continue to work for His Kingdom on this earth. We are and remain on the way, His way.

15 STEWARDSHIP

In Christian circles in which attention is paid to political and social matters, the concept of 'stewardship' is very important. Why?

Stewardship appears to be one of the most important pillars of justice or righteousness, viz. the way and the goal with which we govern and direct things.

First of all the creation (Gen. 2:15); God placed it in the hands of men, to be used and cared for.

Jesus compares the Kingdom of God with someone who went on a journey and put his possessions into the hands of his slaves (Math. 25:14-30). One received five talents, another two and yet another one talent (rather large sums). The first two were able to earn one hundred percent profit. The third buried his. And this person was judged for doing so. Why? Because he was not a good steward. He was not faithful in the challenge he was given. What I find striking about this story is that the owner did not say how the gifts were supposed to be used. He gave the slaves absolute creative freedom. The Kingdom of God is so important, in fact, that we should be willing to sacrifice everything for it. (Matt. 13:44-45; Luke. 12:33)

The importance of good management and bringing forth fruit is also apparent from another parable, viz. unrighteous tenant farmers (Matt. 21:33). These unrighteous tenants wanted to take over the property and then they treated the messenger in a horrible way; finally they murdered the heir and refused to pay the rent, i.e. part of the harvest. It should be clear that these tenants were judged.

'Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.' (1Peter 4:10)

There is no difference between natural gifts, spiritual gifts (1Cor. 4:1-2), property, doing business, concern for labourers, people in need, management,

nature, etc. With everything and in everything we must be good stewards, as servants whose purpose it is to assist everyone and everything to be fruitful and unfold itself. (Matt. 24:45-51; Who will take the challenge? Cf. Luke 12:42 `The Lord answered, Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time.')

From making coffee to directing an estate; from art to proper use of water, from local politics to mass-media, from family to caring for the sick; from education to liturgy; everything is related to good stewardship. Trying to escape this or to let things go will be judged by the Lord as a case of burying ones talents.

Righteousness is to take upon yourself stewardship for every sphere of life and to put it into practice. The result will inevitably be a valuable, exciting, meaningful, inspiring, challenging, social, human society with real development or unfolding.

16 SELF-DENIAL

'Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: '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 and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angles.' (Mark 8:34-38)

The paradox of life! We all want to live and be the first (Mark 9:35-37), be well off, enjoy things, be successful, be happy, be admired and respected....all of which are fundamental needs.

It looks as though our societies have changed so much that everything is set up so as to realize these things. And for many people it is no problem at all if these goals are reached at the cost of family, spouse, children, neighbours, community or the environment...

And when you finally have something, you throw it away after a little while because there is always something better, a better job, a better car, a better TV, a more expensive dress, a younger and more attractive woman, etc., etc. All this egocentric dumping of things, only makes you more numb.

Jesus formulated a very important rule for a righteous life: Do you want to live? Give what you have away. Do you want to enjoy things? Let others enjoy them. Do you want to be first? Serve as the last one. Do you want to be great? Have the attitude of the least. Do you want to have the most? Take care of the least. Are there people you hate? Bless them.

Deny yourself and follow Jesus; this way of righteousness leads to a true, intense life, the highest pleasure of the soul the most intense enjoyment, true life fulfillment and the greatest, most valuable treasures in heaven and on earth. This will also gain you the respect of your family, community and God.

Is this easy to do? No! It seems so contradictory, but how absolutely true it is. Giving up your own pure self-interest: this too is righteousness.

17 CHILDREN

'People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.' (Mark 10:13-15)

This is a well known Sunday school story. Very nice for children. Occasionally we stop and think about it, since we 'must become like little children' (Matt. 18:1-4, 21:16; John 1:12; Rom. 8:16-17; John 2:12-12). Of course we think about how we as adults should have a child-like trust in God as our father. Of course, we don't want to be naive and certainly not childish.

But there is a deeper layer to this story, one which is often lost sight of. Jesus makes clear that children should have direct access to Him themselves. We should help these children here and in no way be an obstacle to them. Do we do this?

How easily we put our adult problems, our theological discoveries in the way of child-like openness to Jesus. In this way we destroy their expectation and their uninhibitedness. Even worse, it is robbing children of their innocence. This can ruin their entire life. How do we do this? By manipulation, rape, incest or we try and tell them how everything works. In this way they are scarred for life. There is another reason why we must see to it that children be allowed to come to Jesus. In the encounter with Him, under His blessing, we understand who God is, we learn step by step the playing rules of this life (the Book of Proverbs shows this clearly, Proverbs 1:10, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, 6:1,20, 7:1, 10:1, etc.; it is a book full of practical righteousness, lessons of life for every day). We then discover why God has given norms and values. And by faith in Him, those norms and values begin to live in a child and become the source of identity.

Pity those who lead the little ones (the children) into sin (Matt. 18:6). Pity those who obstruct the way to God.

The question which quickly arises is, how does this aspect relate to our own behaviour and structures?

- How are we as parents?
- How and about what do we give children instruction or do we hold back our so-called knowledge of Jesus from the children?
- How are our churches, congregations and Christian organizations oriented with respect to the interests of children?

Righteousness is to show the children the way to The Righteousness One and to righteousness. Learning something by rote is of no use, it creates only apes who know some 'tricks'.

18 MY NEIGHBOUR

'But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29)

How human it is and how often we hide behind unreal arguments and questions of detail. We ask:

- Who is my neighbour?
- What is truth?
- Is there a God and a law?

The list of such questions is long. People gladly occupy themselves with such questions. And in the mean-time they do nothing; they neglect what they could have done. Hiding behind such so-called legitimate questions leads to unrighteousness. This we see in politics, in negotiations between management and union workers, we see it within businesses and in so many places.

The Bible verse quoted above is the lead-in to the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus tells the story to illustrate the meaning of neighbourly love (Luke 10:30-37). The act of care was not done by a religious education leader or an artistic or business leader, but by one looked down on by society (in the Dutch context, someone like a muslim foreign worker or Gypsy; the USA-context: a mexican, etc.). Jesus then says: *'Go and do likewise'* (Luke 10:37). Righteousness is action.

This practical righteousness, this showing mercy came from somewhere. The speaker at the beginning of the chapter started with the question: *'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'* (Luke 10:25). Jesus then asks this person: *What is written in the law?* And the person knows how to express that very well: *'He answered: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your mind and Love your neighbour as yourself'* (Luke 10:27). It must have been clear to Jesus that the discussion was only theory. What the person did not do was to really believe and hence put it into practice. Then Jesus says, very strikingly: *'Do this and you will live'* (Luke 10:28).

Believe and act!

What? The summary of the law and the prophets (with the Ten Commandments at the center) is expressed as: Love God with all your heart, understanding and actions. (Cf. Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 9:8-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). Only from out of this vertical relationship is it possible to put the horizontal

(i.e. regarding my neighbour) into practice.

Only this strong, inward conviction makes it possible to achieve social, compassionate actions, a human community in which justice and righteousness dominate. Without a vision the people perish (Prov. 29:18). Without faith the motor of mercy, social action, responsibility and righteousness stops; and we are faced with only a gray landscape of pure pragmatism.

How and where should we begin? With the things which are at hand, which are my `neighbours'.

19 FREE OF CHARGE

*'Then Jesus said to his host, When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours: if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the **righteous**.'* (Luke 14:12-14)

How sick our society has become because of the idea that everything should be paid for. Whether it be negotiations, discussions about structures, questions of production, we drive stakes into the ground to mark off decisively, once-for-all, where we stand, what is involved and what our demands are. Do you think this kind of extreme hardness will make the society a more livable place?

Struggling against child labour, inhumanity; working for fair work relations, respect for women, human rights, solidarity, humanity, etc., is very significant and these things are connected with Biblical righteousness.

But if they degenerate into more complaining about secondary matters and we lose sight of the totality, serious questions must be asked: what have we gotten ourselves into.

The passage quoted above is refreshing. Do something some time without expecting to get anything back (Luke 6:27-38). By acting so unexpectedly different than usual, so apparently 'irresponsible' we turn all the relationships upside down (Eph. 4:20; Luke 14:27,33). It definitely makes society more beautiful and more livable. Nothing is more charitable and liberating than to give something with no 'strings attached'. How does God see this? *As acts of righteousness*. The people who do this will be part of the resurrection. Remarkable: not (always) getting what is due to us is sometimes righteousness.

It is not without reason that a deep truth is found in Jesus' words about praying for our enemies and blessing those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44; Rom. 12:14). Have you ever done this? Hard, isn't it? But how liberating; your yoke, your hate, your bitterness just melts away and you become a free person, even if you were treated unfairly. However, I certainly *don't* want to say that you should let people do anything they want to you. The important point is that you have a positive basic attitude in your intentions, in your heart.

20 RELATING

'Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Then Jesus told them this parable: Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me: I have found my lost coin. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.' (Luke 15:1-10)

Look at the first sentence of this passage again carefully: 'Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him.' This is very remarkable. Did you ever really realize this? You might have expected Jesus too would have had the upright and those in favour of moral renewal around him; but these people are the ones who had problems with this unorthodox Rabbi.

What attracted the unrighteous so much to The Righteous One was his way of relating. He acted so normally. He did not use the language of an elite, he did not set up a group of separatists, he was not rigid, he did not form a clique. He stood along side the working man as 'one of us'. He knew how to touch their hearts by means of humor, a creative story from life, a jest, or by using an answer or a question. There was no distance between Jesus and the people. He took part in their feasts and parties and their daily lives. And there, within their own realm of life, he did not lift the reprimanding finger (but more often the glass). This had not happened before, a Rabbi who did not shut himself off from the world, but stood right in the middle of it. He knew what was going on and what the source of Abram's strength was. Everywhere in the gospels we can read how respectfully he related to crooks, the downcast and the outcasts of society (Luke 18:9-14). He affirmed them in their own dignity.

Hence, it is not surprising that these people could be found with Jesus.

Today, it seems that the ninety-nine righteous people keep Jesus so much in their own midst that the public scene loses sight of Jesus. The ninety-nine are so focused on Jesus, they theologize Him, they mythologize or de-mythologize Him, they create a ghetto around Him with archaic speech, songs and customs. No wonder the man in the street has lost sight of Jesus. The ordinary people can no longer reach this living Person who was flesh and blood and who lived among people like them.

What can we do about this? Isn't it time for the ninety-nine to stand aside to give the people a chance to get to know Jesus as He is? Moreover, what are the ninety-nine righteous (we) doing with him. Isn't it time for us to adopt Jesus' life style? It will be a shock if you leave your ghetto. You must no longer judge other people's behaviour, language, clothing, hair or appearance. Respect is needed. If we want to be able to penetrate the heart of things we need to accept others as they are. Conversion is impossible if we cannot really reach the other person.

Righteousness is also *not* blocking another's view of Jesus and his work.

21 CORRUPTION

'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.' (Luke 16:10-15)

In this passage Jesus penetrates to the very depths of a person's attitude. If you are faithful with a little then you can be trusted with a lot. If you are corrupt with a little then you will be corrupt with a lot. Things begin so easily with a little. Are we trustworthy with the postage stamp treasury? Do we or don't we take a pen without asking from the office..... These small choices can apparently have big consequences.

Do we really want to develop into a leader, a director in business or become important in politics, etc. etc.? Then we have to begin at the bottom. If we show that we can produce good work on the shop floor, then we can be given a higher position. If we prove that we are trustworthy in one place then we can be given another advancement. It takes strength to bear the weight of the world and hence we need preparation, experience, growth, challenges. Sometimes we forget that trustworthiness and loyalty cannot be bought with big salaries. Much is done to establish conditions which will minimize the problem of the lack of loyalty, but Jesus brings it clearly to attention. Essentially it is a spiritual principle. Either you make the ethical choice for the one or for the other. And this starts with small things.

Salon socialists, who have never had any first hand contact with the true problems of workers, can never have true solidarity. I see too many people around me who are only what they are 'in name'. Some studied, for example, to be spiritual leaders (cf. Luke 20:47), but were they really called and did they get experience and purification in the field? Some studied to become labour union functionaries, but did they really know what work was and the true

problems on the work floor? Some studied to be managers, but had they ever accepted the leadership of others? I see this in politics too; do politicians really understand the problems the ordinary people face? Laws should serve to regulate but not unnecessarily hinder our lives. Is it possible for decisions to be made at the lowest possible level? (This involves the principles of authority in each sphere of its own subsidiarity.)

These matters concern questions of justice and keeping responsibility at the lowest level. This is where the primary decisions are made. From there they reach upward, a renewal from the bottom up. This also explains why people are so shocked at the buying-off of leaders (spiritual, business, political, etc.). Your trust is abused; righteousness (right dealings) is abused; the ethical foundations of society have been tampered with. This demonstrates that a so-called 'value free' society does not exist. If I, as an ordinary citizen or worker, do not act ethically, even the harshest penalties cannot stop me. Hence, at my own level, I must make the choice between righteousness or corruption.

Jesus has no sympathy, at all, for people who are only pretending or are pretenders. *'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts'* (Luke 16:15). What a comfort to all of those who wrestle with hypocritical pretending. The Lord sees through them! (Luke 18:9). In another place Jesus says: *'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy'* (Luke 12:1b). Hypocritical pretending is infectious, as yeast penetrates throughout the dough. People are infected, but hypocrisy will come to light so that the scales shall fall from peoples' eyes. And then it will appear what is true and what is false. Evil, deceit, fraud, persecution only goes on so long. The true is what is just and righteous and eternal. This is an encouragement at moments when we are confronted with corruption and corrupt situations. We are called to penetrate to the heart of the matter and to unmask the hypocrisy (Luke 12:2-4) which can so easily corrupt any power or authority structure.

And if we have a high opinion of ourselves, let us examine ourselves repeatedly. Are we like this only because it makes our egos feel good? There will come a day when you will fall.

22 SWIFT JUSTICE

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, Grant me justice against my adversary. For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming! And the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:1-8)

(Contrast this passage with Luke 18:9-14. Also compare this to the Lords Prayer: *'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'*. Even in heaven, before the thrown of God, there is a cry to avenge the blood of the martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11). God will bring about justice and punish evil doers (Rev 15:3-4, 16:1,5, 18:5-6,20, 19:2,11 20:11-14. Righteousness or justice is not the seeking of revenge; God will do that: 'Judgment is mine'. God knows that many people hunger after justice; justice will be done unto them. In part, this will come about by upholding the law and supporting the legal system.)

Karl Marx said that religion is the opium of the people. In his view, religion was an invention of capitalists to keep the poor dumb and quiet. Alas, sometimes the church hierarchy made pacts with rulers to secure privileges, while the workers were left to suffer. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attention was focused on various of these injustices. It was a blemish for the churches, it made a joke of the faith and God was blamed.

The passage quoted above shows something different. After a lot of complaining an unjust judge granted justice. This can give some initial comfort to those who suffer injustice; endure until justice is done; you definitely must not give up. Secondly, it shows us that God is a righteous judge; He too wants justice to be done. The remarkable thing is that this passage of Scripture calls us to persevere in our prayer and in our call for justice. This is really something totally other than 'pious' acceptance, which Marx accused us of. Finally, when the time of patience is past, God will bring about justice, at least, if we do not give up praying for justice. This also shows us ourselves: how is our prayer life? This passage shows us both sides of the coin: pray and seek the face of God, which go hand and hand with righteous actions; we can

insist that the various authorities must do justice.

There are those who do nothing other than campaign (in writing and action) but who lose contact with God, although He is the source and basis or the call for justice. There are those who only pray and lose all contact with reality. How can their prayer still have meaning?

Apparently the balance between prayer and activity is very important. How easily we become complacent. If we really want justice to come, this chapter should be a forceful encouragement to energetically include both aspects.

23 JOY

'So he [Zacchaeus] came down at once and welcomed him gladly'. (Luke 19:6)

How do we welcome Jesus? How do we relate to him? Are we one of those people who is always muttering and complaining because things do not go according to the rules and procedures? *'All the people saw this and began to muter, He has gone to be the guest of a sinner'* (Luke 19:7). How frequently have you observed a discussion about rules, structures and procedures becoming more important than the heart of the matter. We find this in business, the media, trade unions, politics and churches.

The main question is that of righteousness. In this example, the subject is a corrupt tax collector: bribery, extortion, over-charging; he did everything to become rich. Of course, this man was as corrupt as you could be and everyone avoided him like the plague. But Jesus sees the heart, and what was the result? This corrupt man turned back to justice. *'But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'* (Luke 19:8-10)

And what are we going to do with such a nice story? Will we do what Jesus did: go to the house of those who practice unrighteousness? Show real interest? Touch their hearts? If we do this we will see righteousness in action. As a reborn man, Zacchaeus himself brought about a shock wave of righteousness! And notice: it was out of inner conviction.

24 RULES

'Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? He saw through their duplicity and said to them, Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it? Caesar's they replied. He said to them, Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.' (Luke 20:20-26)

How cleaver and brilliant Jesus' answer was, and how obviously mean this trick-question was. Here was something beautiful, creative, something renewing which would jolt the status quo in reaction to this trick question. Do we understand this. Why do people lay this kind of 'mine field of words' for others? Try listening to some political debates. Sometimes it is pathetic the way people try to pin each other down on the basis of one word, all the while avoiding the real topic which they ought to be discussing. Jesus says it outright (Luke 20:21a), directly, because he is 'right' (righteous). This passage encourages us to turn away from word games and follow the example of Jesus; use clear language, good examples and don't avoid the real issue. I would like to call this the first basic rule which should be given first priority in churches, congregations, Christian organizations, labour unions and in politics.

There is a second rule present in this rule. Jesus stuck to the rules which were agreed upon. He in no way questioned the legitimate authority of the rules of the pagan Caesar (who even thought of himself as a God). This concerned the universal rules of human interaction: behaviour, taxation, etc. An important lesson. Too often have I seen congregations and (Christian) organizations trying to change the agreed-upon rules while the game was being played. This is how little they stick to agreements they have previously made. Doesn't God's word say *'let your yea be yea...'* (Matt. 5:37). Sticking to agreements is also one aspect of righteousness and that is something other than piously twisting words. The lesson is to sail straight and make unequivocal agreements.

25 JUDGING

'I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid.' (John 5:30-31)

'For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.' (John 5:36)

How easy it is to stand up for one's own interests. How difficult it is to really be objective. There are 'strings' on so many things which we do and which we want to do. Interests so easily play a role.

Jesus' life on earth is a perfect example of righteous relations and righteous judgment. His relationship with people was right because his relationship with God was right. The proper relationships and priorities were kept first. By keeping these things straight you are able to see clearly; objectivity comes about and there is a righteous judgment which is not based upon public opinion or the voice of the majority and you become less vulnerable to outside pressure. From our works, from consequent actions, it appears that there can be a righteous, correct assessment. Righteousness is indeed, right action and correct behaviour. This is measurable and noticeable in the force-field of human relationships. Jesus rightly says: *'Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment'* (John 7:24). How easily we let ourselves be distracted by what we see, by presentation or appearance. Don't give in. We must rightly penetrate to the heart of the matter again and again regardless of how others are 'presented' to us.

26 NOURISHMENT

'To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' (John 8:31-32)

Righteousness doesn't simply fall out of the clear blue sky. Righteousness is the consequence of something which is already there, a source which nourishes this. Without the source or the energy of justice, righteousness simply expires at some point because the motor has no more petrol. Hence, righteousness must be nourished.

This nourishment, clearly comes from the Word; this nourishment comes through Jesus Christ, his word and Spirit and life (John 6:63, 17:17). If we allow ourselves to be fed in this way the foundation grows, the roots of righteousness grow and the influence will be all the stronger.

For we shall be free by knowing the truth and the truth shall make us free. This is a very important principle. First we need to understand and then we grasp our position, and only then can righteous action follow. Are we actually applying this principle? For only this will guarantee that we see everything in the proper perspective (Matt. 5:14-16, 10:27; Luke 8:17; John 3:20-21, 8:12; Rom. 13:12).

The truth makes us free; Jesus does this. It sounds so simple, so superficial, so cheap. But what is the reverse side of the coin? Complete surrender to Jesus, and that is something in the way of faith and commitment; steeping yourself in His word, and that requires dedication and perseverance. Only by remaining in him like this can we bear fruit (John 15:1-8).

What is the result? The truth makes us really free (John 15:26). (Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth. A proper way of combating lies, deceit and unrighteousness is the work of the Holy Spirit in our life. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8); This emphasizes how important it is for people to receive the Holy Spirit and go to work with the help of the Spirit. Everything can and must then be brought to light. Mistakes, wrong decisions, and sins must not be swept under the carpet. Uprightness tolerates no secretiveness or covering up things. Righteousness is also the calling of things by their name, confessing and correcting mistakes. This truth makes you free; acting in this way means that light will finally shine in the darkness. How true this is, both in our personal lives and in the function of public affairs. Finally: things which are hidden away can only become more rotten.

27 EVERYTHING

'Righteous Father, though the world does not know you.' (John 17:25)

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16)

'As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.' (John 17:18)

'He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.' (Mark 16:15)

Two points are being made in these passages. God, who is righteous, loves the world. In the Greek the word for 'world' is 'cosmos', that is, everything created: humans, human relationships, social and political relationships, etc. It is amazing to realize how much God loves you as a unique person; God loves people, God loves every society, community, city, tribe, culture, the plant and animal worlds, nature. Jesus came to make known the Righteous and the Merciful One. Through Jesus we can come to the Righteous One and understand Him, receive Him. And then we, like Jesus, are sent out into the cosmos by the Righteous One in order to make known who the Righteous One is and what he wants and to act it out. The message, the proclamation is speaking, believing and acting. Together this is the good news, the gospel, the best news the world is waiting for. Is this superficial? No, it is all-inclusive and all-incorporating!

28 HOW TO TAKE ACTION

*'Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was forty years old he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being **mistreated** by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, Men you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other? But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday? When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt. This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, Who made you ruler and judge? He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.'* (Acts 7:22-36)

The story of Moses was a wonderful example of a man who was concerned about others. He was well brought up, educated, was a good speaker and his intentions were very good. He was a fighter of injustice based on his own human knowledge and insight. But his actions for the sake of justice only ended in murder. Even if the situation made this very plausible it did not justify murder; Moses himself committed a much greater injustice than the one he wanted to fight. The big opponent of injustice had to flee in dishonour as a result of his impassioned action guided by his own insight and force. Nevertheless, God knew that his intentions were pure and that he really cared about his people. It only took forty years to ennoble and change him. When he was really pure, when he trusted only in God and asked Him for wisdom, insight and guidance, only then could he become the great liberator and law

giver of his people.

The story of Moses presents us with a dilemma. Do we look to the wisdom of 'Egypt' to guide us or the wisdom of God? (This is also a crucial point for organizations that want to maintain a distinct identity. It is all too easy to chase after 'quality' in order to be able to compete with the world and thereby ignore the importance of internal motivation and spiritual principles. After a while, there is no difference and having been secularized this organization loses its right to exist. An organization with a distinct identity exists thanks to the identity of its people, personnel and leaders; attention needs to be paid to this.) The insights of this world will never be able to combat injustice in the right way. We do not escape the storm but go from a drizzle into the pouring rain of even more injustice.

Violence calls forth even more violence. It only leads to more hatred. Only forgiveness leads to liberation; only the path of respect and love leads to reconciliation.

The practicing of righteousness does not justify any means possible.

29 SIMON VERSUS SIMON

'For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin'. (Acts 8:23)

One of the first deacons, Philip, was sent out to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom shortly after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As a confirmation, many great miracles took place and evil spirits were expelled (Acts 8:6-7). There was a sorcerer in the city named Simon who amazed everyone with his occult practices. People even thought that Simon was a kind of messiah (Acts 8:10). The people saw, however, that what Philip brought was the truth and they were converted in great numbers. The apostles in Jerusalem then send Peter and John who begin praying for the people in Samaria that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). And this happened too.

Simon the sorcerer was very impressed. This was the best trick he had ever seen and he offers the apostles money (Acts 8:18-19), because he wants this power. Peter sees through Simon. Peter is not interested in human power but in the power of God. Peter did not want to manipulate or impress, but to show the power of God which changes us from within.

The apostle Peter looks at the heart. He is a changed person. In contrast to him we have Simon (who even had himself baptized (Acts 8:13). This Simon appears to be changed, but isn't. He only sees the outward, the superficial, the spectacular and thinks that 'that' is the main thing; He has not been changed from within.

The apostle Peter gives it to him straight: *'You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin'* (Acts 8:21-23).

A few very important things are said here. First of all because the sorcerer Simon appeared to be converted. He appeared to be a believer, but was not. His heart was not right with God and hence, his spiritual principles, morality and behaviour were not right. He was full of bitterness which is a result of

jealousy. Bitterness and jealousy are a kind of occult poison which rob a person of clear vision; (Cf. I Sam. 15:23; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:31). The conflict between Peter and Simon is all the more interesting if you remember that Peter was originally called Simon. He was a fisherman and he was unchanged, as we can see in many situations. The resurrection of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit made him a different person and he was then called Peter. In Acts, we find a changing Simon over against an unchanging Simon.) Hence, this man was a nest of sin and unrighteousness within. He was as unchangeable as a wall.

Righteousness is based on healthy spiritual principles. If we are right inside, true righteousness can grow inside like a strong tree which gives shelter to many.

Simon had a real chance to be converted, but did not take it. He brushed it off; he does not want the true, the truth, the right and the righteous.

Anyone who wants to fight injustice and unrighteousness, must first be spiritually cleansed from within before trying to help others.

30 DESPISE NO ONE

'God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.' (Acts 10:35)

God does not have favorites. He has no favorite believers. This is completely contrary to what is everywhere unavoidably the case in religion. All the other religions accept that the faithful will perform certain rites, read the holy text in the original language, and make certain sacrifices. Only after you completely adapt your culture and form an elite group of the initiated do you have any possibility of making contact with the transcendent.

At Pentecost God chose to be a God for all people, understood in every language, in their own culture. In the book of Acts the orthodox Jews appeared to have a problem with this.

At a certain time, Peter was on a missionary journey in Joppa, and naturally he was among Jews. There he had a vision three times in which God showed him a large sheet with pure and impure animals in it; and the message was: eat! (Acts 10:10-15). Peter refuses to do so, saying he had never eaten anything impure. To this he received the reply, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean' (Acts 10:15b). While Peter was musing about this vision, some soldiers sent by Cornelius the centurion came to fetch him. Peter dared to accept the invitation of these unclean gentiles. A whole revival then began at Cornelius' house. Peter had understood, *'that I should not call any man impure or unclean'* (Acts 10:28b).

With this, the boundary lines of cultures, languages, station, class were convincingly broken. The meeting of God in Jesus Christ is for everyone (Acts 10:43); the Holy Spirit is for everyone (Acts 10:45-46). With God there is no respect of persons (Acts 10:34).

The only criterion is that we worship the true God, and from this source practice righteousness. Then He is pleased with every person from every culture.

Honouring God and practicing righteousness: the universal Message, which is good news for everyone from every culture: *'Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not*

be justified from by the law of Moses' (Acts 13:38-39). So much room, so much openness and understanding! And so encouraging.

31 PLURALISM

One day Paul was in 'the' city of pluralism: ATHENS.

*'All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. Paul then stood in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an alter with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, We are his offspring. Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world **with justice** by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, We want to hear you again on this subject. At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.'* (Acts 17:21-34)

It is remarkable that Paul delivers the Message at this place. He does not quote the Old Testament but refers to the most well-known contemporary Greek poets (Acts 17:28). Paul relates to the religious and artistic feelings of the day (Acts 17:22-23, 29).

This speech is a fabulous example of being active in a cross-cultural way; your reference point is on the side of your listeners! Paul knew very precisely what interested and excited these people. And he was able to express this in the context of the Gospel. The forms of his speech shows his listeners that he

respects their religion and art, although he knew how to make very clear that God was infinitely greater than the art works he saw around him. He recognized a searching for God in all of this. And Paul used this to explain who God really is. He did this in four steps:

- Every nation and people have a unique purpose and destiny (Acts 17:26b);
- Mercy: God reaches out to you (Acts 17:27,30); you have a special purpose;
- The possibility of conversion and change; you can act and make a decision (Acts 17:30b);
- There is such a thing as absolute righteousness, which every person hungers and thirsts for (Acts 17:31).

Paul saw how difficult it was to communicate the heart of the Gospel in a pluralistic society. Still, even here it had results.

For the poor and the outcasts the Gospel had many other facets. Large numbers of people from the lower strata of society came to faith. It was much harder to reach the elite. Paul's four step plan is a good example of how we can work in a pluralistic society.

32 DEMANDING JUSTICE

'As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty? When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. What are you going to do? he asked. This man is a Roman citizen. The commander went to Paul and asked, Tell me, are you a Roman citizen? Yes, I am, he answered. Then the commander said, I had to pay a big price for my citizenship. But I was born a citizen, Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.' (Acts 22:25-29)

There are people who have an idea of what a true Christian is, a sweet person you can easily make fun of. There are Christians who never dare to offend anyone, for, isn't it better to suffer than to demand your rights? Such people are bound to be used as doormats.

Paul gives us an indication of how we should act. For the sake of the gospel he was tortured, arrested and stoned. But when it came to the functioning of the legal system he did not let himself be walked on. In the case described above, he made an appeal based on his Roman citizenship. He demanded due legal process. He was not going to just let himself be bound and whipped.

The same thing happened on another occasion, in Philippi, where he was thrown in jail (Acts 16:37-39). There, the leaders even had to offer their apologies and personally escort Paul to the borders of the city.

In my experience, I have often found that groups of Christians don't dare make use of the legal system. Paul's example should encourage us to let the legal system take its course *when we are treated unfairly*. Christians are not just dumb sheep who should just let themselves be slaughtered. Christians too easily allow themselves to be insulted, scoffed at, intimidated, misused. Of course, we will bless our enemies, but this does not exclude the possibility of an appeal to existing laws and principles of justice and righteousness. In the Old Testament it is clearly stated that we should *'seek justice'* (Isa. 1:17) and keep violence under control. This means individual and coordinated action. It is certainly time for Christians to take legal action on a number of fronts if we don't want to see our legal system and principles be robbed any further of their meaning.

33 WHAT ARE YOU AFTER?

*'I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written; **The righteous will live by faith.**' (Rom 1:16-17)*

Now, after years of liberal indoctrination, it appears that we cannot do without norms and values. Hence, society must be grafted anew into norms and values. But which ones? We find parts of the Ten Commandments surfacing again rather quickly. But what is the primary value involved here? After some investigation, it appears that all of these commandments are aspects of one thing: righteousness. Righteousness expresses itself in responsibility, solidarity, care, social behaviour, true relationships, respect for others and their property, etc. This is, of course, splendid since without such basic rules of life society could not exist. For this reason we human beings need to pay attention to these basic rules of behaviour. But how does one implement these, e.g. in school, with children, the youth, adults? We quickly find that if this does not come from inside of us it is only a quickly deteriorating varnish. So how can it come from someone's heart? Because only then it will influence ones behaviour...

At this point, none of the 'isms' can offer help; because it appears that the root of righteousness, the basis of justice, is *faith*.

In other words, if we want to renew society, if you want people with a sense of responsibility, everything depends upon faith. Without faith, there will be no change. But if we begin to live by faith that will give us strength to do deeds of righteousness. Remember, *the righteous shall live by faith*. This is the only thing which is eternal, indestructible, a timeless and unchanging value.

If we deny them or let go of them, the automatic consequence will be that people and eventually society will base everything on feeling; this will result in a downward spiral, leading to evermore extreme forms of subjectivism which will then dominate life.

Read about the consequences in Romans: *'Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy,*

murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve those who practice them.' (Rom 1:28-32)

Bad thinking appears to have enormous consequences for people, families, and society; all different kinds of unrighteousness contaminate everything.

Put it another way: we will either begin to think, believe and act clearly again, or just live for what gives us a kick, experiences (all kinds of cravings, desires, etc, but also drugs, the occult, new age, etc.) which will ruin everything. These questions require everyone of us to honestly examine himself. Will you do this? What are you looking for? What motivates you? What are you after? Is this the way to be a human as we were created to be after God's likeness?

34 PUBLIC JUSTICE

Not long ago, the Dutch Christian political party, the CDA, came out with a report called, 'Public Justice'. It gives a clear explanation of what the foundations of society are and argues that without public justice (righteousness) these foundations cannot exist. I don't have time to explain all of the reasoning, the necessity and the desired consequences here. But while reading through the Bible I found the following brief description of the foundation of public justice:

'For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey (the ones who act it) the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.' (Rom. 2:13-15)

Isn't it amazing that from the beginning of creation the principles of good and evil actions, and of righteousness were put in the heart of every human being? It would seem that every person can act according to the principles of righteousness. The question is then whether or not people do this. God's judgment takes place in accordance with how people act with respect to the rules of justice. For believers, the law (summarized in the Ten Commandments) only clarifies what justice is. Believers too must ask themselves how they meet the demands of justice.

Let us now return to the topic of public justice. Even if the principles are present in everyone, what do we do if our fellow citizens do not appear to have a sense of 'public justice'? The government can then only uphold the principles of justice by using different forms of punishment. But will this help? This is a major dilemma. It has been shown that you can punish people as much as you want, but if they don't have the necessary internal conviction this will lead nowhere. Our hearts must be circumcised (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28-29). What then? Should the government promote religion and conversion? That won't work either. But then the whole discussion about norms and values breaks down. By the way, slogans about a sense of citizenship are of no use at all.

There is no other solution than to extensively discuss, explain and apply the Ten Commandments in the primary schools. And then the summary of the law:

`Love your neighbour as yourself'

All human interaction actually depends upon these rules for action. If these most fundamental truths are understood, then they can be followed with applications such as `Basic rights and Human rights'.

Wouldn't it better to do the latter without the former? The fear of the absolute basis (which is clearly religious) is a lot of nonsense. The latter is derived from the former and it is not without good reason that it has been able to give form and content to society for three and a half thousand years. Whether or not people are believers, the truth may not be covered up.

Moreover, the government must continue to administer punishments. However, this must be linked to educational and alternative service programs in order to make a maximum re-socialization possible. This should also be the case with petty crimes. If this problem is not dealt with carefully, large problems will certainly develop. Besides this, we need preventative programs for young people who are on the margins of society and for those who have few opportunities. These things are necessary practical forms of justice which the state must finance, although the execution of these programs must not be carried out by the government.

Returning to where we began: the main goal is to stimulate internal motivation. Are we doing that at school, at work, in politics, in trade unions, in the media, in the family?

35 IT WON'T WORK

The entire Letter to the Romans is a magnificent account of the struggle of grace and righteousness with sin and unrighteousness. Tradition has it that the ideas in this letter led to the conversion of Martin Luther. Its point of departure is God as the Righteous one, he who will judge everyone according to their degree of righteousness. The conclusions are that:

- No one is righteous (Rom. 1:10-18, 7:21-24). All people are sinners.
- When we try to live according to the law of the Old Testament, we fail (Rom. 3:20). As such, we can only be condemned.
- Thanks be to God, for it appears that through faith in Jesus Christ, righteousness is possible (Rom.3:21-30, 4:4-8, 6:14, 8:1-2). By His grace we receive righteousness (now not as condemnation but as grace).
- Then, we who are justified through faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom.5:1, 8:1-2, 9:30, 10:4-15).
- Hence, it is finally possible to have real life, hope, a future, true serving and solidarity (Rom. 5:17,21, 6:11-14, 17-23).
- By acting justly, righteously, this grace can begin to dominate and become visible (Rom. 5:21).
- What this means in practice can be seen, in part, in the following passage:

'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' (Rom. 12:9-21)

And:

*'The commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law**'* (Rom. 13:9-10).

By ourselves this won't work; but if we surrender ourselves to the grace of God, the practice of *righteousness* is possible. What a wonderfully beautiful, powerful message this is. *'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of **righteousness**, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'* (Rom. 14:17).

36 BASIC NEEDS

*'It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God; that is, our **righteousness**, holiness and redemption.'* (I Cor. 1:30)

Perhaps we could call these the basic spiritual needs of every human being, every tribe, every nation.

-Everyone wants wisdom. Fortunes are sometimes spent on astrology, gurus, research programs, etc.

True wisdom appears not to be for sale. There is great doubt today about the meaning of existence. People are looking everywhere to explain (their own) existence; but outside of God, this only leads to existential despair.

-Everyone wants justice, righteousness. You often experience injustice; receiving justice appears to be limited; you see much structural injustice around you. Sometimes everything in you rises up in protest; everything in you calls out, justice must be done. Human, social and political structures seem to be very limited.

-Everyone wants holiness. Holiness means, in the first place, being dedicated to God, hence, having a purpose. If there was ever a thirst for purpose, it is in today's post-modern culture. Everyone wants a purpose for life and everything seems so meaningless. In the second place; holiness also means purity; everyone is looking for purity, everything seems to be contaminated; everything is imperfect, things always seem to have strings attached; it is all enough to drive you to despair.

-Everyone wants redemption. There is so much which holds us down and which burdens us. We want liberation from everything which weighs us down and binds us. It can be the everyday routine, depressing work, bureaucracy, inefficiency, e.g. bad public structures. Where is redemption from our troubles, from the misery we see around us, from sickness, etc. etc. Yes, where is redemption?

Only in Jesus Christ can we find fulfillment for our basic spiritual needs. These needs can be fulfilled if we are willing to take the step to Jesus, to Jesus alone. (Upon the foundation of Jesus everything can be built with eternal value; I Cor 3:11-12, 3:7-9, 4:1,2)

37 THROUGH THE SPIRIT

*'But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.'* (1Cor. 6:11b)

After reading the previous chapter, perhaps you thought 'we have arrived'. This passage takes us further. We can look at being 'justified in the name of the Lord Jesus' as the basic structure. But that's not the same as it being a reality. The Spirit of God is also necessary. The Spirit of God is what brings righteousness to life. We must act and walk with the attitude of God. And this can only happen through the Holy Spirit. We can then only pray: *Veni Creator Spiritus; come creating Spirit.*

The Letter to the Corinthians shows us what the gifts of the Spirit are; they can equip us to be worthy servants. Galatians shows us what the fruits of the Spirit are (Gal. 5:22).

Letting yourself be led by the Holy Spirit is the way of righteousness.

38 LOVE

'Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.' (I Cor 13:6)

Real love is incompatible with unrighteousness. True love seeks the truth. And truth makes righteousness and justice possible. The truth will make you free (John 8:26; Gal. 5:1; II Cor. 3:17; John 14:6; Eph. 5:9, 4:15; II Cor. 6:7; I Cor. 13:6; John 1:17, 8:32). In the love song to love there are more gems of wisdom.

'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part: then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.' (I Cor. 13:1-13)

The truth along with real love opens our eyes. The giant of infatuation blinds us and clearly, that won't help us very much. True love is one of the fruits of the Spirit and can only grow where there is truth, where there is light.

Secretiveness, manipulation, sweeping things under the carpet, artificiality, etc. ruin true love. Why?

Because it is not clear, recognizable. The truth liberates. Truth brings everything into the light. True love detests unrighteousness and the doers of unrighteousness.

People so easily let themselves be manipulated: if you really love me, then

you will.....'

That is imitation love. The answer to it is: 'if you really love me, than you will not ask me to do this'.

Real love greets righteousness with joy.

39 MINISTRY

*How much more glorious is the ministry that brings **righteousness!*** (II Cor. 3:9b)

The word 'ministry' is really a very beautiful concept. It entails ministering, having a mission, working for a goal. A ministry is something you can only receive. And in carrying it out its high and noble purpose becomes manifest. A ministry is never focused upon itself and may not be used simply to enrich those involved with it; that would be to misuse it.

There appears to be a 'ministry that brings righteousness'. It seems that this ministry is for every believer who will take it up. God promises that the results of this ministry will be fascinating: 'glorious'.

If you let this sink in, it will give you courage, boldness, you have something special to give! A ministry of righteousness! What effect does this have on you? *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold!* (II Cor. 3:12)

This ministry, carrying out the mission of righteousness, is so important that you can go to work with complete freedom and courage, because this is to act in the *'Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'* (II Cor. 3:17). And isn't freedom one of the things for which millions of people cry out?

A ministry which brings glory, *'the Lord's glory'* (II Cor. 3:18b) is apparently reflected in you! If you understand this, that you have a truly eternal, fantastic ministry (II Cor. 4:1), this will give you courage (II Cor. 4:1b). You go into action! Indeed, this does not fit with negative things, you have *'renounced secret and shameful ways'* (II Cor. 4:2). You dare to take a stand, take action, stick out your neck. Because it is not self-serving, it is credible. Moreover, *'for we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord'* (II Cor. 4:5). Action of this kind will not always be easy, and that is why we are encouraged again: *'therefore we do not lose heart'* (II Cor. 4:16a). Even if it sometimes costs us a lot, the reward is *'inwardly we are being renewed day by day'* (II Cor. 4:16b). Each day anew, each day new inspiration to be allowed to fulfill this ministry.

The Letter to the Corinthians goes further. We should understand that *'what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal'* (II Cor. 4:18b). And this too is good news, because it is so hard for people to overcome materialism, which only makes them more egotistical and it also harms society.

There is a wonderful eternity (II Cor. 5:1b-2) waiting for us. That too is an aspect of ministry which brings justice, righteousness. That eternity encourages us anew: *'therefore we are always confident'* (II Cor. 5:6a). The writer of Corinthians brings us to an ever deeper aspect, *'we live by faith, not by sight'* (II Cor. 5:7). It is certain that if we carry out our ministry of righteousness this is a substantial contribution. How easily we look with fear at the waves all around us. We easily let ourselves get discouraged by the mountains we have to climb, difficulties that get in our way. The Bible sets another sign before us; you must go by faith and not by sight. Faith is the motivating power. Once again *'we are confident'* (II Cor. 5:8a).

And we may be full of courage, *'for Christ's love compels us'* (II Cor. 5:14) which is the heart of our faith. It is love which drives us: *'therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!'* (II Cor. 5:17). If this is not sensible and overwhelmingly good news, then what is?

The writer of Corinthians sums things up by saying that God *'gave us the ministry of reconciliation'* (2 Cor. 5:18b). The ministry which brings righteousness appears thus to be based upon reconciliation. Reconciliation with God is necessary; **reconciliation** is necessary between parents and children; reconciliation is necessary between groups, between groups of people, tribes, nations; reconciliation is necessary with the environment, with the whole creation. Everything expresses the need for harmony. And this can come only through reconciliation.

By being so active, a new righteousness or justice will come. A righteousness of God. A righteousness which we may carry to others (II Cor. 5:21b) thanks to Jesus.

40 ATTACK

'With weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.' (II Cor. 6:7b)

'Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.' (Eph. 6:14)

These passages from II Corinthians and Ephesians, make clear that we are engaged in a great battle. We are attacked in different ways: ridiculed, smeared with mud, sometimes discriminated against, our motives questioned, criticized in print, etc...

It is very easy to react angrily against people who treat us this way. But that is precisely **not** what is important.

We need to direct our energy against the powers behind this. It is not a struggle against flesh and blood, but against authorities, powers, against world rulers of this darkness, against evil spirits in heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

How do we attack these powers and structures? By doing righteousness. In the places where we find injustice, we need to do justice; and where we can, everything should be supported by righteousness. In this way we can defeat the enemy. We must not act unjustly in reaction, no; rather, we should pray for our enemies, bless them (Luke 6:28; Rom. 12:14, II Cor. 6:3-10), and do acts of justice.

To avoid being like a bull in a china shop, our 'attack' needs to be part of a greater whole: What should our attitude be, what should our approach and behaviour be. And what should the other parts of our armour be?

'We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always

rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.' (II Cor. 6:3-10)

'Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.' (Eph 6:10-18)

It is very encouraging to realize that our battle is part of a much greater war. God cannot use soldiers who just sit inactively in their ghettos. We are all supposed to be active in our own life and area of work; in every area of life. God gave the world to the human race to be used and cared for. If we want to see the world and the human race grow and blossom, then every believer must be committed and active in order to fight against both individual and structural evil and the spirit of evil.

41 UNEQUALLY YOKED

*'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do **righteousness** and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.'* (II Cor. 6:14-16a)

This text is taken out of context again and again in order to assure that Protestants and Catholics don't marry one another, or a Baptist and a Charismatic, or a Christian and a non-Christian. This has caused a lot of pain and suffering. It is even more painful because the text has been so misused.

Let us look at this text to try to see what it really means. The criterion is that if people cannot carry the same load or if the carriers are going in different directions the combination won't work. What is the equal or the unequal element? That is a matter of principles: e.g. righteousness and lawlessness. If we express this in practical terms, this means that if you start a business, a store or a company with someone, the partners should have the same motivation. If one wants to be honest and upright and the other partner wants to get rich quick by fraud then the two do not fit together. Both need to believe in the same basic principle of the business and work according to it. Hence, if the business partner is not a Christian, but like the partner who is, believes in doing business honestly and justly then they are equally yoked and so it will be a success.

This principle can be translated and applied in every area of life, society and politics. In cases where motives and purposes are the same, people can work together as 'equally yoked'.

The text suggests five aspects to which we should pay attention to determine whether it is possible for two or more people to be equally yoked.

- a) Righteousness versus lawlessness.
- b) Light versus darkness.
- c) Christ versus Belial.
- d) Faith versus unbelief.
- e) The temple of God versus idols.

a) Righteousness versus lawlessness has been explained in part above. You can also put it like this: working according to honest rules, justice, in truth; and hence, not engaging in fraud, untruthful documents, bad quality, business lies, bribery, etc. etc.

b) Light versus darkness.

The principles of light are related to openness, truth, frankness, your yes as yes, stick to the content and the spirit of your promises, giving insight, transparency of leadership, letting yourself be venerable, etc. Darkness is related to dishonesty, manipulation, shady dealings, fraud, etc. etc.

c) Christ versus Belial.

Belial was the god to whom sacrifices were given, people even offered their own children. That was an abomination to God. Christ stands for usefulness, eternity, quality of life, social relationships, solidarity and true responsibility. Do we believe in these principles and want to act as Christ did? Or do we follow the principle of Belial: do we sacrifice everything for power, money, success? There really are people who sacrifice their families, children and social relations for money, more power or status. Clearly, these two motivations are different and cannot be combined.

d) Faith and unbelief.

In this sense, what is essentially expressed is that there must be a unity of purpose. Do you together believe that your marriage will endure. Do you believe together that the business will make it. Do you believe together that ... It is noteworthy that more and more businesses are formulating mission statements. The more one supports and the more one believes in it, the better the company will operate. The company suddenly has found a heart and a soul. The Bible passage quoted above, speaks about this: 'what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?' This is just right. You can only take part in something if you believe in it. It is true for every form of partnership. It is a sensible question to be asked when you are applying for a job: why do you believe in this company, why do you want to be part of it. When people start taking different sides this leads to nothing, if you do not 'believe in it' together.

e) The temple of God versus idols.

Your works appear to form a kind of structure together. From the fruits you will know the tree. Does a particular thing bring glory to God? Are these principles of righteousness, solidarity, responsibility, etc?

Or: does it make it apparent that you are serving idols? What are idols? First of all, they are all different forms of darkness and occult practices. Idols can be unbridled lust for career advancement, power for power's sake, greed, trying to

get a bigger and bigger kick, etc.

It should now be clear what is meant by 'unequally yoked'. The wisdom of this passage of scripture is very important. If you are going to form a partnership either personal, business, social or political, you should first consider the basic questions about purpose, intentions, commitment, etc. which are very important to see whether you are equally yoked; since only then will the partnership last.

Returning to the question of who we may marry: Even if two people have the same church background that does not say whether or not they are 'equally yoked'. Frequently, I have seen this kind of marriage fall apart. Forming an equally yoked couple in the personal sphere needs a lot more points of similarity to be successful, (see points a-e). Put differently, a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, or someone who believes differently, can be successful and beautiful if they believe the same concerning points a-e and work from the same basic principles.

42 PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

*'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his **righteousness** endures forever.'* (II Cor. 9:9; Psalm 112:9)

Both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures call us in many places to be abundant in 'good works' (II Cor. 9:8b).

These are the works of charity, care for the sick, for the poor, for the underprivileged, for the widow, for the orphan, a fair wage, etc. In the Bible, this is often referred to as a sign of righteousness. Believers are constantly called to actually and practically participate in this. This planting and this outgrowth of our righteousness will yield an abundance of fruit (II Cor. 9:10b). James writes using tough language about the necessity of being socially concerned (James 1:27; 2:5-7, 14-17, 5:4-6); care for the widow, the orphan, the poor, a fair wage, etc. He summarizes by saying: *'because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful'* (James 2:13); and *'You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone'* (James 2:24). *'Faith without deeds is dead'* (James 2:26; Heb 6:1). It is clear that the test of righteousness is in action, what we actually do in practice in regard to others. (Paul also mentions the necessity of good works in various places, for example, in the Letter to Titus (*'to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good'* 2:14, 3:1,8b,14). What justifies us, what makes our faith visible are our deeds, our 'works'. What once made the spreading of the gospel credible was its practical meaning for the lower classes of society: *'God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them'* Heb. 6:10; cf. Heb 10:24). In the future, there will again be many possibilities in these areas. The developments in society are again an enormous challenge for 'works of mercy', hence, practical Christianity.

43 INEQUALITY

'So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' (Gal. 3:24-29)

One of the most controversial questions of our times concerns inequality. Inequality between the sexes, inequality in work relations, inequality between countries and peoples, social inequality, discrimination... When God created everything, everything was in harmony: man and woman, human beings with animals and plants; it was really a paradise. The fall into sin brought inequality, exploitation, manipulation, dominance, mis-use, etc. Since that time there have been many attempts to restore the harmony. One was based on rulers and slaves, another tried centralized power; another a super culture, another the strong leader; another complete decentralization and separation of groups... and so we continue to wrestle with the problems. All of these areas of tension will never be changed, unless.....

Unless Christ, through faith, changes our heart. Justified by faith. Through faith we again begin to sail straight, just relationships come about again, making new equitable structures possible. And what do we find? In Christ the differences disappear, tensions cease, reconciliation and forgiveness are possible! In Christ we learn to accept each other as we are. In Christ there can be no thought of treating one another without respect. In Christ we are one!

Men and women, workers and employers, nations and languages. And together we become inheritors of the original promises of God: there is a way of blessing and a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign.

44 NEW PEOPLE

*'So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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.'* (Eph. 4:17-24)

If we want change, then new people are needed: a new spirit, heart and mind is needed. Regardless of what we try, social engineering will not work. We need to act consciously and put on the new man. We need to take a decision and a step toward renewal. Only then can there be true righteousness and holiness. And that is apparent: new people bring forth new actions, new commitment, new relationships. It turns everything upside down. Just read about all the things which are going to happen:

'Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure

or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.' (Eph. 4:25 - 5:9, cf Gal. 5:13-26, Phil. 2:2-5, Col. 3:5-17)

Through faith we ask God to recreate; this will bring true righteousness, holiness, goodness, truth.

This fulfills another Bible passage: *'But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.'* (Gal. 5:5, Phil. 3:9)

We eagerly await the new humanity. Finally it can be true. Finally righteousness.

45 EVIL

'The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displaying in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie...' (II Thess. 2:9-12)

There are people who think that evil is only something that someone does. Others look at evil as also being something abstract. But believing that evil really exists as 'the evil', 'the evil one', 'Satan' is going too far for some people. People who lived through the Second World War know the sad truth: human beings can be completely possessed by evil and do the most terrible things because they believe a lie, about race for example. How true the Bible verse is quoted above.

Evil exists and this person will come with all kinds of deception to tempt and mislead. Watch out: he dispenses unrighteousness in such a way that it tricks people into believing it, to follow it and to put it into practice. This is a very frightening phenomenon which we repeatedly see taking place around us: ethnic cleansing, for example, of Jewish people, of non Serbians, of foreigners....

How can this be? People who are civilized keep asking themselves this. The axle, around which everything turns is: 'to love the truth'. If you refuse to see or believe the truth, then you are vulnerable to a different spirit, way of thinking, group or principle, namely, the evil one. No one in Dutch society believed after the experience of the war that right wing extremism could ever get a foot-hold again in the Netherlands. And many people are shocked at how easily young people believe the nonsense espoused by these groups. Of course, something should be done within the schools and through public education.

But the heart of the matter is more difficult to convey: that is the love of the truth. You have to accept this spiritual principle. You must make this decision. Only this will protect you against the enticement of unrighteousness. The truth opens eyes, the truth is light by which you can see clearly. The truth will make you free. The truth brings us to righteousness and unmask unrighteousness.

(God is The Truth. Seeking after and doing the truth will ultimately bring us to God, the source of truth and righteousness. Ultimately, the truth is also a spiritual principle, see 2 Thes. 2:13 which must be acted upon.

46 WEALTH

'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.' (I Tim. 6:10-12)

'Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.' (I Tim. 6:17-19)

What is your goal? What are you after? What do you want to achieve in your life? In this passage we are warned about the dangers of wealth. If this is your goal, there are many sad consequences which can follow and ultimately you can lose everything because of greed: true relationships, love, righteousness, truthfulness, humanness...

This principle was true two thousand years ago and it is just as true today. If you have many possessions, don't put your trust in them, but put your trust in God. Do good things with what you have and 'be rich in good deeds'. But watch out, don't become arrogant because of your wealth.

Look around you, and you will see how relevant this sketch is. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Is it in this world, in your possessions? Or is it that which is eternal, imperishable?

We are called not to go along with that which entices us in riches and possessions, but to have different priorities: yes true righteousness, joy in the Lord, faith, love, endurance, humility; fight the good fight

This is developed more fully in the second Letter to Timothy:

- *'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline'* (II Tim. 1:7).

- *'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth'* (II Tim. 2:15).

- *'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'* (II Tim. 2:19).

- *'Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace'* (II Tim. 2:22).

- Hard times are going to come because people are going to pursue their lusts:

'People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God--having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them' (II Tim. 3:2-5) .

- *'While evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived'* (II Tim. 3:13) .

- *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work'* (II Tim. 3:16-17).

- The battle for the good goal has a deep meaning: *'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day'* (II Tim. 4:7, 8a).

To devote yourself to this battle has eternal value. If you devote yourself, your property, your money, the things which are temporal will not easily corrupt you. Let us encourage one another to strive for those aspects of righteousness.

47 DISCIPLINE

'Endure hardship as discipline: God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?' (Heb. 12:7)

'Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.' (Heb. 10-13a)

Discipline is not such a pleasant subject. I will never forget, as a child, I once did something terrible; my parents had to punish me and they said: 'Go get the carpet beater from the garage'. The fact that I was going to be punished using the carpet beater I could understand, I deserved it. But that I myself had to go and get it, that was the worst punishment.

Sometimes words don't help; so then you must punish your children in other ways. (See the various passages from Proverbs, in the Old Testament, and the Letters in the New Testament. Corporal punishment must not be excessive, done out of anger; it must be justified and according to measure. A child is not a possession with which you may do as you please! This belief stood in stark contrast to other cultures at that time.) If parents love their children, there will be attention to the necessity of discipline and punishment. Because we know that if we don't do this we will raise a bunch of spoiled, egotistical adults who will behave in anti-social ways. And this kind of person is a plague on society, because they only think of themselves.

In the natural realm it appears that punishment and discipline is necessary. But is this also true in the spiritual? If we wish to be sons of God there ought to be the element of punishment and discipline. How easily we react childishly: rather don't than do. Nevertheless, spiritual discipline has a large and a deep usefulness; because untimely it produces the result which this whole book is about: righteousness. (*'Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness'* (James 3:18). Peace is not just letting things go their way. Peace-making is an action, it requires actions of reconciliation and deeds of punishment. This is true at both the micro (family) level and the macro (society) level.)

All of this offers us lots of encouragement: *'Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees'* (Heb. 12:12), God is with you, you are His child: you can walk in the straight and narrow path.

48 PRAYER

*'Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a **righteous** man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.'* (James 5:16)

The prayers of the righteous avail much. How easy it is to forget this..... Although there are innumerable books written about prayer. Jesus, too, spoke about prayer in various places. The disciples also wrote about it. How difficult it seems to be to make time for prayer every day. Not that I believe in any of the schemes that the various groups propagate: you must do it in the morning, or in the evening; you must begin with the Lords Prayer, or you must first...Or the minimum is so many minutes.

Praying is nothing other than talking with God; in communication, there are monologues and dialogues. I too have trouble praying when heaven seems to be insulated with reinforced concrete; still, I pray on; God is with me, around me, in me, hence, I must not let my feelings mislead me. Sometimes my prayer is no more than a crying out.

The prayer of a righteous man avails much.... This Bible passage is located in the context of relationships. Righteousness can be detected in how we act towards others, in different situations. We dare to pray for personal things, the family, health, a degree of welfare... But: the example of James goes so far as to remind us of the great prophet Elijah. His prayer had enormous political, social and religious consequences, if you know this history.

The prayer of a righteous man avails much... Prayer then appears to have influence on the political and social situation, as well as upon the environment, on war and peace, and the people around you. Prayer hits evil at the root and has effects upon the servants of the principle of evil.

How easily we explain away evil in prayer. Because, just imagine it is true. We prefer to see prayer as a kind of Sunday school story. The prayers of righteous people accomplish much. The times are so unpeaceful that believers at every level of society must again start praying: for the national, international and local political situation: for those who are unemployed and all other social problems; for the trade union movement; for the media; for industry; for the

neighbourhood; for...

Prayer is the weapon in the spiritual struggle. By defeating the reigning spirits, the results will become visible here and now.

The prayer of the righteous avails much because power is given to it, just as with Elijah.

49 INJUSTICE

'For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.' (1 Peter 2:17)

'But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffers for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.' (1 Peter 19b-24).

Do everything taking God into account. That is difficult. Nevertheless, this is the only way to bring about change. Righteousness is *not always receiving your due*.

The situations referred to above, in the passage of scripture, are all taken from very personal situations: you are in this situation, you experience it. The call is to live for righteousness in every situation and this means that you must sometimes experience injustice in order to put to shame the one who caused the evil.

This is why Paul was in prison a number of times; he was whipped, stoned and persecuted. Nevertheless, Paul frequently insisted that Roman justice be applied. Not always insisting on your own rights does not mean that you must become a doormat. There appears to be a balance between these two approaches.

Why we should bear the pain in one situation and demand our rights in another depends upon the situation. Which will bring the most glory to God: what will most brilliantly manifest what righteousness is?

'Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.' (1 Peter 3:8-9)

'Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should

suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.' (1 Peter 3:13-18a)

Behaving in this way is a complete cultural paradox. Still, this kind of person, who dares to take a stand for the kingdom of God, is needed. Even if it seems as though the majority does not listen, or waltzes over you, this should not hinder us from showing a different faith, attitude, character and behaviour. It demonstrates courage to take God into account and to live for righteousness.

50 FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

*'But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of **righteousness**.'* (II Peter 3:13)

There will come a day when the kingdom of God will incorporate everything. The whole creation will be redeemed from the fall. Finally, there will be a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness will come to pass. Millions and millions of people are looking forward to such a world.

Are we just going to sit and wait and do nothing? Wait until it happens? The Bible calls us to the way of righteousness at the present time. We need to act now and walk according to the guidelines of righteousness (I John 3:7-10, 2:3-6, 3:18, III John 11). Even if our actions, commitment, faith and prayers do not completely realize righteousness in every aspect of life, they will not have been for nothing.

We are called to remain awake: *'If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him'* (I John 2:29).

There are other people (outside your circle of faith and conviction) who do righteousness and struggle for justice. These too are born of God. The perspective on the future is that one day God will organize everything and everyone in a righteous way (Rev. 11:15-18, 15:3-4, 19:11, 20:11-13). Finally there will be righteousness!

This perspective on the future shows us two cities: Babylon (Rev. 18), and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). Babylon is the personification of human (fleshly) culture; externally beautiful and impressive, but inside, rotten through and through. God will judge Babylon, *'for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes'* (Rev. 18:5,20). This fleshly culture was built upon injustice, exploitation, misuse, the occult, lies, deceit, torture, falsehood, etc.

A new heaven and a new earth are coming (Rev. 21:1 22:21) in which God will make everything new; finally, comfort, complete redemption and deliverance; finally, justice and righteousness.... How we hunger for this now. And then the new, the gigantic, the astonishingly beautiful and interesting city: the new Jerusalem where God's creativity and human creativity will embrace one another (Rev. 21:24,26). Our search for the meaning, purpose, beauty, norms, values and identity will be fulfilled. What a celebration that will be. A new civilization, a new eternity in which we will all have meaningful tasks to

perform (Rev. 21:5b).

What about the present? What is going to happen? In our time, it looks as if peoples' motives are becoming clearer and clearer. This has to happen.

'Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.' (Rev. 21:11-14)

Is there a fate which means everything is determined for us? No, everyone can choose for the way of righteousness, the kingdom of God now. Even on the last page of the Bible (Rev. 21:17), God calls upon us to come, to choose and to receive the Holy Spirit so that we can become new people, who can live out His kingdom and His righteousness.

APPLICATION 1: PEOPLE

If you look at the Biblical examples of how people act justly and unjustly, these examples give a crystal clear picture of the application of Biblical righteousness in the personal sphere:

-One on one:

'love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27). A directly applicable rule. How would you yourself like to be treated in this situation? Treat others that way! Is the other person acting impossibly, then go to him and tell him (Luke 6:28); Pray very specifically (Luke 6:27-31). The Ten Commandments also give a perfect guideline.

-You and your family:

The family is the smallest social unit based on love and care. It is clear that there can be no unrighteousness between members of the family such as, manipulation, incest, rape, discrimination (see chapter 27 of my *The Kingdom In Deed*, where it is explained that any form of discrimination of women is very unbiblical), violence, oppression, etc. Based on love and respect, people must see to it that other peoples' gifts are developed to their fullest. Let the others be carried by your prayers, blessing and commitment: that is your responsibility.

-Person and clan:

People live in various social units. In the past, that was the tribe or clan. Later you had the guilds. But even now, all of us belong to a number of groups. For example, your group at work, your sports club, the bridge club, the parents association, tenants association, neighbourhood association, etc. Here too, we are placed as salting salt to act according to justice and righteousness. (Do you pray for your association, the leaders, the situations that come up?)

-Person and church, labour union, politics:

People are also part of a few special units of association, namely, as part of a religious community; but they are also organized within the fields of work; besides this you are inevitably a part of a political reality which effects you personally.

In the following chapters I will discuss these questions in more detail. Some key terms are personal experience, personal radiation and righteousness which can only take form on the basis of participation; bearing responsibility, voting habits and the practice of solidarity.

APPLICATION 2: THE CHURCH

Many people will think of an institution when they read this word. The New Testament meaning was that of a living, dynamic community (which indeed did have structure). God wants to reveal Himself precisely through such a community (Eph. 3:10). Such a community is not the same as a one man show or a liturgy where the people only get the chance to say Amen. Paul described the Christian community very pointedly: a place where there is something for everyone and where everyone can contribute something: a psalm, a song, teaching, revelation, etc. (1 Cor. 14:26). In such a community, men and women, older and younger people can develop their gifts (see the book: *the creative church* © 1995 Leen La Rivière). The gifts can be creative ones, giving instruction, or social and leadership gifts. There is room for everyone. Such a community can have a great effect on the people around it when there is a wide representation of all of the possibilities for development. Justice means that there is room for everyone to develop or to contribute something somewhere: a creative learning situation. This community stands in the midst of the world: the gospel makes demands upon every structure. Hence, this community, along with various forms of spiritual and creative development, will also have a clear development in regard to the needs of the poor, the underprivileged, homeless, prostitutes, drug users, Aids patients, etc. This community will show what righteousness is in action in its well organized relief work. When these things are in order, then this community can rightly be involved in evangelization! Soup, soap and salvation, was what William Booth said a hundred years ago. The founder of the Salvation Army understood it! Works of righteousness are the basis of the Message of righteousness, where the strong and rich carry the weak.

APPLICATION 3: SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Through the centuries, people practicing the same trade or job joined together. This is how the guilds came about; they established quality standards and took care of each other in difficult times. Even though the Middle Ages are long gone, we still need structures to organize social necessities. Justice is then expressed in: solidarity, righteousness, freedom, stewardship, responsibility and participation.

This social ordering and structuring is today called the labour movement. It is not a small club of people dictating their own interests to society, but a group of people who care deeply about how everything is ordered. We have been confronted by major societal questions for the hundred years since the (Christian) labour movement began in The Netherlands and Europe. Countless questions have arisen in the areas of labour laws, unemployment, the dole, refugees, rich and poor, the opportunity deprived, those over forty, etc. etc. It looks like a entangled ball of wool. All of these structural problems are very great. Just as incidental problems must be solved individually, structural questions must be solved structurally -- and this is why we need a large and strong (Christian) labour movement, now more than ever. The problems of the future touch everyone: Christians too. One aspect of justice is to practice righteousness precisely in the area of social structures and labour agreements. Both the Old and the New Testaments are full of statements about the way we practice justice in social relationships! There are many reasons why it is of great importance to organise in a Christian labour union.

APPLICATION 4: POLITICAL STRUCTURES

There are Christians who consider participation in politics to be a bad thing. And that is not so surprising. Making compromises can really be bad work. But for every omelet some eggs must be broken. In my book, 'The Kingdom Indeed' I tried to explain the Biblical grounds for political action (Note 1). From the Biblical point of view there are two important basic principles which should guide government:

- a) Subsidiarity: the higher levels of government should only do that which cannot be done by the citizens or lower levels of government.
- b) Sphere Sovereignty: In each distinct area of life, there, the authority lies for ordering things in that area.

a) and b) emphasize the interest of the social middle field. Citizens organize themselves in many different associations. All of these help make true democracy possible.

The task of government is to create the public conditions which people need in order to responsibly come into their own (Note 2). It should be clear that the government should not occupy itself with innumerable little rules; but based on a) and b), it should focus on what transcends the whole pluriformity of the middle field, e.g. maintaining basic rights, peace, security, international relations, the departments of government, etc. The state is 'not value neutral in these matters. Politics depends upon norms and values and the government will apply these in a certain way. This is summarized under the term 'public justice' (Note 3). There is something like a universal code of justice, which all people have received from God (see chapter 34, Publieke gerechtigheid) (Note 4). Hence, the state is not without norms.

Even though there is a division between church and state, this does not mean that there is a division between faith and politics. The Biblical sense of justice challenges politicians to act fairly, to assure a just public order, fair rules without respect of persons. From a Biblically informed vision, practical effects of righteousness can be given political form, i.e. in solidarity, shared responsibility, stewardship. In this way politics should give form to the relationships concerning our neighbour (in the legal context), how we treat foreigners, the needy, etc. At a period of time when there are many cut-backs, the Biblical principles of justice are of especially great importance. But also in a time of multi-national corporations and problems which know no boundaries,

we need to keep a watch on the relationship between power and justice: influence and arbitrariness; pluriformity and identity.

Politics is certainly the field in which Christians should make their presence felt (Note 5) by means of practical participation and voting behaviour. This is where the structures of society and culture are determined. And this is certainly the area which must build upon righteousness and justice.

(Note 1; 'The Kingdom In Deed', chapter 29. In that chapter there are many examples of believers and their political actions. The following *political* texts are also of importance:

-Prov. 8:20, *'I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice.'*

-Prov. 10:25, *'the righteous stand firm forever.'*

-Prov. 12:7, *'the house of the righteous stands firm.'*

-Prov. 14:34, *'Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.'*

-Prov. 16:12, *'Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.'*

-Prov. 24:23-25, *'To show partiality in judging is not good: whoever says to the guilty, You are innocent, people will curse him and nations denounce him.'*

-Prov. 28:16, *'A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment, but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life.'*

-Ecc. 5:8, *'If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still. The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.'*

-Isa. 29:20-21, *'The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down--those who with a word make a man out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice.'*

-Isa. 32:1-8, *'See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen. The mind of the rash will know and understand, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear. No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected. For the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practices ungodliness and spreads error concerning the Lord; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water. The scoundrel's methods are wicked, he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just.'*

But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.

Isa. 32:17, 'The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.'

-Isa. 1:17 'Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.'

-Isa 1:21-28. 'See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her but now murderers! Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's cause does not come before them. Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City. Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish.'

-Eze. 34:1-4, 'The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.'

-Eze. 45:9-10, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: You have gone far enough, O princes of Israel! Give up your violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Stop dispossessing my people, declares the Sovereign Lord. You are to use accurate scales, an accurate ephah and an accurate bath.'

-Hosea 4:1-3, 'Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.'

-Hosea 4:6a, 'my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests.'

-Micha 7:2-6, 'The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire--they all conspire together. The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion. Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even

*with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words. For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a *man's enemies are the members of his own household.'*

-Micah 7:13, 'The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds.'

-Habakkuk 1:3-4, 'Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.'

-Habakkuk 2:12, 'Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!'

-Zechariah 7:9-14, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says, Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other. But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry. When I called, they did not listen so when they called, I would not listen, says the Lord Almighty. I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.'

-Zechariah 8:16-17, 'These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbour, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this, declares the Lord.'

-Malachi 3:5, 'So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty.'

-Exodus 22:21-27, 'Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.'

-Lev. 18:24-28, 'Do not defile yourself in any of these ways, because this is how the nations became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees

and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.'

-Lev. 19:11-17, 'Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight. Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord. Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in his guilt.'

-Lev. 19:32, 'Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.'

Deut. 1:17, 'Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.'

-Deut. 16:18-20, 'Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you.'

-Psalm 72:1-4, 'Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.'

-Psalm 72:12-14, 'For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.'

(Note 2; See the book 'Publieke Gerechtigheid', page 26)

(Note 3; An excellent treatment can be found in the book 'Publieke Gerechtigheid', published by the, Wetenschappelijk Instituut of the CDA. The Hague, Holland; very worthwhile reading.)

(Note 4; See Romans 2:14: *Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts.*)

(Note 5; The New Testament concept of office or the **priesthood of all believers is in essence the spiritual basis upon which democracy rests.** Every believer is called to be responsible, to be reconciling, to act, to practice love of his neighbour, etc. This is not the action of only an elite, a cast of priests or rulers, but a demand for everybody)

APPENDIX 1: THE `OUTDATEDNESS' OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The majority of this book was written based on the New Testament. A great many believers view the New Testament as normative for their lives, actions and walk. They very easily overlook the aspects of justice and righteousness present in the New Testament. And that's why I dealt with it so extensively. Many Christians think that the Old Testament is fulfilled, and hence they don't study it, since it is outdated.

Just try studying the Old Testament thoroughly! It is very relevant, as you will see by the way God deals with people; God's rules apply to every area of life and what takes place; if you discard these rules for a so-called `freedom', and let everything go its way, that will result in violence, rape, devastation and the disintegration of society.

In regard to what is written in the Old Testament we read: *'Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did'* (I Cor. 10:6).

'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.' (I Cor 10:11)

Among these are a number of important situations or texts which illustrate how the question of righteousness is addressed and applied. This does not suffer in the least from being unclear in the area of:

- a) Society
- b) Spiritual well-being of the public (ethics)
- c) Economy
- d) Environment
- e) Legal system
- f) Politics
- g. etc.

Is the Old Testament out of date? Read it yourself now!

a) RIGHTEOUSNESS IN SOCIETY

The Old Testament is full of texts which show how we must act toward the poor, widows, orphans, foreigners, slaves, travelers, senior citizens, outcasts,

etc. In the old days these 'weaker' members of society had no protection. They easily fell victim to the cruelty of the rich, or they died in poverty. The Old Testament is unique in that God stood in the breach for all these categories of people. He demanded care, attention, respect, commitment, social and economic opportunities for the underclass of society. To do this is righteousness, who He blesses. God's judgment will not be stayed toward those who neglect and show no righteousness unto the 'weak'. God's rules of righteousness and solidarity are extremely relevant today. Even now we must and may not act anyway we wish, exploiting, misusing, etc.

Gen. 6:5-6,8-13

Ex. 21:1-2

Ex. 21:20,26

Ex. 22:21-27

Ex. 23:9

Lev. 19:32

Deut. 24:6-22

Lev. 25:35-55

Num. 15:14-16

Num. 27:6-11

Deut. 14:29

Deut. 15:7-11

Deut. 27:18-19

Deut. 15:12-18

Deut. 15:11,14

Deut. 23:15-16

Neh. 5:1-13

Ps. 9:9-11

Ps. 10:12-18

Ps. 12:6

Ps. 14

Ps. 37:12-17

Ps. 41:2

Ps. 55:23-24

Ps. 68:6-11

Ps. 69:34

Ps. 72:1-14

Ps. 82:3-4

Ps. 92:6-8

Ps. 94:3-11

Ps. 103:6

Ps. 107:41-43

Ps. 109:14-17, 30-31

Ps. 140:13
Ps. 146:5-9
Prov. 21:13
Prov. 25:21-22
Prov. 29:7
Isa. 1:17
Isa. 10:1-2
Isa. 32:6-8
Isa. 61:1-4
Jer. 5:25-31
Jer. 7:5-11
Jer. 9:2-9,23
Jer. 16:9-18
Jer. 22:3-5
Ez. 16:9-18
Dan. 4:27
Amos 4:1
Amos 8:4-6
Obadiah 1:12-14
Jonah 3:7-10
Zech. 7:9-10
Malachi 3:5, 18

b) RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE SPIRITUAL WELL BEING OF THE PUBLIC

Without public justice, without public morality, without a collective ethic of the people, society cannot develop along the lines of righteousness. The Old Testament is very clear in this area and speaks to nations and individuals to act in every area of life according justice and righteousness.

Gen. 19:15
Gen. 20:1-17
Ex. 23:1
Lev. 5:1
Lev. 18
Lev. 19:16-17, 31
Lev. 20
Deut. 5:1-21
Deut. 16:20

Deut. 22:13-30
Deut. 23:17-18
Deut. 27:16-26
Josh. 22:5
Josh. 23:5-16
Josh. 24:19-27
Judges 2:10 - 3:2
Judges 10:10-16
I Sam. 12:20-25
I Sam. 15:22-23
II Kings 17:15-18
I Chr. 29:10-19
II Chr. 6:26-27
II Chr. 7:13-14
II Chr. 17:9
Neh. 8:1-5
Ps. 1
Ps. 7:11, 15-18
Ps. 11:7
Ps. 15
Ps. 34:16-23
Ps. 37: 1-11
Ps. 37:27-28
Ps. 45:5
Ps. 53:2
Ps. 56:6
Ps. 57:5-7
Ps. 58:11-12
Ps. 75:11
Ps. 85:10-14
Ps. 92:13-16
Ps. 101:3
Ps. 106:3
Prov. 8:12-13, 20
Prov. 10:25
Ecclesiastes
Isa. 1:13-17
Isa. 24:5-6
Isa. 26:7,9,10
Isa. 26:21
Isa. 45:8
Isa. 48:17-18
Isa. 53:6,11

Isa. 56:1-2
Isa. 58:1-14
Isa. 59:1-4,8-9,11-17
Jer. 23:10-11
Lam. 4:12-13
Eze. 3:18-21
Eze. 7:13b
Micah 6:8,11-12
Micah 7:2-6,13
Habakkuk 1:3-4
Zephaniah 1:9
Zephaniah 3:3-5,13
Zech. 8:16,17,19b
Malachi 2:7-9,14-17
Eze. 18:5-32
Eze. 33:9-20,25,31
Dan. 9:13
Hosea 2:18
Hosea 14:2-4,10

c) ECONOMIC JUSTICE

How do you use your property, how do you do business, how do you deal with your trading, wealth, etc.? Here too, God gives clear rules based on justice. He judges dishonesty, taking advantage, bribery, etc. etc. We ought also to bring about justice in the area of business.

Ex.22:1-16
Deut. 19:14
Deut. 22:1-3
Deut. 22:8
Deut. 23: 19-20
Deut. 25: 13-16
2 Chr. 7:14
Ps. 37: 18-22
Ps. 37:35-36
Ps. 49:6-7
Ps. 49: 13-14
Ps. 52
Ps. 62:11
Ps. 112: 1-6

Prov. 1:19
Prov. 3:33
Prov. 10: 3-5
Prov. 11: 1,4-5
Prov. 11:18
Prov. 11:24-31
Prov. 11:12
Prov. 13: 22
Prov. 16: 7, 11
Prov. 17:23
Prov. 19:2, 15, 24
Prov. 20: 4,10,13,14,17,19,21,23
Prov. 21: 5,6,7,8,21,25,26
Prov. 22: 4,26,27
Prov. 23: 10,11,20,21
Prov. 24: 3,4,5,6,16,26,29,31
Prov. 31
Prov. 28: 19, 24
Prov. 29:21
Prov. 30: 7-10
Eccl. 5: 10-16
Eccl. 7:7
Eccl. 11: 4, 6
Isa. 1: 21-23
Isa. 5:8
Isa. 33:15-16
Isa. 61:8
Jer. 16:11
Jer. 22:13-17

d) RIGHTEOUSNESS REGARDING THE ENVIRONMENT, CREATION

In these matters too, God does not allow us to do just anything we want. In regard to plants, animals, cattle, raw materials our responsibilities are pointed out. Misuse of these is in opposition to righteousness. Proper use and care of things is the basis of responsibility.

Gen. 2:15
Ex. 23:10-12
Deut. 22:4,6-7
Ezra 9:11
Ps. 36: 6-7

Ps. 65: 6,10-14
Ps. 96: 11-13
Ps. 106:35-39
Prov. 12:10
Prov. 27:23-27
Jer. 3:2
Jer. 4:18
Jer. 16:18
Ezech. 36:18,33
Hosea 4:1-3
Hosea 10:12
Micha 7:13

e) RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

It is absolutely unthinkable that justice be bent. No respect of persons. A rich or powerful person who makes a mistake must receive the same punishment as a poor person. Gifts may not be used to pervert justice. Equal legal treatment for the rich and the poor, the native-born and the foreigner, the citizen and the official is based on the Old Testament. If the legal system is full of righteousness, this is 'the' basis of the welfare of the nation, and God will bless it.

Ex. 18:19-23
Ex. 23:1-8
Lev. 19:11-15
Lev. 24: 17-22
Deut. 1:17
Deut. 4:8
Deut. 19:15-21
1 Sam 30:23-25
2 Sam 8:15
1 Chron. 18:14
2 Chron 6:22-23
2 Chron 19:4-11
Ps. 35:23-24
Ps. 94: 15-23
Ps 89:9
Prov. 1:1-4
Prov. 17:15
Prov. 17:23

Prov. 18:5
Prov. 19:28
Prov. 21:3
Prov. 22:22
Prov. 24:23-25
Prov. 25:8-10
Prov. 29:7
Prov. 31:8-9
Eccl. 12:13-14
Isa. 10:1-2
Isa. 1-17
Isa. 5: 16,22
Isa. 29:20-21
Isa. 30:18b
Ezekiel 44:23-24
Amos 5:10-15,24
Amos 6:12
Micah 3:9-11
Micah 7:3
Zephaniah 3:3
Zech. 7:9-10
Zech. 8: 16-17

f) RIGHTEOUSNESS IN POLITICS, IN ADMINISTRATION

God's rules of righteousness and justice for politics, city and state government, are very clear. This alone can be the basis for society. If the principles of righteousness are abandoned, society will disintegrate and society comes under the judgment of God. Have pity upon those who abandon these foundations.

Gen. 18:18-19
Ex. 1:13-14
Ex. 2:23
Ex. 6:6
Num. 31:25-27
Joshua 17:3-4
Judges 5:7
Judges 21:25
1 Sam 8:3
1 Sam 12:24,25
1 Sam 13:13-14

1 Sam 15: 22-23
1 Kings 9:4-8
1 Kings 10:9
2 Kings 23:25
1 Chron. 10:13
1 Chron. 28:8-10
2 Chron. 14:2-5
2 Chron. 15:15
2 Chron. 17:1-9
2 Chron. 26:4-5
2 Chron. 28:19
Ps. 37:10-11
Ps. 45: 7,8
Ps. 53:5
Ps. 67:5
Ps. 68:31b
Ps. 89:15
Ps. 119: 142-144
Ps. 125: 3-5
Prov. 2:21
Prov. 11:11,14
Prov. 14:34
Prov. 16:12
Prov. 25:5
Prov. 28:2,4,12,15,16
Prov. 29:2,4
Prov. 29:12,14,18
Prov. 31: 4-5, 8-9
Eccl. 5:7-9
Eccl. 7:19-22
Eccl. 8:2-4
Eccl. 8:11
Eccl. 9:17
Eccl. 10:16-17
Isa. 1:4,17
Isa. 1:21-23,27
Isa. 3:14-15
Isa. 5:7
Isa. 5:16,18,20
Isa. 9:6
Isa. 10:1-2
Isa. 11:1-9
Isa. 16:5

Isa. 26:2
Isa. 28:17
Isa. 29:20-21
Isa. 32: 1-8, 16-17
Isa. 33:5
Isa. 42:1-3, 6-7
Isa. 51: 4-7
Isa. 54:14
Isa. 58:1-14
Jer. 6:13
Jer. 16: 9-12, 18
Jer. 18:7-11
Jer. 22:3-5
Jer. 33:8,15-16
Jer. 34:10-1, 15-16
Lam. 5:7,16,17
Ezech. 22:1-12,25-30
Ezech. 34:1-4, 17-21
Ezech. 45:9-10
Ezech. 46:18
Amos 1:11
Amos 2:4,6-8
Amos 3:10
Micah 2:1-2
Micah 3:1-2,8-11
Habbakuk 2:9,12
Zach. 11:15-17

g) THE CLOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

'You have said harsh things against me, says the Lord. Yet you ask, What have we said against you? You have said, It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.' (Malachi 3:13-15)

'And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.' (Malachi 3:18)

'But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the

stall.' (Malachi 4:2)

'Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.' (Malachi 4:4-6)

APPENDIX 2: THE FOUNDATION

What is the foundation of righteousness? The foundation is the Lord. He is Justice, he is Righteousness (see the first few chapters). Is God a form of thinking, a projection, an impersonal power? Who is this God, whom we call 'Lord'?

The great law-giver, Moses, asked this too when God called him to fight for justice and righteousness. His answer was: 'I AM WHO I AM' (Ex. 3:13). An unbelievably true, deep and powerful definition.

God is a living person and He comes to us in the form of Jesus Christ, so that we can get to know God as He is. Jesus made a few extreme statements to reveal more to us about who this 'I AM' is:

'I am the door.' (John 10:8)

'I am the light.' (John 8:12)

'I am the good shepherd.' (John 10:11)

'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' (John 10:10)

'I am the bread of life.' (John 6:35)

'I am the resurrection and the life.' (John 11:25-26)

'I am the way, the truth and the life.' (John 14:6)

'I am the true vine.' (John 15:1-8)

'I came from God.' (John 8:42)

'They are not of the world, even as I am not of it... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.' (John 17:16,18)

'Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come.' (Rev. 1:4)

'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.' (Rev. 1:17-18, 2:8)

'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.' (Rev. 22:13)

These are remarkable texts and statements. And if we examine the behaviour and actions of Jesus, we can only concede that indeed, he showed who the 'I AM' is.

He sends us in the same way into the world: *'Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did'* (1 John 2:6). Do we do this? Do we show this?

It is not prideful to pray: 'Lord, as you are, I want to be'. By taking this step of surrender, the Holy Spirit is able to work in us to transform us.

'On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.' (John 7:37-37)

May streams of living water come flowing out of us, bringing life in the world, streams of righteousness, streams of change, streams of power.

CLOSING CHAPTER

'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.' (1 Cor. 4:20)

In this book and in 'The Kingdom In Deed', I did not deal extensively with the topic of power. It is part of an understanding of the kingdom. Many books have already been written on it. The powers of the future age, signs and wonders, are today authentic aspects of the kingdom, even if they are not manifest every day. Spectacular occurrences can easily tempt us into focusing on them, as we see happening in some circles. Why does it then happen that these groups sometimes get derailed?

Sometimes it happens because such groups don't have a solid basis. Their spiritual understanding is sometimes only developed to the point of, 'I am saved and everything is now fine', which is a crude simplification of the Gospel.

In my book, 'The Kingdom In Deed', an analysis is given of what the Gospel involves. I built further upon this foundation with the aspect of righteousness, which for the most part was a practical exposition of the Gospel in the here and now. Many different kinds of actions can only take place along the lines of righteousness, as is described in this book: personal surrender to God, personal faith, you are justified, on these norms and values you can start practicing righteousness; then comes care, engagement, responsibility and solidarity.

When the foundation of 'His kingdom and His righteousness' is solid, only then can the dynamic powers of the kingdom begin to function without anything getting derailed. Then the Holy Spirit can go to work and the gifts of the Spirit can be used, and the fruits of the Spirit can come to full development without us getting indigestion from unripe behaviour.

Thanks to the firm eternal foundation of 'His kingdom and His righteousness' God's power can go to work in a forceful way. By building and praying in such a way, we are allowed to anticipate the work of the Holy Spirit: for personal transformation and societal reformation.

Other publications.

Leen La Rivière wrote several other books:

- Music & Ministry** - The biblical foundation for music ministry
- Royal Creativity=Creative and Christian** - The biblical foundation for creativity and the arts
- Pas-de-deux** - The biblical foundation for the performing arts
- The creative church** - The development of every creative gift will make churches grow.
- Music & Revivals** - A historical analyses, proving that spiritual and artistic renewals go hand in hand (OT/NT/church history)
- Evangelistic concerts** - A book teaching how to organise an event, concert, etc.
- Creative leadership - A challenging study how to become a creative leader
- Praise and Worshippers** - how praise and worship should be - a vferly in depth study and all historical facts.

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