

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is a mix of blue, orange, and yellow. In the foreground, three people are walking away from the viewer on a dark, silhouetted hill. The person on the left is wearing a long dress, the middle person is wearing a shorter dress, and the person on the right is wearing a long coat or robe. The silhouettes of trees are visible on the left side of the image.

# Good News Australia

2002 Issue No. 4

## Walking Without Seeing

The Gospel  
and the Spirit

### The Gentleness of God

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## Editorial



*'Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one' (Ephesians 6:17).*

**T**here are two New Testament words that can be translated 'shield'. One designates a small device that could be used as a target, the other was a larger frame behind which a soldier could conceal most of himself. It is this latter type that Paul refers to in Ephesians six. He intends to teach that faith is not a partial protection for Christians. It is a comprehensive shelter.

In what sense, then, should we expect faith to keep us safe? We should allow Paul's own faith-practice to inform us. We know from other writings of his, that he was not exempt from the natural hardships which attend all human life.

He was not protected from illness. He was awarded no special cover from unexpected and dangerous weather conditions; heat, cold and tempest. He suffered shipwreck, robbery, unjust

imprisonment and betrayal by friends. All things that go to make life difficult, unjust, dangerous and painful, were experienced by Paul who lived by faith. Yet he insisted that faith is able to quench all the fiery attacks of the enemy.

Rather than guarding Paul from anything, or everything, faith guarded him in everything. Jesus' example teaches similarly. He was granted no discharge from life's unpleasant features. He was 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.' He was tempted in every way, just as we are. Yet, through it all he remained tranquil, unembittered, optimistic, loving and forgiving. His faith was, for him, a victory that overcame the world. So it will be for us.

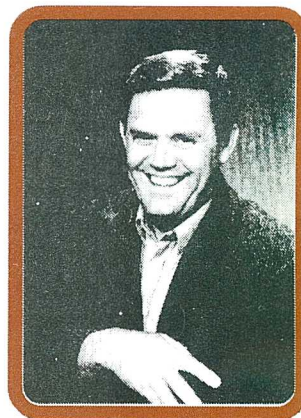
The one who, despite hurt, and unanswered questions, holds to the conviction that God is good, kind and just; that love will triumph is more than a match for anything the world can throw at him.

We are admonished to *take up* the shield of faith. There is a faith we daily manage to exercise, which requires no conscious effort. By it we worry not whether the sun will rise in the morning, or whether our spouse will still love us tomorrow.

But the shield of faith which we are invited to take up, is deeper. On dark, harrowing days, when all hell seems to have broken loose, some action of the will—some moral exertion is needed—for faith to continue to work its miracle for us. And here we need not falter. God will never abandon even the weakest believer. Remember the desperate father in the gospel? 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.'

Take up the shield of faith. May this challenge confront you afresh as you read through these pages.

R J ALLEN



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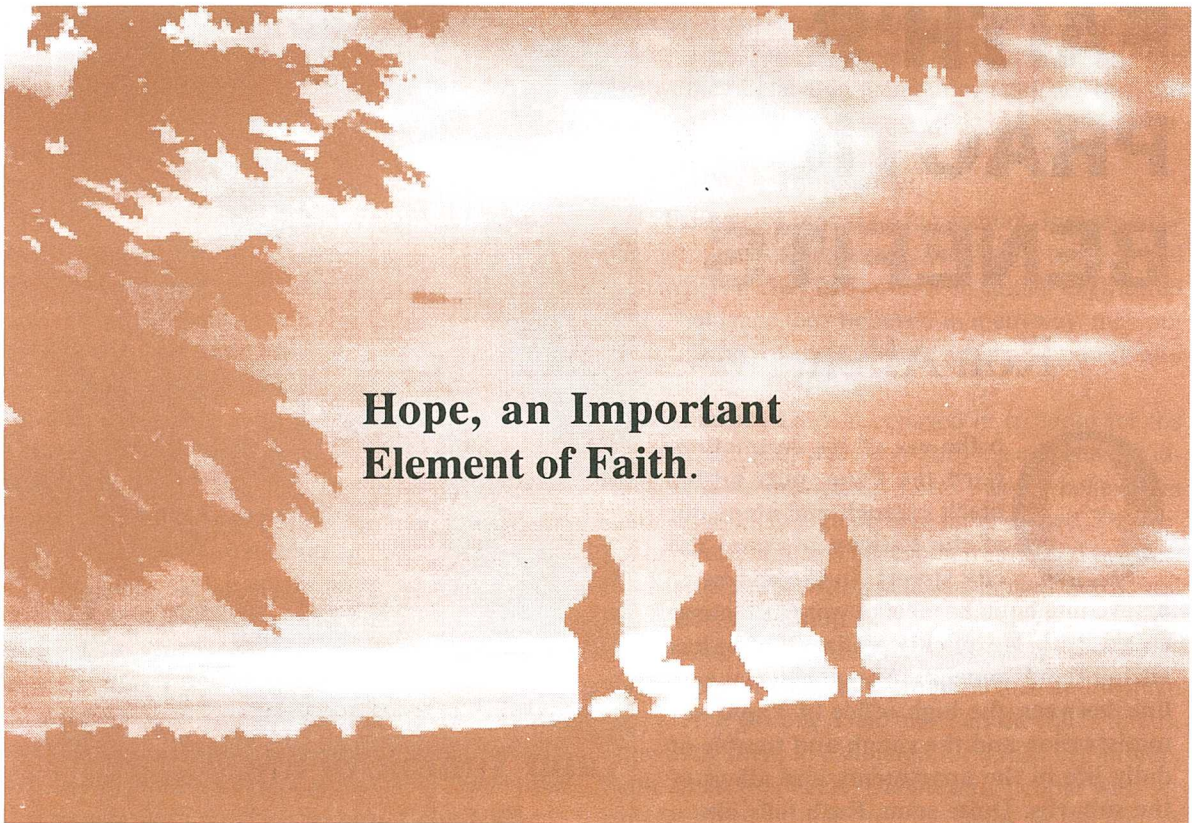
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## Hope, an Important Element of Faith.

# WALKING WITHOUT SEEING (1)

Ron Allen.

**T**he eleventh chapter of Hebrews celebrates the faith of revered persons in Jewish history. The writer is at pains to highlight a special aspect of faith. He states it in the first verse: *'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' (Hebrews 11:1).*

Hope looms large as an element of faith. In this letter, it almost means the same thing as faith. For example: *'Let us draw near in full assurance of faith, let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess' (Hebrews 10:23-24).* Everyone hopes, but hope seasoned with faith is a *'better hope' (7:19)*. Such hope is *'firm and secure' (6:19)*.

Hopeful faith takes as certain what it cannot see. It has a future orientation. Abraham responds to God's summons to go to a place he would later receive. Faith invests life with the character of a quest; an adventure. Abraham and his family were *'looking for a country of their own' (11:14)*. Those who

traveled by wagon to Oregon and California in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were pioneers. They too were looking for a place of their own. Faith is similarly daring. It envisions a better world. (The word 'better' occurs twelve times in Hebrews.) *'By faith Moses refused to accept the luxury of Pharaoh's palace. Instead, he chose to endure suffering with the people of God—because he was looking ahead to his reward' (11:24-26).*

Faith is forward-looking. It refuses to accept that the world is a 'tale told by an idiot.' It maintains that God's creation is moving to a denouement, in which God will reward those who diligently seek him. In faith, the patriarchs held that the world they knew would not always be. They beheld *'a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God' (11:10).*

Drenched with hope, faith, knowing that the present journey is rough, nevertheless stays on the road because it sees that it leads to the promised land.





# FAITH'S PRACTICAL BENEFITS

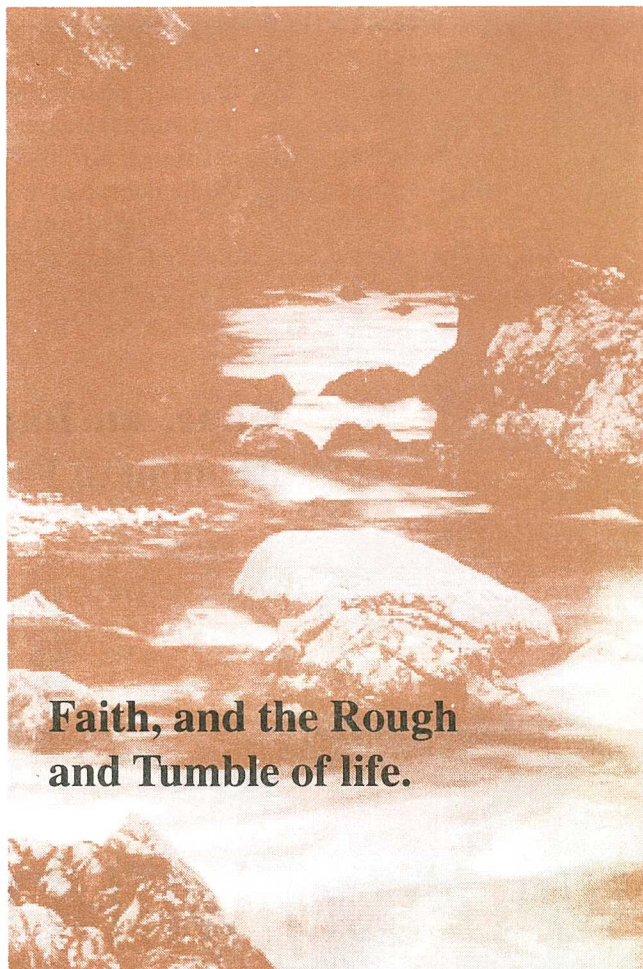
Ron Allen.

**O**n the eve of his coronation, Kiril the Pope, puts on his black cassock and steps out of the Vatican to roam the city streets. In the course of his evening jaunt he meets a woman, a nurse called Ruth. He quickly realizes that he has encountered someone who can serve as a link between the high office of Papal administration and the rough and tumble of daily life in the apartments and alleys of the suburbs. Quite soon, Ruth tells him a story of real life, so stark and terrible, that he must reach deep, in faith, to meet it.

Ruth is giving midwife assistance to a woman. The woman has been the subject of drug treatments for morning sickness. A young doctor is present, and when the baby appears Ruth is horrified to observe that it is seriously malformed, having flipper-like limbs instead of arms. The baby is alive, but the doctor wraps it tightly in blankets and takes it quickly away. Later, he returns to inform the parents that the child was still-born. Afterward, he says to Ruth, 'I've got twenty more deliveries like that in the next two weeks. All of the mothers have been taking the same drug; what am I going to do with all of them?' Then he begins to sob.

This was the story that Ruth told Kiril the Pope. Her plea to him was: 'What can the Church do for men and women who have to live in a world where well-intentioned medical science often gets it wrong, so that mothers give birth to disastrously defective infants?'

What can faith do for nurses and doctors who must make decisions every day that can issue in life or death for their patients? What can faith do for mothers and fathers who are robbed of their precious offspring? How can faith in God help in a world that is packed full of sick, maimed, grieving, confused, harassed and hurting people, who are just trying to 'make do' each day of their lives? Who are battling



**Faith, and the Rough  
and Tumble of life.**

steep odds; who are worried and afraid? What has faith got to offer? This was Ruth's, the Pope and everyone's problem.

## **Faith and Human Nature.**

In the Bible, faith is always faith in God. In the gospel, it is faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For Paul, who wrote systematically about 'righteousness by faith in Christ,' faith has a specific meaning. Yet, in a more general way, it is true to say that faith can be seen as one of the native powers of human nature—like thinking or remembering. Without thinking precisely of faith as faith in God, we can say that faith is a God-given faculty that everyone has. If it is said that 'everyone believes in something,' this comes close to my meaning here.

## **Faith Implies Risk.**

In the gospels, we see faith at work as a force in human life. We observe the importance Jesus attached to faith. He spoke about faith often and always in a way that showed what he meant by it. One of the things that stands out with Jesus in relation to faith



is, that he never placed God, God's existence and his dealings with humankind, beyond doubt. He never overwhelmed anyone with evidence. Instead, staggering people with a battery of miracles to reinforce his claims, he came softly with: 'Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?' In other words, 'What do you see? What do you think? What is your response?'

When John was in prison and about to lose his head, he began to doubt what he had previously believed—that Jesus was Messiah. He sent a message to Jesus in hope of some reassurance. Jesus replied, not with irrefutable evidence, but with: *'The lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised. Blessed is he that is not offended in me.'* Thus Jesus placed John in the position of having to venture all upon Jesus, without the luxury of absolute verification.

For Jesus, faith is not the acceptance of a proposition because it presses so forcefully on the understanding there can be no other recourse. It is not intellectual certainty. Faith, for Jesus, is not the same as knowing. Knowing comes after faith, and even then, never comprehensively. *'Whoever chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God, or whether I speak on my own'* (John 7:17).

Jesus did not permit faith in him to consist in a reluctant, nonchalant admission that he was, after all, right. He did not allow faith in God to be careless, or casual. Witness the Canaanite woman who came begging for mercy. In an apparently insulting way, Jesus told her, 'It's not right to give the children's bread to dogs.' She replied: 'Yes, but the dogs don't mind the scraps that fall from the table.' Observing her resolution, her fervour and her willingness to abandon herself to his mercies, Jesus said, 'Woman, great is your faith.'

God does not choose to reveal himself in sky-splitting ways. Traces of him are muted, subdued. You think you see something, but your vision is blurred. For a clearer picture you must press your search more vigorously; dig beneath the surface; reach as far as you can. *'You will seek me, and find me, when you seek me with all your heart'* (Jeremiah 29:13). That verse expresses one of the essential characteristics of faith.

Most things that are of higher worth, cannot be had without our willingness to bet our whole selves upon them, in the absence of empirical certainty. If God was to be had like groceries from the store, we would not respect nor admire him, let alone worship him. For this reason faith is powerful, because in faith people chance themselves and destiny on what they believe. Faith gathers together the scattered re-

sources of personality and wagers everything on its object. This is why believers are hard to shake. Men and women believe in many things that are bad, but having believed, they are a force to be reckoned with.

### **Faith Cancels Aimlessness.**

Faith helps to make life coherent. It gives it focus and cancels aimlessness. The Wright brothers had faith in flight. They had never seen human-engineered flight, but since they believed in it anyway, they put the full array of their muscle and brain power into achieving it.

Abraham Lincoln believed in freedom for the slaves. That belief was the controlling and guiding influence of his presidency. Louis Pasteur believed in immunization, though no such thing existed. This belief mastered him, and made him fruitful and wonderful. Martin Luther King believed in civil rights, and that belief steered him until his untimely death.

Because of its ability to assemble the various parts of personality, faith produces men and women who get things done. Faith marshals the soul's forces, organizing them to campaign for things yet unseen. Faith creates pioneers, trailblazers; people with vision who bring about improvements in the human lot. Faith rounds up the loose-ends of untidy brains and lazy spirits, integrating them for noble purposes.

### **Faith Strengthens.**

Faith in God attacks weakness, making people strong—even in the face of fear. A lot of people feel powerless. Powerless against oppression, powerless against market forces that drive their living standards down, powerless before big government; before their boss; before other opinions. Powerless in the presence of illness and powerless to save a relationship that is foundering. Everyone sometimes feels the need for inner strength to manage the forces that play upon them from the outside. The popularity of self-help seminars and self-help books and videos, proclaims our much felt need. Many try to 'screw their courage to the sticking place'; straining their wits, and bodies, managing on less sleep and working harder.

Some of the most tragic examples of this longing for power, are to be seen among religious folk. Leo Tolstoy, being convinced of the truth of Christ, determined to rule himself accordingly. He devised endless regulations. No hunting, drinking, or eating of meat. He took several public vows of chastity, but was unsuccessful in keeping any of them. What Tolstoy thought would be power, turned out to be weakness. Nor was it faith. Faith looks outside oneself to an Infi-

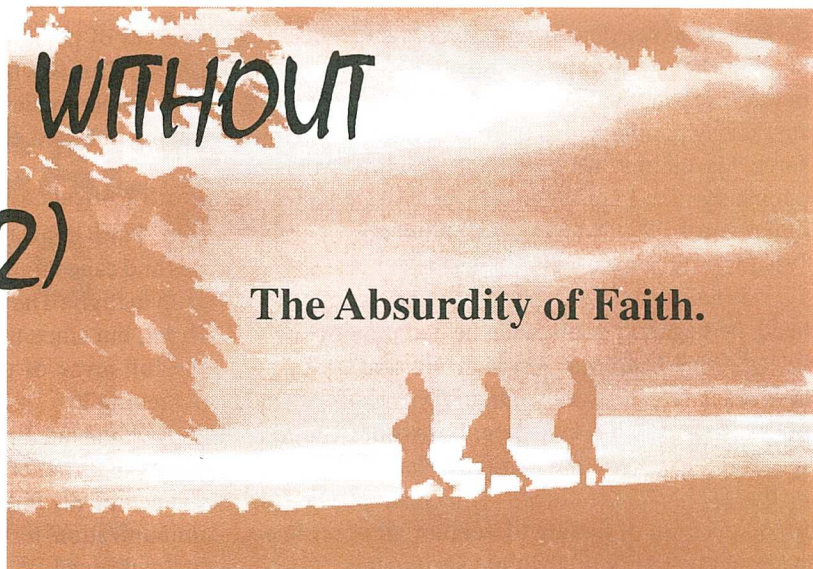
**(Continued on page 13)**



# WALKING WITHOUT SEEING (2)

Ron Allen

## The Absurdity of Faith.



**T**here is an aspect of faith, which sometimes, is not to our liking. Some refuse even to acknowledge it, but the author of Hebrews frankly discusses it. The absurdity is this: faith sees what is not seen. How that paradox works out in the life of the faithful is well documented in Hebrews 11. By faith, Noah built an ark when God warned him of *'things not seen'* (Hebrews 11:7). Neither Noah, nor any one else at the time had ever seen an inundation. Yet Noah built his ark. He saw what was yet unseen.

When God instructed Abraham to go to the promised land, *'he did not know where he was going'* (11:8). But did not God give him Canaan? Yes, but Abraham didn't see it. That is, he saw it, in that he went there and lived in it, but for all his life long he never actually possessed the promised land. He lived in it like *'a stranger in a foreign country'* (11:9). It was owned and inhabited by wild tribes. Abraham knew where he was going, but *'he did not know where he was going'* (11:8). He arrived at his destination without actually having arrived.

### Still Living by Faith When They Died.

The Patriarchs were still living by faith when they died, *'none of them received what had been promised'* (11:39). When Sarah died, Abraham was obliged to purchase a piece of the 'promised land' from the local inhabitants to bury her in. Despite this, they died in faith. That is, they did receive what was promised, *'from a distance'* (11:13). Their faith penetrated the future and welcomed the promise from afar.

There is a very real 'from a distance' component to faith. I know God exists, but I only 'know in

part.' I see 'through a glass darkly.' In faith I embrace the gospel promise, that I have been crucified with Christ, yet I am alive and seated with Christ at God's right hand. But when my wife hears me arriving home at the front door and she calls out, 'Wipe your feet.' I know that I am still here in the world. Heaven is mine—from a distance. When Christ says, 'whoever believes in me has eternal life', I grasp the privilege. There are loved ones of mine who also grasped it, but they sickened and died. They died still believing they had eternal life, even though their mortality was all too evident.

### The Realism of Faith.

The giants of faith in the ancient world, admitted that they had only received the promises of God from a distance. *'They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on the earth'* (11:13).

Do you know where you are going? Do you believe that you are heaven-bound and that the Father has already given you the kingdom? If so, well and good. But do not fail to admit and confess what is also true. Namely, that for much of the time, you do not know where you are going. That is, you do not know from one day to the next what will happen. Did you know you would lose your job? Did you know that your loved one would become ill? Did you expect your crop to fail? Did you know that your marriage would run onto the rocks. Didn't you expect Christ to have come before this? In faith, we both know and do not know, at the same time. We are often confused and at a loss. For the time being, we are wanderers and pilgrims—admit it. But the promised land is ours—confess it. ♦



# THE GENTLENESS OF GOD

## Marlin Sampson.

**I** have chosen to use an illustration from the days when I was a young boy in West Texas—although the illustration is not perfect. Rodeos and bronco riding were exciting things for me to watch. I even dreamed of the day when I would be able to ‘break’ a wild bronco.

‘Break’ was the word I always heard used and it was the word I used at that time. The word seemed to describe what I had observed in movies, also at rodeos in West Texas and New Mexico, as men tried to ride wild horses. The word seemed to fit with the use of spurs, whips and forceful retention of control.

Then, one day I heard a different word used. A man said the goal was to ‘gentle’ the horses. He also said we do not want to ‘break’ a horse. He said we wanted a horse to retain its ‘spirit’, that meant we must ‘gentle’ the horse, win its trust so that it would like us and enjoy our presence. That thought and the word ‘gentle’ still sounds better to me. From a very young age I had been around horses and I realized they liked me. I realized they also liked the adults that took care of them. There was trust and a willingness to obey. The verb ‘gentle’ became the word to use and not the verb, ‘break.’

Even when I was young, I realized that those two verbs created very different feelings and attitudes in me, concerning horses. Somehow I seemed to lose interest in rodeos. Even now I would say, the words we use for anything are very important.

How important are words? Jesus did not come into the world to break us. Jesus came into the world to gentle us. We who were wild by nature have been won by our Father in heaven through the life, death and resurrection of his Holy Son, Jesus. Saying we are saints is saying we have been won by him and his love for us. We are not saying we are perfect or without defects. We have been *gentled* by him. We trust him and respond to him and to his love. We are defective saints, but we are God’s saints, because he claims us as his own in love.

What do I mean by defective? Permit me to stay with my limited experience with horses as an illustration. I was in my teens when I participated in moving a herd of cattle seven miles to a different grazing area. I was provided a mare, which the owner had previously used in track racing. The other men knew how

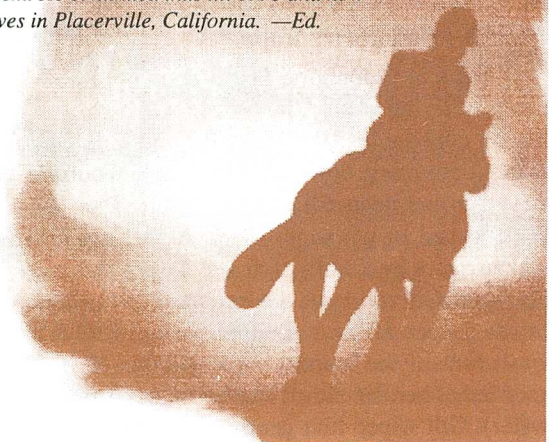
she had been trained or conditioned, so they asked me to ride her. The effort exhausted me. I spent the whole day trying to keep her in control and trying to prevent her from passing every horse and cow in front of her. We were there to drive the herd, not to pass it up and pass all the other horses in front of us.

Could some of us defective saints be conditioned to behave as that beautiful mare had been conditioned? Or do some of us try to condition our children that way?

Some horses tend to kick anything carelessly moving behind them. One boy I went to grade-school with, had a silver plate in his head because of that. I do not know if the kicking was a conditioned or learned trait, or if it was genetic. Likewise, I do not know always how to evaluate our defects as saints. The publication *Earth Watch* ran an article with the captioning: ‘How Do Dominant Horses Reap The Benefits Of Their Rank, And what Implications Does That Have For Other Societies?’ I grant you permission to deal with that sentence, applying it to defective saints. But may we, who know God’s love, always show God’s love.

God’s love seeks to ‘gentle’ us. Let us be gentle. A horse that had been gentled must have loved me when I was four or five years old, it tried to ‘gentle’ me. I still love the memory of that horse. It always stood next to me. Today I try to stand next to my God who ‘gentles’ me. ♦

*\* Marlin Sampson studied theology at Concordia Seminary. He was ordained to Gospel ministry in a congregation at Watonga, Oklahoma. Most of his years of ministry were spent in the deaf mission work. He retired to Georgetown, California in 1978 and was asked by a small Lutheran congregation there to preach to them. He continued thus till 1995 and now lives in Placerville, California. —Ed.*







# Kidz Korner

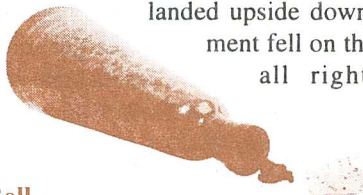
## PET PARABLES

### The Tale of a Tail

Gillian Ford

**G**ill's mother came from New Zealand and was staying at the house. One night Gill was rubbing Nanna's arm with liniment. This was because Nanna had fallen in the gutter.

Her arm was very sore from the fall. This night, Jasper came flying over the bed. Although it was a big bed, Jasper's feet and the bottle of liniment happened to meet by accident. The liniment flew off the bed and, of course, it landed upside down. Big blobs of liniment fell on the carpet. But it was all right, Gill was there to clean it up.



#### The Toilet Roll.

The next morning when Gill went to get Nanna out of bed, there was a roll of wet toilet paper in the rubbish bin. It was Jasper who liked to jump on top of the cupboard in the middle of the night. That night he had kicked the toilet paper into the toilet.

#### Well Behaved in Brisbane.

When Jasper stayed in Brisbane with Elenne and Peter, they didn't have all this trouble with Jasper. He could get outside the apartment there and play in the conservatory. If he was tired of the conservatory he could get out of the apartment and go down the street. The apartment was in the middle of Brisbane city. Jasper saw a lot of city life. By the time he came in at night he was really tired and he slept through the night.

#### The End of Her Rope.

Back at Caloundra, Jasper soon got into his old habits of flying around the bedroom at night and leaping on cupboards. 'That does it,' said Gill. She took Jasper, squirming, downstairs and put him outside. Gill stayed up and cleaned house for a while. Then she went back to bed to get some sleep. At 5.00am Gill was woken again by a catfight. It was Jasper and someone else's cat. Gill ran down the stairs and opened the door. In ran Jasper. He was covered with dirt. Gill had to wash him in the laundry sink. His tail hurt and he growled at her. He didn't like being washed (cats hate water). Gill wiped him gently and put him down. He

fled upstairs.

#### A Miserable Day.

Through the morning, Gill checked on Jasper. He didn't look very well. His tail was completely limp. In the afternoon, Gill was out driving in the car for a long time. When she came home and saw Jasper, he looked worse. His eyes were narrowed. He looked glum. His tail was thin and limp. His fur was flat.

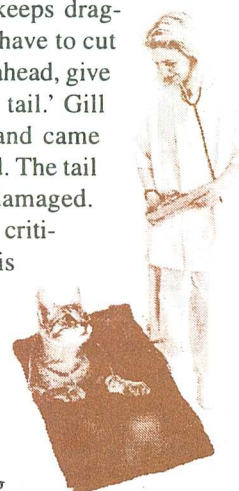
Gill knew that cat bites are very septic and can cause an abscess. That night Gill called the vet. Even though it was near to closing time, he said to bring the cat over. Gill put Jasper in his carrier and put the carrier in the car. She drove over to the vet at Moffatt Beach.

#### Jasper Sees Alison.

Gill took Jasper into the examining room and let him out of the carrier. Alison looked at his tail and gently touched it. 'His tail has been damaged,' she said. 'Normally it should have 'tone' but it is just lying limp.' Alison was very concerned. 'He could have broken his tail. He could have nerve damage. The only way I can see, is, if it is X-rayed.'

#### Bad Behavior Costs.

Alison told Gill, 'Jasper might have permanent damage to his tail, and if it keeps dragging on the ground we might have to cut it off.' Gill said to Alison, 'Go ahead, give him a sedative and X-ray his tail.' Gill went away for half an hour and came back when Alison was finished. The tail wasn't broken. It was nerve damaged. 'The next forty-eight hours are critical,' said Alison. 'If the tail is going to mend, it may take a week, but the signs of the outcome may be sooner.'



#### Thumbs (Tails) Up.

The next day Jasper looked better. He was eating normally. His tail was still limp, but later in the day, when Gill asked him how his tail was, he lifted it slightly, twice in a row. He seemed to be saying, 'On the mend, thank you.'

Over the next two days, Jasper's tail improved dramatically. When it stood up on its end like a tall, feathered plume, Gill knew Jasper's tail was fully healed.

#### God is Good.

Cause brings effect, which means we reap the results of what we sow. Jasper had caused the cat-fight and he might have lost his tail as a result. It would have been his own fault for being such a naughty boy. Though



we all deserve punishment when we do wrong, God is very good to us. We don't always get into as much trouble as we might. God was good to Jasper. He did not have lasting nerve damage. He didn't lose his tail.

When we are naughty, and bad things happen to us as a result, they are meant to teach us lessons in life, so that we will improve. In Jasper's case, the pain was short-lived and he soon forgot the lesson. He soon was back to his old tricks of keeping everyone awake.

### Unconditional Love.

Elenne heard about the naughty things Jasper was doing. She asked Gill: 'Do you want me to find him a new home?' 'Oh, no,' said Gill. 'I couldn't do that.' Even though Jasper was naughty and Gill didn't like his naughtiness, she still loved Jasper and didn't want him to go away to another home. God knows our naughty ways and he wished we'd try harder. But he still loves us.



## TO AND FRO WITH THE EDITOR

**Question:** *I've been in discussion for some time with a friend of mine about hell; specifically, whether it is eternal torment or permanent destruction. A Scripture that my friend repeats is Revelation 20:10. It seems to support the idea of endless punishment. I look forward to your thoughts.*

**SK.**  
**Answer:** In my view, what the church has taught—and still teaches in some quarters—is mediaeval and primitive in the extreme. It allows for a God who is even more vindictive than sinful humans; willing to apply capital punishment eternally, for temporal wrongs.

The language of Revelation 20:10, is typical of other passages within that book (see 14:9-10). It represents a stream of thinking on the subject of death current in Jesus' day, also, present in the Gospels.

We should keep in mind that the Bible is not uniform in its teaching about the hereafter. From Old Testament times people thought of the dead as going to a huge subterranean cavern, where they were completely lost to the terrestrial world without being entirely obliterated. These ideas are reflected in the New Testament, but with some development. For example, Luke 16 has mention of Sheol with two apartments, one for the righteous and the other for the wicked. Jesus variously refers to the abode of the righteous as 'Abraham's bosom' and 'paradise'. Though the rich man ended up in a torment of flames, it was still in Sheol, the place of the dead.

The tradition of Sheol of flames, was, for many Jews, represented by the fires of Gehenna. Gehenna was a valley just outside of Jerusalem. It was a place where human sacrifices had been made during a time of national apostasy, which, by Jesus' time, had become a garbage dump with continually burning refuse. It was a place of uncleanness and destruction (see Matthew 5:22; 18:8-9).

The expression in Revelation 20:9, seems to echo the language used of Gehenna elsewhere. We also need to realise that the phrase 'forever and ever' need not mean an extension of time without end. It is more likely a superlative expression meaning something like our to the 'enth degree' or 'to the max' (see Jonah 2:6).

**Ron.**

**Comment:** To all at Good News Unlimited. Thank you so much for your ministry. My husband and I were really excited to see Dr. Ford and Pastor Ron Allen in person, a few months ago. Thanks Ron, for the huge bag of GNU tapes you passed on to me at that meeting. They have found their way into many homes; becoming part of my very active tape and book library

My husband and I are in our early thirties. In the past year, our lives have changed dramatically. Only since the awesome insights and encouragement delivered by Good News Unlimited, have we discovered the gospel. Thank you! We feel as if sometimes we could almost fly. It's as if we found our wings; our purpose. We are confident of our salvation and have entered into a more personal and intimate relationship with Jesus.

Along with this, we feel a responsibility to pass on the Good News (which we can't help but do) to whoever we can. The exciting part, in this facet of our lives is, we have been blessed with an enthusiastic and passionate group of similar age-group friends.

I'm grateful for my brave and pioneering Mum, who challenged her own beliefs and conditioning within the Catholic church, venturing beyond the boundaries of her religion into a deeper relationship with Jesus; inspiring us to follow. I'm grateful (so very grateful) for Dr. Ford, who also went against the grain of tradition and man-made rules; questioning them, despite being ridiculed and rejected by men who should have known better. But mostly, I am eternally grateful for Jesus, my wonderful Jesus, our wonderful Jesus. The Lord of Lords and King of Kings, who left his perfect home, came to our messed-up world; willing taking up the cross so that I could have eternal life with him. Amen!! He is my ultimate inspiration and encouragement, and, I dare say, the inspiration of every man and woman who has made a difference in this world, that went before me.

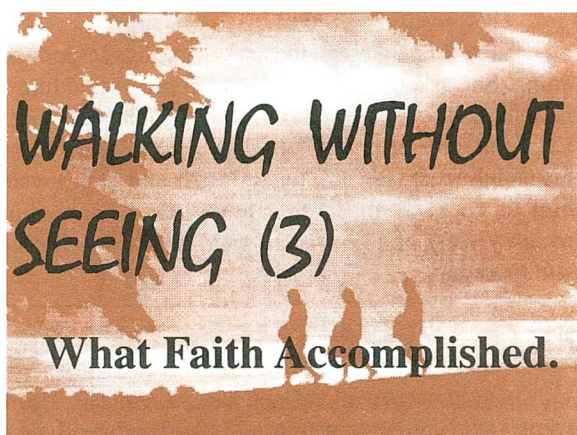
Praise God forever. For Jesus Christ his Son.

**M. and P.**

**Reply:** *Thank you for your encouraging message to all of us here at GNU. For those of us who spend a lot of time sitting at a desk reading and writing, and creating printed and audio material for the gospel, it is wonderful to learn that the message of God's grace has struck roots in some good soil. Your story is a joyous one; well worth telling. We thank you for it. May Christ continue to enrich, and satisfy you both.*

**Ron.**





Ron Allen

**F**ar from being a religious form of self-deception, faith enabled men and women of old to accomplish many things.

*'And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson; Jephthah, David, Samuel and the other 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' (Hebrews 11:32-34).*

This citing of well-remembered exploits by the Jewish fathers is summarised by the phrase, 'gained what was promised' (v.33). Yet this was not the whole story of their faith. A lot of us wish that it was.

There is a popular understanding of faith that says: provided one truly believes in God and his promises, then the world is your oyster. You can have all that your heart desires. By faith you will roll back disease, get out of debt, become rich. Your marriage will be the envy of everyone and your children will become model citizens. That is the kind of thing many of us wish faith would do for us. But the Bible does not teach it. Note the rest of the story of faith, as told by the author in Hebrews eleven:

*'Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated . . . These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. . . .'*

Faith does not segregate believers from what is the common lot of humankind. Faith dignifies men and women by equipping them to endure the unpleasant and difficult parts of life. Faith will not immunize you from trouble, but it will enable you to face it with grace, so that instead of being destroyed by it, you are honed, polished and sweetened.

In faith, the saints of old became bigger than themselves. They found resources they didn't have. Instead of staying close to home and living safe, unrisks lives, faith transformed them from private to public figures. Instead of keeping their noses clean—staying in the background, keeping in the comfort zone—they stepped out into the arena, where they endured strain and opposition. They became strong and courageous.

They were just ordinary people, but they changed their world. We read their names today, because of their faith.

#### **A Vision of the Future.**

The human race has ever been carried forward by men and women who lived out of a vision of the world, not as it was, but as they expected it to become. When Galileo gave public support to the proposition that the earth moved around the sun and not vice versa, he was put in jail. There he remained for ten years. He might have held his peace, but he believed the future would back him up. We owe something to Galileo.

Martin Luther King had a dream. He dreamed of an inclusive society, where people of every color would be tolerated and valued. He gave himself to his vision and he lived according to it. He put his faith in justice. He saw it and embraced it from afar. Not in his day, but now, later, most people know that Dr. King had greatness in him. We know that he had some blemishes, but who and what he believed in made him bigger than he was.

Who are the most significant people of our time? Are they the kings and moguls of the information revolution, like Mr. Bill Gates? Are they those who sow and export terror? Is it the military strategists that excel in devising new ways to make war? Are these the people of the future? Or does the future belong to someone like Henri Nouwen, priest, writer and educator, who left an Ivy League school to work in an institution for severely handicapped people?

Henri was given twenty four hour-a-day responsibility for Adam. Adam was completely helpless. He could not dress, feed, or toilet himself. He could only make grunting, howling sounds. Henri had to change him every time he soiled himself.



Where lies the future? Is it in the hands of those known to us as power-brokers, king-makers, movers and shakers, celebrities? Or does the future belong to those like Henri Nouwen, with a vision of a world in which sacrificial love and difficult service, will be triumphant?

#### **Faith and Time.**

Sometimes people of faith are seen by their contemporaries as unrealistic. But there is deep realism in faith. Faith accepts that anything really worthwhile usually takes longer than any lifetime to come to birth. The earth is part of a massive universe that did not reach its present state in a short time. It has taken incomprehensibly long ages, for the conditions nec-

essary for human life, to come to being. The universe is still developing. We who live in our small corner of it, want it to hurry up. It does not; it will not. God has not paced himself according to our hot little desires. He is not in a hurry—never has been.

Therefore, a feature of faith is patience. Many Bible passages speak about waiting for God. In faith we never lay hold on God in such a way as to procure an expeditious action from him. If faith worked that way, God would become our servant, instead of we, his. In faith, we never get our hands on God. By faith, we are in his hands. We can only 'have' God through our *not* having him. He comes to us and is present with us in our waiting for him. ♦



## **KEEPING IN TOUCH.** A message from Des and Gill Ford.

#### **Dear GNU Friends**

**Hitherto, in the busyness of our days, we have relied on telephone and written messages to the GNU office, plus cassettes of meetings taken here, to assure all that we are alive and well. Now, at the request of the GNU board, I will summarize Ford news—although it has little worth alongside the Good News, which occupies all our hearts and lives.**

God has been exceedingly good to us, as ever. Through my daughter's manifold efforts we were able to buy a unit by the sea. The views are delightful, the swims invigorating and the walks joyous. As many as eight times a month I am called upon to take meetings for one, or several days. Usually, these are in Brisbane or Sydney and occasionally, Melbourne. (I do not as a rule now accept invitations to places which would involve much time in travel, as my program is more than full on Australia's East and Southern coast.)

Not long after arrival, I was poisoned by fumigants to which our goods had been exposed before their release by Australian Customs. This was probably the result of closed sleeping quarters surrounded

by these goods, newly arrived, in cyclonic weather. Mercifully, the enervation did not prevent me from preaching and after two months I was back to normal. Gill stayed in the U.S. till she was able to wind up her obligations at the hormonal clinic for women, that she had launched in earlier years. Though used to the cold of England, she enjoys our present locale, despite its typically warm weather, ameliorated in our case, by sea breezes.

Among the most memorable meetings here, have been some for the Uniting Church, at the invitation of a friend of decades, Dr. Gordon Moyes. At his request, I debated a well-known Atheist before eight hundred people in the Wesley Theatre in Sydney. I also spent an hour with Dr. Moyes on Sydney radio, 2GB. There have been Keswick conventions equally well attended, meetings for Christian lawyers and professionals, as well as classes at a Baptist Bible College and the Brisbane School of Theology.

I have worked on two new books and am scheduled to take a dozen meetings at a nearby Baptist church, which plans to draw in as many of the public as possible.

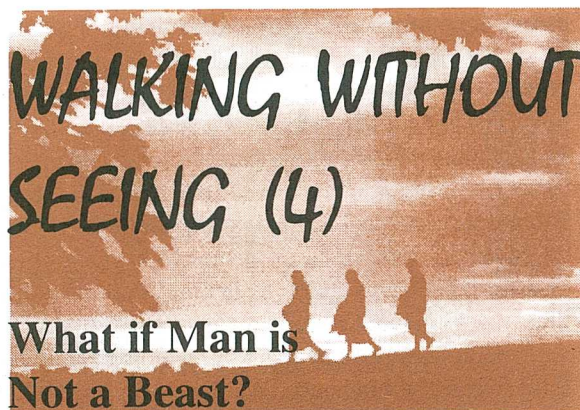
Gill spends scores of hours each week, working on her new book and also answering desperate requests by women for help with their hormonal problems. She also does much for me which I could not do for myself. For example, I always get into trouble with the computer, but she is an expert and delivers me.

We know that all charitable organizations in USA have suffered as a result of September 11 last year, and GNU has not found it easy to survive in the present economic climate. Please prayerfully put your dollars where your heart is. Ron Allen, and the small coterie of workers with him are worthy of your support.

Our love and blessings to all,

**Des and Gill.**





## Ron Allen

**I**n Dostoyevsky's tale, Marmeladov tells how Sonia, his daughter, prostituted herself to help her ailing stepmother and starving stepsisters. He related how in a frenzy of alcoholic desire, he had taken the money that Sonia had procured and spent it on liquor.

Raskolnikov walked home afterwards, thinking to himself. 'Marmeladov has discovered a gold mine in Sonia. At first, he wept bitter tears over what he had done, but now he has gotten used to it. He is taking his daughter's earnings for granted. What a beast man is. He gets used to everything, no matter how disgusting it is.' Then he checked himself and wondered, 'What if man is not a beast?'

Faith in God, holds that human beings are not just beasts. Faith affirms that humans have a kinship with God. Therefore, everything they do and what happens in their lives has significance and tremendous consequence. But if unbelief is right; if God does not exist, then nothing matters. Honor and decency are no better than lewdness or deceit. If there is no God, the future does not exist.

You may pledge yourself to values you think are noble. You may sacrifice yourself for the ones you love. You may work hard, be honest and faithful to your spouse all down through your years together, but in the end, the universe will not care a hoot about your loyalty and faithfulness. The universe will mock your ideals. You will have been made to feel that love meant something high and eternal but it will all have been a huge hoax. Your love for you spouse, children and neighbors will gutter out like a spent candle, and that will be the end of everything forever and ever.

### Living Hopefully.

But if God exists and man is not a beast, you can live well and live hopefully. You can say, I believe in kindness. I believe that kindness is God-like;

that he is moving us slowly but surely to a place where kindness will reign. At present, kindness is having a hard time of it. Yet I believe that kindness will prevail. I will be kind because I believe that God is building a future based on it.

If God exists and man is not a beast, you can say, I believe in freedom. At present, I do not see a lot of it. Sometimes I feel that I am not free. I feel tied hand and foot by debt. I am owned by my work, my boss, my worries. But since I believe in God, I believe in liberty, therefore I will work for freedom because that is the future.

If God exists and men and women are more than beasts, you can say, I believe in truth and righteousness. I myself am not very true . . . and often not right. But I see from afar, a world where truth, righteousness and justice, will flourish unchallenged. So for now, I will work for those values because the future belongs to them.

If God exists, you can say, I believe in brotherhood. Though I am less a brother than I ought to be, though I often feel terribly remote from my own siblings, I still believe in brotherhood. I embrace it from a long way off. Because I am convinced that creation is being moved toward a state of affairs, in which the human race will be like a big family and we will all be brothers and sisters to each other, I turn my faltering steps in the direction of brotherhood, because that is where the future lies.

### We See Jesus.

Quoting from the eighth Psalm, the author of Hebrews asks, 'What is man that you are mindful of him?' (Hebrews 2:6). He meditates further on human dignity. 'You crowned him with glory and honour and put everything under his feet' (Hebrews 2:7). But then he notes that, 'at present we do not see everything subject to him' (v.8). Man's high destiny is yet obscured, 'but we see Jesus ...' (v.9).

There is so much that is yet inaccessible to our gaze. Our vision is blurred by worry and tears. We do not have joy without sorrow. Pleasure is interrupted by pain. Our love is sullied by hatred. Life is cancelled by death. Peace, interspersed with wars. But, we do see! We see Jesus. The eye of faith beholds in him, joy, peace, righteousness; truth, brotherhood and life. And sees that which the whole creation anticipates with its groans. We take as fact, that a day approaches, when all that Jesus was, is, and all he died to win, will be transposed to every corner of the universe. What we once saw by faith, we will see by sight and touch. Then we will say to each other, 'Home at last. The promised land at last!' ♦



## FAITH'S PRACTICAL BENEFITS (from page 5)

nite source of moral strength. This nerves people for service and for deeds not thought possible.

A police officer works night shift. As the sun sets and the day fades, society's grim underbelly emerges. The officer sees greed and depravity not observed by normal folk. He witnesses men and women preying on each other. He recognizes men who hold respectable daytime jobs, doing unspeakable things in the dark. He enters homes where drugs and violence have reduced the inhabitants to animal levels. It seems to him that he is sinking in a tide of evil muck, and he finds it increasingly hard to trust anyone.

He decides to get away for a weekend in the mountains. There he breathes clean air, sees deer tripping lightly in the forest, hears the tinkling stream. He glimpses grandeur, and beauty. There is good in the world! His faith in goodness is renewed. The meanness and filth of the streets is not the whole story. He believes again in what he can't always see—and it makes him strong.

Anyone who has faith that humans are meant for goodness, and that they have a God-endowed capacity for it, will find an ability to do things beyond his/her own strength. Edmund Burke once remarked that slavery is incurable and it will never be stopped. It took people like Wilberforce, Lincoln and a host of others less well known, who, fortified by faith in Christ, acted as if slavery was a blotch on the human race that had to be stopped. Faith makes people strong.

### Faith as Insight.

Faith beats down cynicism. The most modern book in the Bible, Ecclesiastes (It reflects the modern disease of meaninglessness), says that all is meaningless, everything is vain, dogs, lions and humans are all on the one level, because they will all end up dead. That is how the world looks without faith in God. But faith is more than sight, it is insight. Faith holds that the universe is much more than what it seems to be on the surface. Nothing that can be observed through a microscope, or in a test-tube, or with the aid of a mathematical formula, gets to the bottom of reality. Landmark progress in science has usually come through individuals, who believed that certain things were so, long before they could demonstrate them empirically. Humans have always moved ahead on insight—faith.

We are all believers in spite of ourselves. We believe in God, or we believe in his nonexistence. Either way, we hazard all on our faith. But there is a long history of experimental evidence to show that

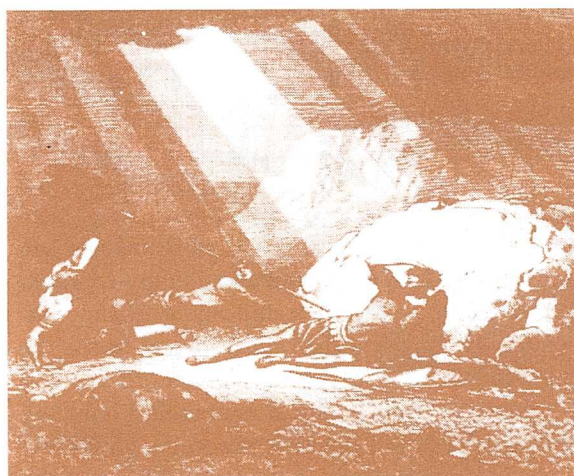
faith in God has more to recommend it than its alternatives. Faith in the nonexistence of God involves accepting the vast indifference of the universe. Unbelief means that we are no more significant than bacteria. Our aspirations are doomed. We plan, hope, imagine and love, in vain.

Faith in God has another effect. In place of futility, it puts purpose. It removes bitterness and puts in sweetness. Instead of despair it gives hope. Rather than cut the nerve of creative endeavour, it pours in energy and releases power to plan, strive and improve.

### Paul, an Example of the Positive Benefits of Faith.

Faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, generates perseverance. No better illustration of the power of Christian faith for positive and fruitful living, is to be found than in the apostle Paul. For all his years of labor he carried a burden of poor health. He faced ingratitude from those he worked so hard to help. He was persecuted by enemies and betrayed by friends. He lived on the brink of poverty. After a long imprisonment he was executed. Through it all, his morale was mostly high. Close to his death he wrote: *'I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness'* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

The practical consequences of faith, for human life, are enormous. Believers and unbelievers alike, must meet the shocks of fate, the ugliness of evil, the shame of man's inhumanity to man, the impact of sorrow, disappointment resulting from human weakness and one's own moral blemishes. The individual who trusts in a loving, wise and just Providence, is much better equipped to face life's challenges. To believe that there is a God with personal traits like those of Jesus, is to be furnished with confidence, courage and hope—spiritual values with which to live well, no matter what happens. ♦





# THE GOSPEL AND THE SPIRIT

## The Fellowship of the Spirit.

Rodney Nelson.

### A Revolutionary Concept.

**D**uring my schooling for a Master of Religion degree I was introduced to a Greek word I had never heard before. It was *koinonia*, meaning fellowship, communion, partnership. It occurs several times in the New Testament, referring to the vertical relationship between God and man, also, the horizontal relationship between God and man.

At that time, I was very interested in the dynamics that drive churches and their ministries. I was particularly interested in the biblical teaching on 'fellowship within the church'. The concept of *koinonia* subsequently led to a written study of it that changed my understanding of how church is done.

### The Key Text.

I was particularly challenged by Acts 2:42-47. The early believers 'devoted' themselves to fellowship (*koinonia*), the teaching of the apostles, eating together (probably including the Lord's supper) and prayer. They freely gave of their possessions, sold their properties and donated the sum to others; opening their homes to strangers. All this, while meeting together privately and in public, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:46-47).

### A Memorable Lord's Supper.

I remember the time I tried to incorporate some of the lessons I had learned in my *koinonia* studies, at a small fellowship my wife and I attended. Having less than thirty people made the experiment cosy. We celebrated the Lord's supper during our potluck lunch after church. I must say the experience was certainly rewarding for me and very different for most in the room. The chief en-

joyment was to eat and drink the emblems during a time of eating and fellowship, not during a traditional church service. I pictured the early Church gathering around their fellowship meal and observing the Lord's supper, in the context of that meal. The idea of spiritual and physical fellowship joined together.

### One Cross, Two Directions.

The cross displays two types of relationship, one vertical, the other horizontal. Christ's death represents the horizontal and vertical reconciliation necessary for the redemption of mankind. The idea of salvation, is typically understood in vertical terms. However, it is more profound than this. The cross also restores relations between men that resulted from their separation from God. In Eden, as soon as the relationship with God was harmed, spousal relationships changed with offspring affected, in the death of one at the hand of another.

Paul declares the reconciliation of the cross in Ephesians 2. Gentiles are now, '*in Christ*' (v.13). Christ '*made the two one, by destroying the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*' (v.14-15). His intention was, '*to create in himself one new man out of the two (Jew and Gentile), thus making peace*' (v.15). And, '*In this one body reconcile them both to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility*' (v.16). In reconciling Jew and Gentile to God on the cross, Jesus reconciled them to one another. '*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit*' (v.18).

### The First Test.

The first test of reconciliation is seen in how Jewish Believers treated each other immediately after Pentecost. The Jewish basis for the new Christian community had to be established before the Gentile segment could be brought in. The Gospel would be taken to the Gentiles through the Jewish church (Romans 1:16; Acts 10:1-129). Before the Gentiles would respond to the





gospel message, the Jewish church must provide an example as first recipients of the Gospel.

### Setting the Standard.

The community of believers was unlike anything ever seen in history. They demonstrated the attributes that would set a standard for believers throughout the Mediterranean world, and continue to challenge Christians throughout history.

These earliest Christians were 'devoted.' They did not give up in adhering firmly to the apostle's teaching, to fellowship with each other, to eating with one another and to prayer (2:42).

Their devotion required them to be 'one in heart and mind' (4:32). They were emotionally and intellectually engaged in one direction—to each other and in the glorification of the Lord.

They were a community that put first things first. The believers witnessed the apostles testify about the resurrection of the Lord; confirmed by many signs and wonders (2:43; 4:34-35). They understood the power of the gospel.

They exhibited the same selfless giving that the Saviour demonstrated in his life and death. They claimed nothing as only theirs, but shared with all believers who had need (2:44-45; 4:34-35).

They demonstrated their faith in public and in private. Privately, they practised hearty hospitality. They ate together with glad and sincere hearts. It has been pointed out that in Luke's gospel, Jesus is often seen eating. This certainly can be seen in Acts as well. Their selfless giving to one another caught the attention of the public, from whom they gained respect and favour.

Their devotion to God and to one another (vertical and horizontal), resulted in a harvest for the Lord (2:47). Evangelism was both proclama-

tion and demonstration.

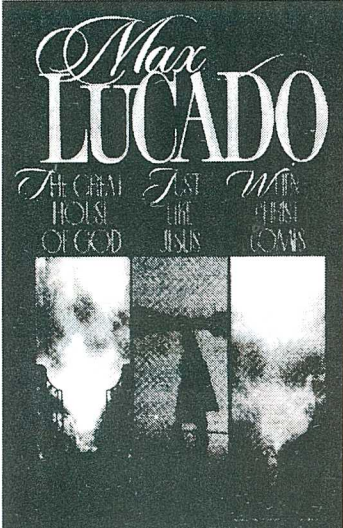
### What About Us?

Some approaches to church growth, seek to find formulas for success in these examples from Jerusalem. A better approach, is to view the believers as sincerely and honestly living out their new life in Jesus Christ. It affected every area of their lives. Practicing by formula will not yield automatic results, but genuine lives lived in devotion to the gospel, produce results God can use for his purposes (2:47b). Marketing principles are not as important as life principles. Changed lives set the stage for God's work in the hearts of unbelievers.

Acts reveals the Christian community as a basis for the extension of God's grace to members and to the world. Through devotion to the teachings of the apostles—fellowship in eating and in communal prayer, also by caring for those in need—the church is guaranteed to have an impact on the world.

### The Springboard.

The Jerusalem church was the springboard from which gospel witness extended throughout the entire Roman Empire. The devotion of believers there to the gospel, and to each other, was an anchor and an encouragement to future missions. Later, Paul would request Gentile churches to aid the Jerusalem believers in their time of need (Acts 11:28-30). Their witness provides Believers today with a standard of conduct and community, many have never seen nor conceived. The great lesson is, that Jesus gave all and we should be prepared to do Likewise. True fellowship of the Spirit produces genuine fellowship among believers. May we open our lives as conduits of grace to one another. ♦



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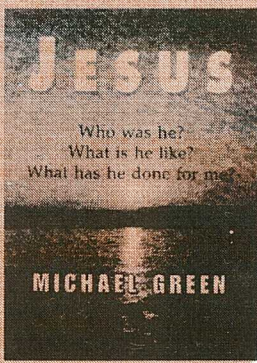
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