

## GOOD, LORD, IT'S MORNING - INDEX

### INTRODUCTION

1. (P3) KEEP IT SIMPLE - THE GREATEST PARADOX
2. (P5) A NEW COMMANDMENT - WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?
3. (P7) GOD IN THE WORLD - MODELS AND SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES
4. (P10) THE TRINITY - THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER
5. (P13) MINISTRY - HEALING AND CONDEMNATION
6. (P15) GOD'S PROVISION - GOD IN A STRAIGHT JACKET
7. (P18) THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - IN PURSUIT OF HOLINESS
8. (P19) THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - OBEDIENCE AND UTILITY
9. (P21) VICTORIOUS LIVING - JOY AND PAIN
10. (P24) EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY - PERCEPTIONS
11. (P27) GOOD AND EVIL - THE BELL THEORY
12. (P29) MALE AND FEMALE - HE CREATED THEM
13. (P32) THINGS - YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
14. (P34) WISDOM FROM GOD - CONSCIENCE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT
15. (P38) THE SACRAMENTS - SOLEMNITY AND JOY
16. (P40) QUESTIONS - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

## INTRODUCTION

This book is written for people who may, like me, be relative newcomers to the Kingdom of God. It is offered in the hope that you will be able to see the pitfalls that I have encountered, and, hopefully, walk around them. If your spiritual maturity is such that you are way ahead of me, then I ask your forgiveness for where I have stated the obvious. However, I believe that God has given me some different insights here, and I pray that you will consider them with the love and tolerance of a Christian brother or sister.

I owe a lot to Bruce Gollan for giving me Juan Carlos Ortiz's 'Cry of the Human Heart' to read. It was the real start of my pilgrimage into God's truth. I want to thank Mary, my wife, for her encouragement, comments, and countless cups of coffee; and my friends Michael and Pauline Ackerley for their invaluable help in checking my wilder flights of fancy, and my frequent liberties with the English language. I must thank too, the members of our local fellowship who kept on loving and supporting me when I was 'down in my valley'. Bless you.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE - THE GREATEST PARADOX

I recently read a potted biography of Ernest Hemingway that told where the author, as a young man learning his craft, was given a "style book" that advised him to "...use short sentences. Use strong English." The most succinct sentence I ever read is this. "God is love." To me this sentence says it all. It explains why God made us. It is the reason for Christianity - *"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). It tells us what we ought to do - *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"* and *"Love your neighbour as yourself"* (Luke 10,27). Jesus said *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13,34).

My own walk in the spirit was triggered by the passage at the end of 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul talks about prophecy being stilled; knowledge passing away and us seeing *"a poor reflection as in a mirror"* then ends with this: *"and now these three remain: faith hope and love. But the greatest of these is love"*. I pondered that passage for some time and then embarked on a voyage through the New Testament looking at all references to love. I came to understand that 'Love never fails'.

Therein is a key to any situation. If you act in love you cannot hurt anyone. If you love someone you will perceive his or her needs and react accordingly. *"Love never fails"*. If you have an enemy then say, "Thank-you Lord for giving me this person to love", because *Love conquers all*. Maybe that person will not want your love, but they cannot stop you loving them. Bad feelings can only grow if they are fed. If you offer love, then those bad feelings will wither and die.

For me it is simple. I just have to love people. This gives me a rule for every time and every place. I don't need to learn a lot of theology. I don't need to memorize whole passages of scripture. It is simple. It is so simple a little child can do it.

I think I have found out what Jesus meant when he said, *"...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Mat 18,3). I think that means that I take God at his word and just love The Lord and my neighbour. Everything else follows on from that. If I need to know something then God will see that I find out. It is as simple as that. A child can do it.

After I was first 'touched' by God, I read every book I could get about 'living in the Kingdom of Heaven'. I read books by people who did mighty things in Gods power, and I thought "Wow - I've got to get up to there and start doing mighty things for The Lord". That didn't happen. What did happen was that I got confused with all that theological know-how and went down into a couple of valleys. Now I see that God didn't want another well-read expert doing mighty things. What He wanted was me, willing and ready to love, right where I was: just as I was. What I should have done when He touched me on the shoulder and asked me into His kingdom was to say, "Ok Lord, here am I". I think I wasted a couple of years studying "Kingdom" books when I could have been used by God just simply loving people.

My wife didn't read those books. She was too busy baking cookies and loving people. All the time I was down in those valleys floundering around with all that theological knowledge to confuse me and feeling sorry for myself, Mary was busy loving me and praying for me and loving people and praying for them and giving them cookies. I had a good model right in front of me and I didn't see it because I was busy looking at myself. You can't find your way out of the gloom of a valley if you are busy looking at yourself. All I had to do was see someone with a need and offer to help them. Then I could have followed them up. I didn't want to help anybody because I thought that my testimony was no good because of being down there. You don't need a testimony about being on a ountaintop to help someone. You just love them with what you have. If they need a testimony like that then God will put someone in their path that has that sort of testimony. God wouldn't send you a plumber to fix your car.

New Zealand is in the southern oceans but we think of ourselves as part of the Western civilization. Our heads are stuffed full of knowledge and we 'know' so many things that it is very hard for us to grasp something as simple as Gods promise to us: *".. and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Acts 2,21).

I think this is the greatest paradox of all time. On one hand it is so simple to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. We don't have to do much - just believe and repent and be baptized. And to stay there we just have to love God and our neighbour and tell the good news. But on the other hand the Kingdom of Heaven is so complicated that a man could be as old as Moses; and go to all the seminars and study all the books; and experience many things and still not know the half of it. God loves us so he made a place for everybody. A place for the simple people and a place for the complicated people.

Did you ever read about some thing somewhere and wonder "how could that be?". I read about this missionary converting primitive people in the Philippines and I wondered how can they be a church there on that mountainside? They don't have a meeting house. They don't have any hymn books. They don't have a Sunday School superintendent or any coloured chalks and audio visual aids. I thought that church could never work. Now I see that it can work, because Gods plan is so simple that we don't have to have hymnbooks and padded pews. We just need to love wherever we are at. Part of loving God is to worship him. We don't have to have coloured chalks and an overhead projector to worship him. *"Love never fails."* See? - it is simple; you just love God and love your neighbour.

Once we had a seminar at our church and for the seminar we had a little book with the title 'KISS'. This was an acronym for Keep It Simple Stupid. At the time I had some trouble with that last word. I didn't think that it was very flattering to me to be a 'stupid'. Flattering, maybe not; accurate, Yes. For twenty years I had a key to the Kingdom of Heaven and didn't recognize it. A kiss is the symbol of love, but that was too obvious for me and I missed it. I must have some sympathy for our God when He says to His children, "How long?"

## 2. THE NEW COMMANDMENT - WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

*"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these commandments"* (Mat 23; 39,40). Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan to show us who is our neighbour. Anyone in need is a candidate for us to have as a neighbour. If I meet somebody at the shop, or along the road, or in my work, they can be my neighbour. I can ask them how is their day going and sometimes I can ask them inside for a cup of coffee. It is very easy to love your neighbour like that. If they get to know me as a man who is interested in them, then they will start to share things in their lives with me. Maybe later on they might have some problem and will share that too. Then I can share the love of Jesus with them if they need comfort.

'The Good Samaritan 20 centuries on.'

And a certain Pedestrian was traveling through the suburbs when he was set upon and robbed by muggers. They vanished into an alley and the man was left bleeding in the gutter. Several people passed and when they saw the man in the gutter they crossed the road and went on. Then Mr Modern Christian drove along that way in his car and his heart was filled with pity when he saw the mugger's victim. He quickly dialed 111 on his cell phone and reported the facts to the police. After discussing the matter with his pastor he arranged to have it included on the agenda of the 'Ways and Means' committee meeting for Thursday week. It was Moved, Seconded, and (with only one amendment) Passed and duly entered in the minutes 'That a sub-committee be formed to investigate the problem of ..... etc, etc.'". You can easily write the rest of the story for yourself. I am very glad that I am a full member of the 'Kingdom' company and that I am wholly covered by the 'Provisions' of God. I wouldn't want to be still waiting for Mr Modern Christian to get out of his car and actually help me.

We are a highly organized society. Think about your pastor. He would be better equipped for his job if his training had been a business degree. His first priority is to organize. After that comes management and preaching. Pastoral care, the function implicit in his title, comes a very poor fourth. Elders too, have the same problem in that they are commonly too busy with meetings and administration to do justice to their elected duty. It is one of the pitfalls of organization that all the time is taken up with the details and there is little left over for the actual doing.

It is a characteristic of any organization that it eventually comes to have self perpetuation as it's chief end. Think of the government 'Quangos' and all the other organizations that started out with a very focused brief, but have now outlived their usefulness. They strongly resist any move to disband them. The church is not immune to this. Ministers meetings and hierarchical church business can gobble up most of a pastors time and energy. Our pastors are often rated by counting heads and dollars, and are compelled to be occupied with administration. How much of each dollar given is devoured by the 'System'? How much of key members time is taken up with paperwork? How much of our effort goes into our original purpose? We are to love God and our neighbour; and to make disciples of all nations. We need to change our 'conditioned reflex' from, "Let's form a committee", to "What can I DO?"

In Romans 12,6 there is a list of 'motivational gifts' with the injunction to use them. We all have gifts in this context of the word, and we can all share the load of 'running' the fellowship to which we belong. If we can free up others to concentrate on their own gift, then we will all have more time to do those things for which we are best qualified. Paul recommends in Ephesians 4,12 that we are to use our gifts *"...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..."*. So a teacher can teach others to teach, etc.; 'to make disciples of all nations'.

Can you imagine what it would be like if we all took the 'Great Commission' literally. You convert me and off I go to some other town and convert someone there. They in turn joyfully rush off to 'go and make disciples of all nations'; and so on. The airlines and the real estate agents would have a wonderfully profitable time. 'All the world' includes next door as well as the deep, dark jungles of Central Africa. I must tell the people in my nation, my neighbours, first because God didn't make me an 'Evangelist'. Some have a special talent for that (see Ephesians 4,11). You don't have to be too smart to see what happens if every member in the Kingdom gets even one 'neighbour' into Gods care - and they too get another one.....

God's provision for us is unbounded: there is no shortage of 'neighbours'. I don't need a committee, or tracts, or 'Ten Steps to Evangelism' to be neighbourly. Everybody needs friends. If you just offer friendliness then you are not likely to be rebuffed. If you 'come on strongly' about your beliefs you are very likely to be rebuffed. What you are going to do here is to meet their need, and until they tell their

need you can only go along being friendly. I don't ever remember meeting anyone who became a Christian for intellectual reasons. All the people I know in the Kingdom gave themselves to the Lord as a response to some need. For some, the need was urgent, and some came to recognize their need slowly; maybe as they saw Christian joy and fulfillment in others around them. So you start meeting people's needs and pretty soon they will recognize that that is what you do, and so they will begin to share their needs with you.

***'Good, Lord, it's morning'***. Morning is the time in the day we think of going forth. I can ask God in the morning to put somebody in my way to be a neighbour to. If I remember to do that I will have a fruitful day. There is a great blessing in being obedient, by *'loving your neighbour as yourself'*. Some days several cars come in our gate. They might come when I am busy working, but I have found that if I stop work and spend whatever time is needed, then God will bless that time, and my work will still get done. His promise is to supply ALL of our needs, and that includes time. A friend of mine works at home, and because he is 'stuck' all day in his greenhouse, he often asks the Lord to send him someone. Isn't it odd that both he and I do our 'going into all the world' by staying at home?

" *Thank-you Lord for the mornings.*"

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### 3. GOD IN THE WORLD - MODELS AND SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

If you want to know about God, then look around you. Mankind was made in His image. So God is like all the people in the world. Not just one person or some persons, but all mankind: All humanity, with all its capacity for good and beauty and all its diversity.

Is God a woman? To even ask the question demonstrates a lack of understanding of the manifold nature of God. 'He' and 'Her' are sexual indicators that we use to show physical differences. They are only applicable when we are discussing something or someone to whom those differences apply. My nearest big city is Auckland: Is it he or she? What colour is it? It is of course too complex for such simple labels. It is all colours. It depends on where you stand to look. If we compress our mental picture of God to fit into a 'Him' or a 'Her' category we are limiting our expectations of Him to the capabilities of a him or a her.

Consider the universe and its infinite complexity.

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.> Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.*

*There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.*

*Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world."* (Ps 19)

Did you ever sit out on a clear night and just look at the stars. You just have to sit in wonder. You can see a flash from a falling star, or a faint twinkle that disappears as you stare. I have looked so long sometimes that I have got chilled and not noticed. Just admiring Gods handiwork. You could look inside an ant and it is more complicated than anything man has made - each cell a miracle of perfection and working in perfect harmony with the one beside it. I have a well equipped workshop, but I can't make an ant.

I used to have a lot of trouble with the thought that God was pretty busy and He couldn't possibly have enough time to keep an eye on me, or even be listening when I prayed. I couldn't conceive that God had enough attention to spread over all the people praying at the same time. God made time so HE can adjust it however He likes, after all, He has told us that 'a thousand years is but a day' in His sight. The scientists are all the time telling about new discoveries in space, as if the universe as we already understand it wasn't mind-boggling enough. If there are an uncountable number of stars in God's heaven then I guess that listening to a couple of million prayers is simple for Him.

God wouldn't like, that maybe He was so busy He wouldn't notice? I did. Now when I look at the world around me I realize that God will notice because He has to be big enough if He made all the things that I can see.

The way we understand things is to fit them into our previous experiences and try them against things that we already know. So we limit God to our own understanding. If the ant was confronted with the complexity of, say, a person driving a car through an intersection, where they are doing a lot of things simultaneously; it might well refuse to believe that it were possible. Ants just don't have that kind of experience; they get confused just deciding which way to go. But, all the same, the ants disbelief wouldn't stop me driving the car. I can see that there are many things in the universe that I don't understand but I am prepared to believe that anything God has said, He will do.

God is three in one. He is the Holy Trinity. We have a model for this in ourselves. I exist on three levels. I have a physical body that functions autonomously - my heart beats without conscious thought: I breathe. I have a mind: it theoretically controls the rest of me. And I have emotions; my soul. Sometimes all three work together, but they can operate independently. I twitch and do other things with my body that are not consciously directed. There are a whole set of 'conditioned reflexes'. My mind can often rationalize a course of action that the body flatly refuses to obey. And the emotions can make the body do things that the mind strongly rejects. So I exist on three different levels that can work together and work independently. Each reacting to different stimuli, yet inseparable; each is functioning in a different sphere but in concert. Maybe if it hadn't been for the snake and the apple they would function in perfect harmony, just like our Creator.

Consider the analogy that Paul uses in Romans 12, where he likens the fellowship to the human body

with its many members with different functions. You could be a cell on a finger which is your local fellowship; that is a member of the whole body of believers. If we then take this analogy further there are some interesting points to think on. As the cell is dependant on the surrounding cells for its sustenance and for its very support, so are we. A cell can not exist alone. Some cells are for receiving messages. Some cells are for sending messages. Some cells are strong for bone support and some soft for comfort. There are cells that form a network for control and other groups for passing the life blood and tidying away the wastes. I can see a niche in there for every type of talent that the Lord endows. The fellowship will work well when all its component members are in harmony and doing their allotted part.

There are fellowships where there is dissension. There is no room for dissension in the body. If you are the cell on the end of the finger that is feeling the heat then your function is to send a message saying that it is hot. You may be located on the front of the hand and be sure you can see what the leadership cannot; but God put that leadership in place and you must just do your own job. That is why you are there. If the finger is sick or damaged it can be healed; but not if the individual cells drop off and go looking for another finger.

God has given us the family, and we often talk about our church family. In the same way as the body is like the church so is the family like the fellowship. If you belong in a family you can only be a proper member if you are living with them. How would it be if you lived in one house and went next door to have your social life? You would be resented in one house because you didn't join in the family times, and the same in the other house because you didn't contribute to the running of the household. I believe that we ought to do all things together as a fellowship. Work together, play together, fellowship together, worship together: How else can we properly love one another? It is hard to be a neighbour to people you don't see all the time. If you only see somebody for an hour on Sunday morning, and maybe for half an hour over the coffee cups, then that is less than two percent of your waking week. If you were a parent in a family and gave only two percent of your time to the family members, you would very quickly have a divorce on your hands and your children would be running wild.

In our modern 'mobile' society we can easily live, work, and worship in different suburbs. Because of the car we tend to have 'communities of interest' rather than geographic ones. It is very hard to be a neighbour to people if you are closed up in a car every time you come out your gate. I want to go to the same church as my neighbours, the same local shop, and the same hairdresser. Then I can get to know them well enough to love them properly.

I see in my bible, a scriptural principle that 'God blesses what you have'. When Jesus did a miracle, he used what was there; the empty jars for water into wine; the loaves and fishes for feeding the multitude. He didn't go and 'Zap' a take-away bar out of thin air, He used what was there and blessed it till it was enough, and some left over. Elijah was fed by the ravens. God could just as easily have sent him four-course dinners with relays of angel waiters, but he used what was there. If we just start using what we have, then God will bless it to our use, and there will always be enough and some left over.

We look to our God for miracles sometimes when all we need do is start using what is already there. His promise to us is to supply our every need, and 'Our Heavenly Father knows our needs' before we are aware of them. If we see a need in our fellowship, we probably pray "Lord send us a new whatever" to cover this situation. Or we look around and think there is a lack of a certain talent somewhere among the 'doers', so we ask for a new 'somebody' to fill that lack. If God showed you that 'lack' or that 'need' then He probably wants YOU to do something about it, and you can be sure that you already have what is needed. If He didn't show you, then perhaps there is no need in His sight.

Remember the manna in the desert for the Children of Israel; you couldn't store it, or save it; you could only use it. And there was more there to use the next day: when it was needed. When some people are baptized in the Holy Spirit and they want to start to speak in tongues they expect the

miraculously with no effort on their part. For a few it does indeed 'burst forth', but for the rest they must first start to use their vocal chords. I remember councilors at 'Life in the Spirit' seminars advising "Just start making sounds and the Spirit will do the rest". Do you see?; we must start to use what we have and the Lord will bless it to our use. There are countless examples on record of fellowships that started projects with a few dollars and God provided the rest as it was needed.

I can rationalize anything that I want for myself. If I look in the 'Word' I can find a scripture that makes it O.K. "*Take a little wine for your stomach*"; for instance, provides a rationalization for what can very well be self indulgence. All over the world there are groups who are different, and they all can point to a bit in the Bible that justifies their particular position. There have been, and may still be to come, some terrible arguments among Christians with each side defending itself with different selections from the Word of God. But there is a way out of this.

When I was in the garage business we had the job of issuing 'warrants of fitness' to our customers cars and I remember some differences of opinion about what was and what was not included in the regulations. But at the end of the book issued by the M.O.T. was the advice that '....the vehicle must be in a generally safe condition'. This 'over-riding clause' covered everything. In the same way the Bible has an over-riding clause. It is this: "Love one another". If somebody says "you are wrong because the Word says this....", then you can say, "Thank-you for telling me that". If they were wrong, then they will surely find that out some day, and your loving of them may help to ensure their salvation. And if you are wrong, then you were right to thank them - It is impossible to have a proper argument with someone who agrees with you!

If you take a pencil, as I did, and underline every passage or verse in the New Testament that uses the word love you will find very few pages unmarked at the end of the exercise. So I found a 'scriptural principle' here that everything must be done in love. If your disagreement with someone means that one party has to give in then you have a rule that lets you decide clearly. If insisting on your line means hurting the other party, then you must give way. If you still have some doubts then try this one. "What would Jesus do here?" You could try re-reading 1 Corinthians 13, and 1 John 4 for some useful tips too!

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#### 4. THE TRINITY - THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

If the word 'why' hadn't been in the language I think I would have invented it. Right from the time of being a small boy I wanted to know "How do they do that?" So I have this lifelong habit of wanting to know how and why. . It makes it very difficult living in the Kingdom of Heaven because God's way is to do it by faith. Faith comes very hard if you think you need to know why and how.

In the workshop the carpentry tools are in a different box from the engineering tools, and the washers are in a different box to the nuts and bolts. So I can find things easily by associating like with like. If it looks like a washer it goes near the washers. My head works the same way and I use a lot of analogies. It is easy for me if I can compare something new with something I know, to fit it into the right box in my head.

One analogy I have for the Trinity is the car: The power plant, the drive transmission, and the wheels. God supplies the power; Jesus transmits that power; and the Holy Spirit turns that power into action. I know of some people who are deeply suspicious of the workings of the Holy Spirit. They suspect that the devil might have a hand in uncommon things like speaking in tongues, and prophecy and so on. They resist the baptism of the Holy Spirit because they are frightened, not knowing what might happen to them.

To be a follower of Jesus without having the Holy Spirit in your life is like having a car with no wheels. Imagine a man getting a new car with no wheels. He can admire it every Sunday morning. He can polish it, and run the motor and sense the power. He can show it to his friends: "See my new car. It has a very powerful engine, and an amazing transmission". But what good is it? He can't give his friend a ride to the hospital in it, or take some person 'meals on wheels'.

The devil can counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and we are right to be alert to any misuse of these gifts; but to reject them totally is as silly as not having wheels on the car, because the wheels could run over people. The disciples were given the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and Jesus has promised this power to us. (John 15 and 16) and Peter says in Acts 2, 38 *"...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

The Holy Spirit is the 'doing' part of the Trinity. And in various parts of the New Testament it says; He is the Spirit of Truth; He will bring Glory; He brings gifts; He will teach you all things; He brings us love ("God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit"-Romans 5,5); He sets us free from the law of sin and death; He testifies that we are God's children; He searches all things; He is a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come; He gives life; He strengthens us with power; He has a sword, which is the Word of God; and He produces the 'fruit' of Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control.

**We can worship God on Sunday Morning and praise Him for His mighty power, we can claim the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus and love Him for being a mediator from us to God, but if we don't have God's Spirit operating inside us to show us God's will and help us to do that will, we might as well be a car with no wheels.**

To do good is not enough. The local Lions clubs do a lot of good, but they cannot offer eternal life. If doing good were enough, you would be better off getting to heaven with the Lions Club, because their social life is much more lively than in most Christian fellowships. We have to do the good that GOD wants us to do. Our 'do-gooding' may in truth be counter-productive to God's plan for that place and that time. Jesus said very emphatically in Matthew 7,21 that, *" only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven ... will enter the kingdom of heaven"* .

I also sometimes think that God is very like electricity. The whole universe depends on it. All things are made of the elements, tiny atoms that have a nucleus and other electrical particles whizzing round them like little solar systems. Some atoms are positively charged, some negatively. These 'ionized' atoms are the working ingredients for a lot of chemical changes; for soil nutrition; and even for our nervous systems. Visible light is electromagnetic radiation as are radio waves and X-rays. Our heartbeat is triggered by an electrical impulse, a charge of electrons flowing in a nerve canal. If electricity stopped then so would the entire universe. Try another analogy. If God is like electricity, then He is the source of all power. Jesus is like the cables spanning the earth to wherever there is a

need: bringing mighty power. And the Holy Spirit is like the appliances at the ends of the power cables: translating that power to our use. We switch on the power when we want to - the power of prayer. We choose which switch, and which light - God has given us free will.

When we pray for others it is a little like taking an extension cable and plugging in some power to a place that isn't permanently wired up. And you can liken praying in tongues to the 'jumper leads' you use on your car when the battery is flat and the ordinary power supply isn't enough. We can take that one a little further and say that there is no use using jumper leads if the car is broken or has a mechanical fault. It is necessary to find out what is needed, so we must first ask Him what to pray for. It is an interesting coincidence, I think, that I have a friend who uses the mnemonic 'God's Electric Power Company' to remember the sequence order of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians

If I have a new electric tool in the workshop, it is sensible to find out what it can do. Then I must learn to use it properly. Maybe the first time I use it I get it wrong. But that is not the tool at fault, or the electric power, it is my lack of experience. To say "it doesn't work properly", and then to put it away is to give up too soon. But if I use it regularly I will get better at it. If I had a problem with a piece of equipment, I would seek help from some person with experience, or from the maker. The same conditions apply to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God gives them to us to use for his work, and the more we make use of them the more confident we will get. If we use the right tools proficiently we will be competent workers. If we have a problem using God's gifts then we can seek help from an experienced user, or from our maker. If you just leave them on the shelf you might even find that they wouldn't work when you do pick them up. A well-used tool fits nicely into your hand with the comfort of familiarity.

Electricity is usually a well-behaved commodity. It doesn't ordinarily do things without some prompting from the user. We are able to choose how and when it will be applied. God doesn't commonly move directly in the world either, because he gave us our 'free will'; the power of choice; the 'knowledge of good and evil'. We choose to be part of God's kingdom or not, so our God will not operate in our lives unless we ask Him. This is a function of prayer, to ask God to move and to bless us, or someone else. If we see a need that we are not able to meet out of our own resources, then we can invoke the power of God through prayer. In a sense God has tied His own hands in that He cannot interfere in a life unless we choose to ask Him to. We 'switch on' the power when we pray, or we 'plug in' the power when we pray for others.

I see a very fine distinction between God blessing someone else, and His 'interfering' in their lives. My own experience is that God does not interfere in my life, but there have been times when He has had to get my attention by causing such things to happen around me that I have become so confused that I have sought His help in prayer. Then He could tell me what I needed to know. It has usually been because I was going ahead in my own strength and not asking His guidance. It is not comfortable to have God 'tap you on the shoulder'. It is much worse if He has to shout to get your attention - it is not a nice thing to have God yell at you. My life has been a lot more fruitful and a lot more tranquil since I have learned to 'let God'.

Psalms 1 pictures a beautiful prospect for the one who "*meditates on his law day and night*". I couldn't imagine what the psalmist meant when I first read that passage. How could one ever get anything done if one was meditating day and night? Now I see that if my mind is open to the Lord all the time then I can have the wisdom of the Holy Spirit constantly available. And because I am communicating with God then I am more or less constantly praying. I can 'turn on the Power' to whoever I may be thinking about and regularly ask God's blessing on all that I do or think.

I have never come across anything that leads me to suppose that there is any limit to the Power available. Think what we could do in this world if we were to constantly pray for others, and for our nation, and for other nations. There are so many people in need to pray for that I can easily feel overwhelmed by the size of the problem, but if I, in my corner, pray for the ones I know to be in need, and you, in your corner do the same, then the whole world will be covered. Think what we could do in this world if we were to constantly pray for others, and for our nation, and for other nations.

"Thank-you Lord that your Power is always available; any time, and any place. "

We have a model in the Bible imagery of 'Our Heavenly Father', and ourselves as children; and I see this as a true analogy. Think of some important person you know. He is treated with respect, and, such

homage is given to his importance by the people he meets, that most are a little in awe of him. But, to his wife, he is the one who carelessly drops his socks on the bathroom floor, and to his children he is the one to be cajoled when they want some more pocket money. They run to him to share their joys, and again for comfort when they are in pain. "Hey dad; look at that great big spider"; or "Hey dad; can I help you? Please!!?". He is treated with awe and reverence when the occasion demands, but for day to day living, he is approached with love and trust and no formality. I am sure that we can approach our Heavenly Father with that same trusting informality as we go about His business. "Oh Lord, look at that beautiful sunset, I am so happy that You have given us such wonderful things;" or, "Oh Lord, what would you have me do here?" - "*But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.*" (Ps 1).

We talk of our 'walk with the Lord', and our 'Kingdom walk'; and it ought to be just that. Just as a child walks down the street with its father, so we walk with our hand in our Father's hand. He will guide us, He will instruct us, He will protect us, and we will share the joys of fellowship and love. As I write this book I am constantly struck with the idea that the stalwarts of old who founded the churches that I used to condemn as being worn out and outdated, have already experienced the 'truths' that I am learning today. This hymn by D.B.Towner, which I have sung all my life, is the essence of what I understand that God wants of us. '*When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His word; what a glory He sheds on our way! While we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey.... ...Then in fellowship sweet, we will sit at His feet, or we'll walk by His side in the way; What He says we will do, where He sends we will go - Never fear, only trust and obey.*'

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## 5. MINISTRY - HEALING AND CONDEMNATION

If a renowned surgeon with the most modern equipment performs a delicate operation, the healing belongs to God. He designed the regenerative and anti-body processes that permit the post-operative healing in our bodies. If we wait and let 'nature' take its course, the same is true. We can do things to help, like taking antibiotics, or whatever else the doctor may prescribe, but the healing still belongs to the Lord. And if we ask for and receive a miracle, it is even more His healing. The power belongs to the Lord.

In these charismatic times we are now accustomed to various healing ministries. Some are very specific, as in the case of the man who had a ministry of praying for people to grow new teeth. Some are for deliverance only, and some for anything and everything. I believe that we have to be very careful in the way we conduct these sessions. Remember Matthew 7, 21... *"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'. Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evil-doers!'*" Here Jesus is very plainly warning of the consequences of not getting it right; of not doing the will of our Father.

Would you take a friend to the doctor and then tell the doctor what to prescribe. The symptoms and the cure might be plain to you, but you could be wrong. No doctor would sign a prescription on your say so; he would rightly insist on his own examination. It seems to me that when we, as counselors, ask someone what their problem is and then proceed specifically to pray for a certain result for them, that we are denying God's sovereignty, and that we are denying God's all-seeing wisdom. Their complaint might be induced by some state of mind or soul or other invisible reason that God may want to cure first. It is my own experience that He always has a better way. I can see a need and think of a cure for it, but I find that His cure is always different to mine, and the chief difference is that His cure will benefit others as well. We are here to see His will be done.

Some of the glory of God may shine on us, but it is reflected glory and definitely not ours. If we are an instrument in a healing, we do well to remember that the glory is the Lords. We can be a part of the process, indeed we are a vital part in that we are the channel of prayer, but our role is just to 'turn on the power'. The glory belongs to the Lord.

My dictionary defines counsel as advice, or opinion, so by extension, a counselor is an adviser. There is a clear distinction between counseling and ministry; that is, ministry in the sense of invoking God's power. In the former we are 'on our own' and bear the responsibility for what we do and say. In ministry we call on God's power and wisdom. Let us be very clear about that. It is God's power and wisdom, not ours. Remember the warning in Matthew *"...but only he who does the will of my father..."*

What I see here is that we must first 'consult the doctor': i.e., "What is it Lord, what would you have us do?" Then we can go on from there as He directs.

My friend was called in for prayer for a young woman who was living in an un-sanctioned relationship, and who was into various drugs as well as being unemployed. Her life was a mess. He didn't pray for deliverance from the sin in her life or miracles to succour her physical needs, but simply sought the Lord's will. The answer, soft and beautiful, was "just tell her I love her". That melted her heart, so that she could hand over her life to God, and she went off home with hope for the future. Within a fortnight she renounced the drugs and then proceeded to regularize her marital relationships.

My instinct, as in any well brought up Presbyterian, would have had me trying to get her to clean up her life and to turn to Jesus for salvation. How wrong I would have been. She would have immediately felt the weight of my instinctive condemnation, unspoken, but implicit in the advice offered. God's way removed the weight, and replaced it with hope and joy. There is a place for counseling and a place for ministry, but they are not the same place. We cannot mix our advice with God's power without running the risk of having Jesus say to us *"Away from me you evil-doers!"*

I believe that the risk of not 'getting it right' is very much greater in deliverance ministry. Firstly we are dealing directly with the satanic realm, and there is considerable danger in that alone. Consider this. *"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through hard places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worst than the first."* (Luke 11,24...) If an evil spirit is driven out of someone, then the empty place needs to be filled. If the Holy Spirit prompts you to pray for deliverance, fine, because whatever else is needed will be supplied as well under His guidance. If you drive out a demon on your own initiative, then you are taking very big risks.

Secondly, there can be considerable trauma attached to deliverance. I think that deliverance may not always be necessary. I have seen in my own Christian growth that the things of the world lose their importance to me as I become closer to the Lord. So there is a form of deliverance here that is built in to God's plan. If I have, say, a spirit of greed, and then my greediness diminishes as I become more interested in spiritual things, then that spirit will find that its lusts are not being fed, and it will go and seek a more fruitful home. Deliverance by displacement.

If you are driving your car across a lonely desert in out-back Australia and you run out of petrol, you will be well advised to send up a prayer for help straight away. But if you are in your kitchen and you find that you have run out of milk, are you going to ask God for a miracle for that? Some Christians advise praying specifically for what you want. Well you could pray for a big friendly Holstein Friesian cow to appear on the back lawn, or a milk tanker to come up the drive, if that is more to your taste. But should we be seeking divine assistance in such a case? Where is the line to be drawn? Do you ask the Lord to help you eat your dinner? That would be a nonsense: we are able to do most of the things we need to do in our lives for ourselves.

I have some reservations about asking for healing for conditions that are within the normal scope of the medical profession. Is there any difference between, say, asking for a miracle to cure your influenza and asking God to call up 'Phillip's' cloud to waft you down to the shop for some more milk? You can deal with the 'flu' by bed-rest and antibiotics, and the other by whatever means you usually employ. However, circumstances alter cases. Maybe you are just talking to God when this happens and you are telling Him that, "This is very important Lord because those new neighbours are coming for afternoon tea, and I don't have time to get down to the shop for more milk, and I do so want to make a good impression because I am going to invite them to come with us on Sunday morning, and... ". And maybe it will happen that God will solve your problem. But should we EXPECT a miracle? Maybe if you are listening closely to what He is saying, you might hear Him gently chiding you for not checking the refrigerator earlier.

## 6. GOD'S PROVISION - GOD IN A STRAIGHT JACKET

*"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Matt 6,33). I now understand that God has covenanted to supply ALL our needs. But tradition and upbringing condition us. My 'conditioning' let me assume that God's offer was just for the specific things that I remembered reading in the Word. So without ever thinking it out, I fell into a way of living where I was content to trust God for Bread and Raiment, etc.; the traditional things; but thought that I had to look after the technical bits myself. Things like running the business, and decisions about how and where to spend what little money that the business (Me in charge thereof) didn't devour. We always had enough groceries, but the business never had enough to properly pay its way. It took some years for the penny to drop in my mind. What I was doing was denying God sovereignty in specific areas of my life. If we say to Him, "This part is mine", then we are putting Him in a straitjacket. How can he bless us in areas where we deny Him?

My God used to be a benevolent old gentleman in a brown robe and rather fuzzy around the edges. He was a little bit stern looking, but his eyes smiled at me. He lived in the clouds, and His Son had been on earth for a time, and did a lot of amazing things with wine-jars, loaves and fishes and in the healing line. All this happened long before motorcars and computers and the share market were invented. He couldn't have any relevance in my technical work? - Could He?

Think of any field of human endeavour - God has been there; done that! Science - The whole universe is a working example of our Creators expertise in that field. Art - just look at the beauty of the world you see around you. Music - all our knowledge of western music is based on recently acquired understanding of the harmonics, rhythms, and resonances of nature: It is pure Mathematics, as is most of structural creation. Philosophy - our Christian religion is the finest form of that. What we are pleased to call ecosystems are finely tuned and totally functional working examples of the much argued 'science' of Economics. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard."* (Ps 19).

We think of money and chattels as security. That is why we worry if our money supply looks to be drying up, or diminishing. We see that as threatening to us because when it happens, it attacks our security. So we worry. But Jesus specifically told us not to worry (Matt. 6) about such things. To do so is therefore sinful. It is wrong because it denies God's promise to supply all our needs. It is a clear indication that we doubt His ability or willingness to honour His promises. Where is your security? In the last few years, the sacred cows of blue-chip security have been dying all around you. Hitherto unimpeachable banks have closed their doors. Government institutions and even some governments have disappeared. White-collar criminals can embezzle your life savings overnight. Your 'security' can vanish in an instant. I get a distinct comfort from His promise to supply all my needs, when I see such dramatic material change all around me.

Today, if I have a technical problem, I just carry on with what is in front of me, and the answer is given to me as I go along. I have yet to tell my bank manager this, but God is my business partner. This is how it works. I do the work and He sends in the customers and does the planning. It is a wonderful way to live, believe me! I am delivered from all worry. Living is simple and hassle-free. What is more, it is exciting. It is like Christmas every day. I never know in advance what the day will bring, because it is pointless making plans when God is in charge. Since I resigned as manager there has been a steady flow of work. Not too much, and never too little. You might think, "How boring with no challenge of planning and achieving"; but the work He sends me is challenging and much more interesting than the jobs I used to do. He promises to supply ALL our needs and there is no doubt about the quality of what He provides.

I can be much more effective in my life when I am relieved of the organising of it. No more scheduling of jobs; no fretting about whether they will be done on time; no time spent drumming up work; no need to advertise; just be available for what ever He will send me to do. For instance, my early morning time used to be devoted to planning the days activities. Now I can spend that time much more profitably in meditation, or prayer, or whatever the need may be. I love that passage in Matthew, chapter 6 that tells us not to worry about worldly things but to *"seek first His kingdom and righteousness"*. Our Heavenly Father knows what we want before we do. It was Juan Carlos Ortiz, I think, who wrote that he hadn't prayed for anything for himself for something like five years. I took

that to myself and I don't ask God for anything personal. He has promised to supply ALL my needs, above anything I could ask or think, according to his riches.

This system works well for me. I have long trusted Him to supply my needs, and He often supplies my wants as well. We recently bought and rebuilt a second-hand house with a lot more faith than money in hand. Mary and I are happy to testify that the finished project is the same as or better than we had envisaged. Even the new drapes that we were given are the colour we wanted. Most of the materials came from garage sales or from the second-hand ads, yet the whole interior is very harmonious. You don't get a colour choice when you buy that way, but God saw to it that everything matched perfectly.

If we make a plan for ourselves, then we focus on that plan. We imagine what it will be like if we get what we ask for, and we can often become very busy doing things that will promote that thing we are wanting. Unfortunately, all the time we are busy promoting and imagining we are unavailable to God. We have taken ourselves out of play.

The action in the Kingdom is always now. If someone needs assistance and you are the nearest person with the right ability to help but you are too busy, then God has to look to the next person. When someone knocks on your door you can say, "I'm sorry, but I'm busy with my plan right now", but think of the blessing that you are missing. There is a very good reason for not being too busy when God calls. God's way always blesses all concerned. He probably intended to use that person who knocked on your door to bless you and to supply one of your needs.

Imagine that you are unemployed. You will have a lot of choices about how to use your day. You can only spend so much time reading the help wanted ads and knocking on doors, so you will have to choose what to do after that. Maybe you will sit by the television with an aluminium can at your elbow and watch a ball game. Maybe you will focus on yourself and even do some praying about getting a job. Perhaps you want to improve your skills and so you spend sometime on study. My solution is to get on with our Fathers business. Find someone to love. Offer to mow their lawn, or clean out their rain gutters, or bake them a cake. You will be in motion, using what you have, which is your hands and your time, and God can bless it. I bet that after you have done that job, when you are having a coffee with that person, they will ask you what you usually do. Then they might say, "I know somebody who needs your skills, let me call them for you." So if you are in motion, using your gifts, God can bless you. If you are sitting at home and focusing on your need, you are making it hard for God to put a blessing in your path.

Would you like a new car? Maybe a pretty blue one with hyper-whatsit transmission and self-adjusting seat cushions. You could pray for that. You could tell God how useful it would be in His Kingdom. But He might have a better idea for you, and you would never know what it was, because you got what you asked for.

While we were finishing our house project last year I was wondering what I would find to do when it was all over. My cousin was in N.Z, at that time with his 'blue-water' trimaran and I got this idea that it would be a fine thing for me to have a 'trailer-sailer' yacht. I imagined a shiny yellow GRP hull on a galvanised road trailer, and me peacefully sailing and fishing on the Waitemata harbour. God didn't give me one of those boats. What he did give me was the urge to write this book. You might be thinking as you read this that He should have given me the boat instead, but I am grateful that He didn't. The business of committing all this to paper has been a great benefit for me. For instance, before I can say all these things publicly, I have to think whether I really believe them. And if I do believe them, "then am I doing what I believe?" It is so much easier to put my faith into practice after having affirmed my beliefs. Now I am glad that I didn't bother God with that boat idea. I like His plan a lot better.

Another thing about praying for a specific thing for yourself is that God might just give it to you! We can't always see the implications in what we plan, and there may be pitfalls and drawbacks that we haven't thought about. Did you ever play a game of checkers and have this cunning move all planned out, and then when you did it, your opponent jumped over, and captured, three of your counters in reply; and maybe you just lost the whole game? Often the things we yearn for are not as glossy when we see them close up. God sees the entire picture and knows what is the best thing for us.

It takes some faith to trust God for everything. If you are going on an aeroplane ride you don't actually need the ticket until you are ready to board. But we are trained from youth to plan things and

to be foresighted. We like to have the ticket in our travel wallet a couple of weeks before we are going to fly. God doesn't do things that way. He says "trust me".

One of the things that I have found hard to get used to, is that my needs will be met, but not until they are needs in fact. Comes the 15th of the month and there are bills to pay on the 20th, and the bin is empty, all my instincts prompt me to "do something". It is hard to carry on with the job in hand and wait in peace till He provides. But that is His promise and we have to have the cheques written out and ready to post and the bank deposit book in our hand when we go for the mail on the 20th. May I remind you again of the manna He provided for the Children of Israel? It didn't come until it was needed: a day's supply arrived on the day, not before - or after! But it always arrived, and it was always enough.

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## 7. THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - IN PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

Holiness is like happiness. You can't march into your local CHRISTIAN book-shop and buy a box full, any more than you can go into some pleasure palace and order happiness on the house. It is a by-product, if you like, of the process of the outworking of our Lord's will.

By definition, holiness is being set apart for God. Set apart from sin and wickedness to do God's will. Holiness, then, comes from doing God's will as we are separated from the sin in the world. The use of the word saint in the New Testament denotes Christians who fit this definition. Over the years the word has been watered down to commonly mean pious or sacred, but, in the sense that the bible uses it, it means set apart for God. So holiness grows in you as you grow in God.

Holiness can't be adopted like a cloak; I mean that you can't just decide to be holy. If I read in the Word that God wants us to be holy, and then if I say "O.K., I will be holy from ten to twelve every day", then that is meaningless. I could set aside a special place in the house and have a particular shirt to wear while thinking holy thoughts, but that wouldn't be being holy.

Holiness can't be caught, like chicken pox, by associating with holy people in holy places. You don't absorb it through the skin, it comes into you as you do His work. You can try to keep happy by shunning miserable people, but you are far more likely to catch a good dose of happiness by curing somebody's misery. The same with holiness, what holiness you have in you will grow if you are busy caring for 'somebodies' in need.

Happiness comes from anticipation and accomplishment. We have a goal that we look forward to, and that is a part of happiness. We get some more happiness from the doing, during the achievement; and we get still more from the finished work, the accomplishment. Holiness comes like this too as we have hope for things to come, and fulfillment from things that happen.

Let us suppose that you want to have a lot of money, for whatever reason. One way is to make a prisoner of every coin or note that comes into your possession. If you are very then you can be very rich by the time you die. Another way might be to think of what you can do well, and then devote all your energy and talent to doing that thing, and get rich like that. But compare the quality of the rewards. In both cases the end has been achieved, i.e., you have got rich, but at what cost in case one, and with what reward in case two. The miser has no friends and no joy, and the successful person has a wealth of both. The same practical result, but totally different qualities.

There was a 'holy man' I read about once who spent his time on a platform on top of a tall pole. He had pilgrims tie his food to a bit of string to pull up to feed himself. I expect that it is not too hard to be 'holy' when you are up a pole like that: but what good is it? Where can you find a neighbour to love when you live like that? I suspect that such deliberately sought after holiness is not true, but a hollow imitation. If we are set apart in God's service then the holiness we attain will be pure

There can be other dangers in a wrong perspective of holiness. If we are preoccupied with the search for it then we will start examining things with this thought in mind: "Are they holy?", and from there we begin asking, "are the ones who do this and that thing being holy?" And before long we will have drawn a line in the sand with holy people and things on one side, and some people on the other side who fall short of those holy things. Then we will want to minister to them to make them holy. And they will feel condemned. When I am condemned, I want to hide away out of sight until I feel better. It does not feel like being loved to me to be prayed for because I am not holy enough, or because something I do is not a holy thing.

Another danger here is that this kind of thinking will cause a situation where we feel compelled to do this or that because it will make us holy. We are making a compulsion out of what ought to be a desire; a burden out of what ought to be a joy. Paul teaches about 'works of the flesh' in his letters. We want to please our heavenly Father with willing obedience, not with a rigid observance of rules, or with the 'good works' of the flesh. If we were only to kiss our marriage partner because the book of happy marriage rules says to do so, then very soon our kisses would be unappreciated. We serve our God because we love Him and want to express that love by pleasing Him.

## 8. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN - OBEDIENCE AND UTILITY

Just before I came into the Kingdom of God I had another text on my mind. It was the verse that says *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matt 6,33.KJV). I was particularly interested in 'having all these things added unto' me at that time, because we were in the middle of a business crisis. Where was this kingdom?; How did one get into it?; I couldn't find the key anywhere, nor did I seem to be able to find the person who did have it.

When my Heavenly Father did put his hand on my shoulder and bring me in, He gave me a very beautiful present. A very apt present. What He gave me on that first birthday was a glimpse of the Kingdom through His eyes. He showed me some of the people as He sees them, and what I saw was the inner value of those people. A strong and useful characteristic for each one.

Paul says we see 'as through a glass darkly' and a very good thing that is too. He was blind for days after Jesus opened the window of heaven above the Damascus road and let a little light shine on him. For me, that tiny glimpse was almost too much too. It happened at seven o'clock one Monday morning. Mary called our friends to share the news, and when they came they brought me a birthday card and a packet of tissues. Well, I used all that packet of tissues that day with tears of happiness. I found out where the Kingdom of God was alright - I thought that I was so full of joy I was going to burst, and I vaguely remember repeating all day, "It is so beautiful". So the Kingdom of Heaven is in us, and we are in it.

How then do we get in. I remember from my Bible Class days, a camp song with an interminable number of verses that went like this: Oh you can't get to heaven (echo) in a Ford Model A (echo) Cause the Lord's got shares (echo) in Chevrolét (echo) (chorus) I ain't go'n to grieve my Lord no more I'll knock on somebody else's door I ain't go'n to grie-e- e-ve my Lord no more. This song was saying that we can't get to heaven by an idol: any idol. In New Zealand we have the idols of materialism.

It is a relatively prosperous country and there is no shortage of these idols, but they can't help us into the Kingdom..

It is not possible to go there on a guided tour; nor on a work permit; or with a visa from some other kingdom. We have to be born there. We have to die to the world and be born again. We become the children of God when we do this. *"....Jesus declared, I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"*. (John 3,3). This is a twofold action, with the first requirement being to die to self, to die to the world.

For me the dying didn't happen quickly. I had been baptised by immersion in water about 18 months previously, but I wasn't ready to surrender my total will to Him. What finally let God have His way with me, was my decision to surrender a last stronghold of stubbornness. It was my opinion that I didn't need to pray aloud in private. My reasoning was that God could hear me very well anyway, and I felt very silly muttering aloud by myself. I had been, that week-end, to a church family camp, and was almost desperate because nothing had happened to me, despite my yearning to 'get into the Kingdom'. Others had been 'touched' at the camp, and I had come to the end of my resources. So, as a last resort, I gave in and started to pray aloud, (by myself). And that is the point that I had missed, I wasn't by myself at all, as I very soon found out. It is one thing to have God tidily pigeon-holed in your mind, it is quite another thing to have Him busily opening windows and letting in some light. And joy!

All my life I have wanted to 'do it my way'. That was the first thing I learned about obedience to God. We have to die to self before we can be obedient. As a young married man I was sometimes pleased to surprise Mary with a plan for a week-end away. I would come home from work and tell her to start packing. Sometimes I was hurt because I got a cool reception to my plan. She had some other idea in mind for that weekend. Now I know that it is much more fun to work out these things together, so that we are both satisfied. It seems that it is like that with God too. If I want to be in his will, then I must not give Him 'nice surprises' by doing it my way; by finding some 'good work' and doing it in my own strength.

Even worse, was an attitude that I had that allowed me to bend the rules in favour of some 'good cause'. It seemed to me, that if the desired end was worthy enough, then it didn't matter that I flouted convention to get there. God's plan was much more important than some man-made rule. Perhaps that

is so; but with my 'man-made' plan; it was the authority that God had instituted that I was flouting. Now I can see that His plan will prevail against any man-made rule, without my intervention.

After that joyful Monday (my Birthday), when I was born again, I got very busy. I started to take a big interest in all the things that happened in the church. I got on all the committees and *helped* the committee members. I went to singing practice and *shared my experience* in music. I went to house-group and *explained* a lot of things to them. Then it happened. Did you ever have your three-year-old 'help' you do something? Maybe you got called to the phone while you were painting, and he did some of it while you were away. Or maybe you were brought toast and tea in bed one week-end.

I will never forget when our eldest decided give me a surprise and mow the front lawn for me. First off she mowed her initials, in script, with embellishments, and then she mowed a nice frame around them. I was surprised - for about seven seconds, then the surprise feeling gave way to a different and much stronger emotion. So what happened to me when I helped God in His garden in Drury. I got sent to my room.

I can now imagine what must have happened. At the weekly planning meeting in heaven they would have this little item on the agenda. About the problem in Drury. "We have to put the brakes on this kid". "What is he up to now?" "Well he's getting into every room and making waves. The people are having to hold their breath when he goes past. In fact he's organising." "Organising? Oh dear. Well perhaps we better give him a little time alone". So I was given time to meditate.

When you get sent to your room it seems that nobody cares about you any more, and it gets dark, and you think you are starving. Nobody takes any notice when you yell. They hear you but they don't reply. And when you have had time to think about why you were sent there and you are sorry about it, then you can come back out. And you are prepared to be obedient. I can see now that when I dug up the new seedlings and rearranged them in nice rows, with all the ones that hadn't yet flowered out of sight at the back, that that wasn't Gods plan for that fellowship. They didn't need me to spray them with water and fertiliser, and rearrange them in my pattern. What I was doing was trying to be the gardener myself. Now I do the work that is in front of me and when God wants me to do something, He puts that in front of me and I do it - His way.

It seems that the Kingdom of God is something like the gardens in the world. Some gardens are quite traditional, like some churches: some are newly planted; some are great fields of strong growing produce; some are overgrown and needing loving; and some have disappeared. The weeds encroach always, and with His help, need to be uprooted; there are periods of sunshine; and times of drought. But always the gardens are producing something, whether it be beauty, or food, or seasonings or whatever fruit is proper for what He has sown there. Sometimes the Gardener transplants us to another garden; sometimes He prunes us, and takes away the weeds; and if we grow according to His will; in due time we will bring forth the fruit. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control.

What would you do if a tool you were using started to question your intentions?. What if the saw said, "that piece of wood is too hard to cut"; or if the mower said, "I want a drink of fuel," and, "are you going to sharpen my blade?". It is the same with us and God if we make conditions about working for Him, and bother Him about our wants. He made us - every particle of bone or protein. He knows before we do exactly what vitamins and carbohydrates we need to 'fuel' us, just as the workman knows what is needed to keep a tool in working order. He knows what we are capable of doing, and He wouldn't use us beyond our strength. He has promised us that in His Word.

Our use in God's sight is a function of our willingness and obedience. If we are 'available' 24 hours a day, then we can be useful tools. We have to put the world aside to be obedient. One man said, "*Let me first go and bury my father*"; and another said, "*Let me first say goodbye to my family*". But Jesus replied, "*No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God*". (Luke 9,57-62.)

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## 9. VICTORIOUS LIVING - JOY AND PAIN

There is no light without dark; no good without bad; no joy without pain. All values are polarised, in that they can be a positive or a negative. Good and evil; or selfishness and generosity, for instance. But there is a sliding scale between the two poles. No doubt complete goodness, or complete generosity does exist, perhaps in some saints, but for the ordinary sinner, these values are in part. We can attempt to be 'good', but never achieve total goodness. Some days we are good, and some days we are not so successful. In the same way we fluctuate in our level of victorious living between lows and highs - mountains and valleys.

The peaks and troughs of life are evident to us as we experience them, and we can observe them too in the 'life' of our fellowships. Churches will go from a high of enthusiasm to a low of falling away, and the other way around. This is entirely natural. It is part of living, part of growing, part of learning. A mountaintop cannot exist without lower ground on either side, and the height of the mountain is a function of the depth of the adjacent valleys.

If you take a scenic flight over a country you will see the mountains, sometimes bare, and sometimes in snow-covered grandeur. And if you go backpacking through that same country you will see what is in the valleys and villages, and what is on the flatlands. So, for a more complete knowledge of that place you must do both. The same thing holds true for our spiritual knowledge. It can only be complete when we have traveled through the valleys on either side of the high places. If our lives are based on the expectation of only encountering high levels of joy and fulfillment then we will as surely fall as would a mountain without firm foundations, and there have, regrettably, been enough instances of those in high places falling. The media never misses an opportunity to splash those news items.

We can't exist solely on the mountaintops, however much we enjoy the 'highs', and want to prolong them. You can, though, if you are very careful, stick to the middle ground, but if you don't slide down into any valleys, neither will you ever get any of the wonderful joy that makes a peak so desirable. You can be a 'pew sitter' if you like, never actually doing anything, just keeping out of trouble. You will be 'safe', safe in the sense that the enemy won't need to spend any powder and shot on you because you are no danger to him. He saves his shots for those who are doing the fighting.

There is quite a lot of battle analogy in the Bible, and I find that I can identify very clearly with that. It is a battle that we are in, the battle between good and evil; the battle between the powers of darkness in this world and the body of Christ.

Are you getting shot at? Are there temptations being laid in your path? I venture to suggest that if not, then you are not in the forefront of the battle. Are you sitting safe at home, or safely on your pew? The battle is on every front. Whenever we go forth at our Fathers bidding we can expect to engage the enemy. The weapons he uses are many; and he attacks from within - our selves; and from without - the world. It is a kind of guerrilla warfare. The devil specialises in sneak attacks. He works in the dark and from under cover and always tries always to catch us unawares.

What do you take when you go forth? Do you have your church's doctrines under one arm, and a pocket full of theology? The last time I fell into a valley, I didn't get any help at all from my doctrines and theology. The more I tried to work it all out in the light of those things, the deeper my confusion became. What I found, eventually, to fight my way back up was the light of truth. The humble, simple business of being obedient and loving my neighbours. That is the sure foundation on which I started to climb. That is the key to 'living in victory'. It is to do one thing; to take one step, in obedience. After that you will have in front of you another thing, another step. So you take that step too, and you are on the way. Who was it that said, "the faith to move a mountain consists in bending down to pick up the first rock"?

The battle is continuous. It is not the kind of battle where there is a whole country conquered, then a time of refreshing, and another country and so on. It is a set of never-ending steps that we take, that we can win. I first thought when I heard this phrase, 'living in victory', that it meant that nothing ever went wrong.

Life is not like that for us. The equation is this.

Victorious living = Joy + Pain. To live, we experience both; life is not possible without ups and downs. The victory is the triumph over the downs.

We have to have the valleys for completeness, but we can climb out from each valley with the steps of obedience and the new knowledge that God puts in front of us. The battle will not be over for us until we go to be with our Father, but we can be winning all the time until then.

In the workshop I have found that the quality of the finished job depends on the quality of the foundation. I have to lay a sure foundation and build up from there. I could hurry the beginnings and make the work appear to be good by filling the gaps with filler and finishing it all with a shiny paint job, but sooner or later the poor quality would show through.

The quality of my 'walk' depends on the sureness of the foundation I begin from, and the higher I climb the stronger that foundation needs to be. I start with the promise of salvation - *"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."* Under the New Covenant, because I believe in Him, I just have to love Him and my neighbour and be obedient. Obedience isn't that complicated, because Jesus said *"We will come and live in you"*, and the Holy Spirit (part of the We), *"will teach you all things"*. That is the rest of my foundation.

I don't need a platform built with the planks of doctrine to stand on. If I had one of those somebody could come along and make it unstable by attacking one of the planks. That happens frequently. It happened to me. Now I just have the New Covenant and it is unassailable.

There is a freedom in this simplicity. I can live with your doctrine because I love you. I don't have to find an argument to refute your beliefs; I love you the way you are, the way God made you. I have come to see that the infinite variety of the called out ones is just part of God's bounty; so I thank him for you, whatever you believe. I don't have to have a policy for homosexuals for instance.

If you ask me about that I will say

"which homosexual are you concerned about?" I am happy to deal with that individual on his own merits, as a person that God loves. I don't need a policy on homosexuals to be a neighbour to any one of God's creations. Whatever problem (if any), that person may have is distinctly his own, and needs to be ministered to on that basis. No doctrine required. I know what the bible says about unnatural sexual acts, and if I had a 'policy' it would probably include some condemnation because of that. If there is any condemnation required, it ought to come from within him, from his inner conviction, arising out of a desire to be free from sin. If I had to be part of a group, you could class me along with others with a Welsh heritage, but I hope you wouldn't feel that you had to have a policy on Welshmen before you could minister to me. I am first of all me, and I hope you wouldn't want to include the other Welshmen in my need.

I want to thank Juan Carlos Ortiz for his book 'The Cry of the Human Heart', that peeled off the layers of doctrine and tradition that surrounded my conception of Christianity. I had long been troubled by the apparent contradictions between what I had been brought up to believe and what the rest of the world seemed to think. He showed me that there is no need for any theological argument or doctrinal differences if we just love the Lord and each other.

For me, the reality is that the Kingdom of Heaven is here, now, and that I can be totally occupied with His business, irrespective of the 'problems' in the church. What does it matter if I believe in full immersion and you believe in partial immersion or sprinkling for baptism so long as I believe that I have been baptised as John promised by *"he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit"*? I once had a friend who said, "If it works, don't mess about with it!" Well it works for me, so I would be foolish to mess about with it by wondering if I had been 'done' properly. That would just be a distraction. I am happy too, that whatever you believe works for you. Jesus did not say, "Love your neighbour, but first check to see that his doctrine is working properly".

What is your perception of Jesus? If I ask you to give me a word picture of Him, what would it be like? Would it include a white robe, or perhaps Galilee with side references to Nazareth? Do you perhaps see Him as Holman Hunt portrayed Him, knocking at the closed door? If these are your perceptions, then your expectations are probably unrealistic. Jesus is dynamic. The key word there is 'is'. He is part of the now, the now that started at the Cross 2000 years ago. What happened in the thirty odd years before that was to underline the sacrifice that He made for us. It was to give us a perspective of God's love for us, a perspective that must always include the Cross and the resurrection. The shedding of His blood sealed the New Covenant, the covenant that promised: *"If anyone loves me,*

*he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him". (John 14,23)*

If your picture of Jesus doesn't include Him right there inside you, ready to mediate for you with The Father, you have missed something. Our 'walk with The Lord' has to be built on a sure foundation. Not a whole doctrine of salvation that includes sanctification and all the other 'ations', but the plain fact of salvation. Read a little further in John, to chapter 15, verse 23, where Jesus says, "*This is my command: Love each other*". It is simple enough; we are assured of salvation, and commanded to love.

The eventual victory is implicit in the promise of salvation, and the way to get there is to love and obey. Can you think of a better way? Is there a better way in the doctrines of any group you know?

There is sometimes more wisdom available in the world, than in all the learned 'religions'. I remember an older popular song that goes like this: "If you see your brother standing by the road, with a heavy load, from the seeds he's sowed. ....Then won't you try a little kindness, just show a little kindness.....". I think that that song embodies more of the spirit of Christianity than all of the weighty doctrines. After all that song just says what Jesus said, "*Love your neighbour*"; and He defined our neighbour as the man in need on the side of the road.

## 10. EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES - PERCEPTIONS

One of the difficulties of present day living is that we can so easily come to have unrealistic expectations. For instance, when I read a lot of books by famous people describing their experiences, I came to think that those experiences must be normal for committed Christians. The first 'unreality' in that is of course that when somebody writes about their experiences, they include all the exciting ones, and the meaningful ones. They don't write about all the Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and weeks when nothing meaningful or exciting happened. It is easy to unconsciously assume that all these happenings were in a continuous and stimulating sequence. That is how they are written down, and that is what we read. If I give a description of all of my normal days between events, then this book will be longer than a dull sermon. I don't have to think too hard to see that any writer is living the same day to day life as me between those recordable events. So my thoughtlessly assumed hope of living a breathtakingly fulfilling life for God is a long way from the reality that He has planned for me.

There is, to use an example, a ratio of one Paul Yongi Cho to 700,000 parishioners in his church in Korea. My chances of being used by God in a like manner to Dr Cho are probably a lot less than a million to one. I had better identify with one of his 700,000. Quite apart from the statistical odds, there is the little matter of humility. That is a much better reason for me to have realistic expectations. As a child in the Kingdom I am more fitted to be asked to fetch my Fathers slippers than to, say, read to Him after supper.

Another unrealistic expectation that I have identified concerns the matter of our first love with Jesus. It is just like a boy/girl love affair in the sequence of events. We meet and fall in love, we marry and have our honeymoon. And after the honeymoon we start the business of life together. It would be idyllic if we could walk arm in arm with our partners on a sunlit beach for the rest of our days. But that is not what happens. We have this instinct to build a nest and raise our young, so it means that we go to work to save; to build; to line the nest with comfortable material; to make it strong for whatever the future may be.

So it is with our coming into the Kingdom. That first wonderful euphoria is followed by a slide back into the reality of living on this world of sin. If I go to all the inspirational meetings and courses and retreats, and pursue with all earnestness all the opportunities for worship and pure communion with God, I can't get back to that first ecstasy. There will be times when I can be so conscious of His presence that I am almost overcome, but I can't take that time and make it last until the 'high' of the next meeting.

There are no gas stations or convenience stores on cloud nine. We have to come down to earth, if only to get our breakfast. And after breakfast we go to work. And that work is going about our Fathers business, in which we can take a quiet joy. That quiet joy is a very good thing with which to fill the space between 'highs', and it is a realistic expectation.

Do you belong to the 'Holy Spirit club'? Do you know all the buzz-words? Do you say things like, "Oh, the Holy Spirit is really working here tonight"? If you are on the outside looking in, it all seems to be like a gathering of the initiated in some esoteric society where there is little attention paid to ordinary mortals.

I have seen the same thing happen with the advent of computers in everyday society. There were a select few who started with this new special knowledge, and they surrounded themselves with a whole incomprehensible jargon; a language that they used to bewilder us common folk. It all made them seem very important and indispensable to those not in the know. The reality is that it is as easy to learn to use a computer as it is to learn to drive a car, and that is well within people's capability. The difficulty is a false one, deliberately manufactured to keep the club as exclusive as possible, (and as highly paid).

There is no mystique about the Holy Spirit. He is freely available to anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. He is not an optional extra, He is part of the package, the agreement God made with us as the New Covenant. He foretold it through the Old Testament:

*"In the last days', God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people'." (Joel 2) "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time', says the Lord. 'I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds'." (Jer., 31) and confirmed it in the New: "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you for ever. The Spirit of truth". (John 14,16) "But the counselor, The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things..." (John*

14,26) So that we can be confident that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the right of all who come to Him. No passwords; no special knowledge; no performing to some impossible standards; just simple acceptance of God's promise.

I like reading legal documents. They can take a lot of understanding sometimes, but they have a common form. They start with a statement of the intent of the contract, and go on with a whole raft of whereas's and herein-unto-befores to cover any foreseeable eventualities, and finish with a conclusion; commonly a 'quiet enjoyment' clause, and the legal 'marks' and seals of the parties concerned. God's covenant with us is like that too. The intent is plain: God says "...I will be their God, and they will be my people", and He promises to save us from the world and supply all our needs. We, in turn, promise to believe in Him, to love Him and obey His commands. Not an onerous contract by any measure.

Then we come to the 'fine print'. There have been Herculean arguments among the 'believers' over the interpretation of the wherefore and therefore clauses, but God has never changed the contract by *'the smallest letter, or the least stroke of a pen'* since it was sealed in the Blood of Calvary.

I like Paul's advice to the Romans in chapter twelve where he is advising respect for local customs. He makes the point that if we distress a brother by what we do, we are not acting in love, and goes on to say, "...whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God." And the point here is, that although the New Covenant is open to all mankind to enter, it is an individual contract with each believer. When I make my commitment, I am contracting myself alone: not the rest of my family, or the neighbours, or others with a Presbyterian or any other label. My contract was sealed at 7.10 AM on April 17th 1987. Yours will have a different date; it is your contract.

I have never read a clause that hints or suggests that I am to police someone else's agreement with God. The reverse is true in fact. My copy sounds a clear warning that if I attempt such a thing then I will be judged with the same measure that I have attempted to use. I know for sure that my observance of the fine print leaves a lot to be desired, and I couldn't afford to be judged on my performance to date.

I have learned that my expectations of the Christian life must be based on MY relationship with God. He made me. I believe that He doesn't make mistakes, therefore He made me the way I am way on purpose; with a specific plan in His mind; an individual plan that only I can fulfill. How then could I compel you, whom He made in a different mould, to conform to my expectations? How can I expect to have the same experiences as you who are so uniquely yourself? Again, an unrealistic expectation. Your realities are not mine, or your or my brothers, but still form part of a great universal truth. They are as real to you as mine are to me, and as different as we are as individuals.

I suspect that it is a great mistake to look at what our brothers and sisters receive from the Lord and to then want that for ourselves. My very good friend receives some amazing revelations from God, but if I covet his blessings, then I run the risk of also receiving his tribulations. My present feeling is that I don't really need any more tribulations just now. Especially not my friend's ones: I've seen some of them. If we get down to cases, then we probably don't really want God to treat us all alike. Fortunately He wouldn't anyway, because He knows what is best for us, and loves us too.

The same conditions apply to corporate expectations as to personal ones. Because fellowships are distinctly different, just as people are, God gives us all different treatment at different times, according to our present need. It would be quite unrealistic to look at another church family and see that they have 'got it all together' and that the Holy Spirit is doing mighty things in their midst, and expect God to make your own church family into a likeness of them.

The first difference is that the others are probably a lot more mature spiritually. We give milk to babies and solid food to grown-ups. It is useless to ask God for solid food if we are still spiritually immature. Living is growing. It is not possible to stay in the same condition all the time, and if we are not growing, we are dying. That is true for people; for systems; for businesses; and for corporate bodies - churches, fellowships, mutual-aid fraternities, and the Social Welfare department.

So the 'diet' that He gives us is right for our present state of spiritual growth. It is normal to hope to get to a state of 'having God do mighty things' in and with us, but we grow into that state. Remember Paul's letters to the churches? He gently chides them for behaving as spiritual children, and regrets

that he must offer them milk. Well, we must grow to get closer to our spiritual goals, and our longing ought to be to grow well, as God would have us do.

Having said earlier that my realities are not yours, I want to qualify that. I would prefer to use the expression 'perceived realities' here, because we each see things from our own perspective. We use, for instance, expressions like, "in my view"; and, "it appears to me" to express our opinions to each other, and those opinions, or 'views', are based on what we have seen, or experienced, for ourselves.

Imagine two travelers arriving in our city of Auckland on the same day. One comes into the deep-water harbour in a ship; through the downtown business district; and on through the older suburbs to his motel. The other comes into the international airport, beside the tidal western harbour; through the green fields and newer suburbs to the same motel. They both grab a postcard as they register and go to their rooms and write greetings and a brief description of Auckland to their mutual friend abroad. You have guessed it already, the 'mutual friend' gets two wildly differing descriptions of Auckland. However they have each faithfully reported their perceived 'reality'. If they went, the next day, out of the city on the opposite side to the one they came in, their 'differences' would disappear as their perspectives were rounded out.

When we disagree, on whatever level, we ought to get up out of our comfortable chair, and go and stand shoulder to shoulder with the other person. Then we will see what they can see. If we can both see the same thing, there will be no differences. When we disagree 'on principle'; (a favourite Christian pastime); we are not taking the trouble to find out what the other party's principles are. If we understood them properly, we likely wouldn't disagree with them. It is very important to realise that the other person's perceived realities are just that. They are real to him, and if you deny them then you are attacking his reason. After all, those things happened to him; or he saw those things himself. You can show him your 'reality', but you must do it gently, and only after you have seen his with your own eyes of understanding. Then your expectations of him, and his expectations of you will be truly 'realistic'. This could be what is meant in the Bible by 'speaking the truth in love'....

There is a young man of my acquaintance who could charitably be described as 'helpful'. For instance, if you are doing a job the wrong way, he will quickly tell you about the right way, but even though he helps you to finish the job, you will still feel a little silly for having gone about it the wrong way. He used to make me feel like a cat that has been stroked from south to north. One day I heard someone criticizing him, and although I would have offered the same criticisms under provocation, I suddenly saw him in a different light. What I now saw was that the things that had struck me before as the 'rough corners' that abraded people, were in fact the cutting edges of a useful tool in God's kingdom.

His willingness to march up to total strangers and engage them in conversation is a valuable asset to anyone who wants to evangelise. His refusal to be overawed by 'important' people allows him to get things done that I wouldn't have the courage to take on. His highly colloquial conversation lets him identify closely with the work-mates that he usually associates with, and his very brashness is the asset that lets him witness to more people in a day than I can in a month. A very effective tool. So I came to see that my perception, my 'realisation', of a brother or a sister was quite different to the reality of God's perception of them. Jesus said, *"By their fruit you shall know them"*. I was misled by the prickles; by the camouflage of the dark looking leaves; and I didn't even see the fruit until He showed me. I know the Bible commands us not 'to covet our neighbours grass, nor yet his hand-mower', but I do have a problem with coveting some of that fruit.

## 11. GOOD AND EVIL- THE BELL THEORY

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If you draw a line from left to right and label one end short, and the other tall; then another rising, upright line from the LH end and mark off ten spaces on it with the 10 at the top; you will have drawn a graph on which you could map the statistics of height of the population. If you do that using each space up to represent, say, 1 million people; and then link the top of the plots that you have drawn you will find that the line along the top traces a bell shape. You can do the same exercise with people's weights, for instance, or their I.Q.s, and you will find that the bell always appears. The bell shape is called the Normal (Distribution) Curve, or the Gaussian Curve, after C. F. Gauss who first found it.

There are very few real geniuses in the world, so they would fit in the little bit of bell that sticks out to the lower right. Similarly, there are very few people with no sense at all, and they fit in the little bit on the left, and the rest of us 'normal' folks fit into the big middle bulge. If you are average, you are near the centre line, with above and below to the right and left respectively.

I ask you to imagine the same exercise done with the labels of bad and good along the bottom line. We will have a few good saints to fit the little space on the right, and some truly bad people for the left side. Now we come to the interesting bit. EVERYBODY ELSE fits into the big bulge in the middle. Some are a little bit to the left, and some are a little bit to the right. BUT WHERE IS THE LINE? Can you then say everybody on the right is good, and everybody on the left is not? What about those who are exactly in the middle? If you are still happy about this, then try adding a few more statistics on top of the good/bad bell. Like pride/humility; patience/impatience; etc. The only absolutes in this are the points at the ends where the bell tapers out to nothing. In those last spaces where there is room for only one we can fit Jesus on the right and the devil on the left. I can be happy with that, but not be at all happy about trying to fit someone into any other particular place on the graph.

One point that comes out clearly to me here is that it is impossible to judge people in terms of moral values. A tough criminal might well be a loving husband and father and very fond of his pet. What measure do you use to judge him? Another man might have never broken a law in his life and yet be a rotten father with a positive hatred of cats. What measure do you use to judge him? If you score them both from one to ten for law-breaking and family commitment, then they both get a 0 and a ten, but for different subjects. Their total scores are equal. Are they good or bad?

*"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* (Matt 7;1,2). If I judge someone, for whatever reason, my judgment will be false, because it is plain that I can never know enough about that person to judge fairly. The above warning from Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is frightening if we consider the implications. It will be hard enough to be judged for the things we have done and have to answer for, without that judgment being as incomplete and unfair as the judgments we have handed down.

In 1 Corinthians chapter two where Paul is discoursing on wisdom from the Spirit, he says, *"The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment"*. I take this to mean that I am expected to judge all issues in the light of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, but to refrain from judging anybody.

In the courtroom a judgment is not complete until the judge puts on his black cap and delivers his verdict. Judging is a composite act that first weighs evidence and then pronounces a sentence. Looking at evidence is not judging. I had trouble understanding the prohibition on judging for a while. It seemed to me that it wouldn't be right to just accept apparently wrong acts and attitudes from others. Now I see that I am not to suspend my critical faculties at all. I can still see and weigh the 'evidence'. What I must not do is to pass a sentence. It is not my business to offer condemnation in any form. My business is to love people as He has commanded. He has reserved the right of judgment to Himself.

If we were to stand outside our imaginary Good/Bad 'bell' we would see that the feet were pointing in all directions. Some folk are getting better; some are getting worse; some are standing still; and some are getting nowhere by running in ever diminishing circles as their bewilderment with modern society increases. They try a little T.M. perhaps or sample some 'new age' seminars, or get tangled up in reincarnation and astrology in their search for truth.

For any problem, a solution that is based on love must always point to good. And this is our role in the community. Remember the chorus of that popular song I quoted earlier - "Why don't you show a little kindness? Just shine your light for everyone to see." We can do this whatever our station in life. We can do it around the lunch-room table; at P.T.A. meetings; at club committee meetings; and, most significantly, in any level of government that we can get access to.

Do I hear you say?, "Hey, wait a minute, politics is dirty, that's no place for a Christian." Well, are they? The practice of it certainly is in some places. But is that any reason to let our country go to hell? Nothing that God has created is inherently dirty; only our misuse of it is wrong. Practically everything that man has had his hand on is capable of being misused. Do we stop using syringes, for instance, now that the criminals use them for drug abuse and as a threatening weapon infected with AIDS? No, we just take a lot more care with them.

In His Word we are promised immunity from harm from poison and snakes: that seems to cover present party politics pretty well. Have a glance at Ephesians 5; 10,20. My reading of that has always been that it is a mandate for fighting the enemy on all levels. When we surrender any ground without a fight, we give him a free hand to do what he likes, and he likes all right. When I read in the Word that, "*Love conquers all*", I believe it. With such a 'super-weapon', and with the complete protection of the armour mentioned in the above passage in Ephesians; what can we not accomplish?

There is plenty of imagery in the Bible using light. We are as a light to the world; we are to shine our light for everyone to see. As we witness in the community with love we are shining a light that leads to good, and to God. If we get enough of the feet in the bell pointing to the good end, then the whole population is drawn in that direction.

The bell shape is not fixed in time or space. Populations are dynamic. They can degenerate, and they can evolve. That is what history is about. I see a direct link between the fall from power of a nation, and its moral decay; with the last causing the first. We call this movement of the bell-shape progress, but it can be in any direction. It is our task to ensure that that progress is real, that it is progress toward the good.

There is a word these days that applies to the centre line of the bell. It is the 'norm'. Apt enough in this illustration, given that the bell is known as the normal curve. Changing standards in society are predicated on the fact that, if enough people do it, then it must be right. 'It' becomes the Norm. As a small child I was encouraged to throw my sweet wrappers out of the car window to keep the car interior tidy. The 'norm' now is to drop them on the car floor to keep the great outdoors tidy - Progress. Similarly, as a child, I was accustomed to people 'keeping up appearances', especially those in high places. Now the Norm is to publish, as luridly as possible, any mis-steps or indiscretions of the high and the mighty - Progress? Whatever happened to our sense of decency?

Just because 'most of the people do it' is not justification for a Christian to abate any of the standards that God has set for us. His standards do not change, they are immutable, and they are uncompromising. That sounds a little severe perhaps, but just look at the second half of Psalm 19: "*They are more precious than gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*" If we '*live such lives among the pagans*' that they will '*see your good deeds and glorify God on the day....*'; then truly there will be a great reward.

As a young man I was intrigued by the apparent freedoms implicit in the 'permissive society'. Now I am appalled by the cost of those 'freedoms': The rampant sexually transmitted diseases; AIDS; the brutality inspired by pornography and drugs; the hosts of children that don't know what a family is; and much more. There is no shortage of opportunity for us to point to the good, with our lives and our whole being.

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## 12. MALE AND FEMALE- HE CREATED THEM

*"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."* (Genesis 1,27). I have some problems with the extremes of feminism and chauvinism. To me, what we have here is entirely separate roles, and I can't be happy with the concept of trying to establish a set of standards whereby males are equal to, or superior to, or inferior to females. We can compare apples to peaches if it is a case of comparing specific qualities, such as acidity, sweetness, or taste preference. But is an apple a better fruit than a peach, or is a peach better than an apple? It is an impossible question unless you qualify it with a condition: Such as, is it better for thirst quenching, or whatever.

Mary is better than I am at childbearing, cookie baking, and keeping the cheque stubs filled in. There is a great list of things that she is more skilled in than I am. How then can we arrive at an answer to the question, "Who is better"? If the wife God had chosen for me had been a lady with a different set of skills would the answer still be the same?

I am very glad that Mary's skills are different to mine because most of her skills are in areas where I am sadly lacking. I hate baking cookies and entering cheque stubs, and my mind boggles at the thought of child-bearing. Only a fool would want to be the master of every sphere in the home when there is a God-given partner to share with. Mary and I have complementary roles, and together we are strong.

It is an essential part of God's design that we are different. Have you ever met a person with the same personality and interests as yourself? And if you have; did you get on well with them? I will bet that you didn't, because they can guess what you are thinking and that is too uncomfortable for us. Such a person is like a mirror, and because we can easily detect their weaknesses, which are so like our own, we can never like them well. We also feel threatened by them because their strengths are our own and we dislike overt competition. We like to meet people who are different, and that is 'the attraction of opposites'.

Walk with me for a minute down the street. Ahead of us are a couple strolling. They look in a shop window, then wait at the corner for a car to pass. If we engage them in conversation for a moment of two, they might tell us what they have just seen. She tells me, "We were looking at the kitchen utensils in the window, and then I saw this lady with six cherries on her hat drive past." He says to you, "We were looking in the hardware shop at the garden tools, and then I saw this expensive sports car with a lady driver."

The same view, but different perceptions, and our perceptions are different. They are qualified by our roles. I never saw garden tools in a shop window until I had a garden I wanted to dig. The traditional roles are the hunter and the nest-builder. I am concerned with the ways and means, Mary is concerned with the objects themselves, not how they are acquired. I look at the horizon, Mary sees the carpet, or lack of it. I bring home the bacon, Mary cooks it, and then we share it.

So I can see differences of outlook that are a function of the roles we have. We are different in our aspirations; I want an easy task of providing, and Mary wants a comfortable nest. If Mary is a peach; and she surely gets my vote; and I must be the 'apple of her eye', because she surrounds me with a totally unmerited love: Then who is the better? I can compare myself with the other 'apples'; indeed that is how we aspire to improve, by finding role models to emulate; but I am quite bewildered by the idea of matching myself against my, or any other man's, wife, sister or mother.

The Bible teaches that when people marry they become one. I can offer an analogy for this. Consider the gases oxygen and hydrogen. In their single state they have obvious physical and behavioral differences, but when they are put together they become one substance - water. If we eavesdrop on an imaginary heated discussion after their union we might hear this. "Why, compared to me you are useless", says Oxygen; "The whole of life depended on me for breathing". "But I am so powerful that when I get in a bomb, I can destroy a whole city", replies Hydrogen with unaccustomed vigour. "And anyway, if it wasn't for my ability to combine with Carbon and the other Elements, there wouldn't be any life for you to support, so put that in your pipe and oxidize it."

They have missed the point. They now have a new role as water, and cannot do as they did before. Mary and I can only function as one if we are together, mutually supportive, and going in the same

direction. As one, we have a new utility. We have become a different part of the fabric of our society. For instance, we are helping to hold up the system, rather than drawing from it, as we were as youngsters. We have a new role in our church family, and God uses us in this new and richer way.

What do you think about Paul's statement in his second letter to Timothy: that he doesn't permit women to teach, or to have authority over a man? I imagine that if you belong to a liberated ladies school, then that statement makes you angry. Alternatively if you are a disciple of the doctrine of submission you will entirely agree with Paul. He seems to go further in his letter to the Corinthians (14,34). *"...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak.... for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."* The last quote is from a discourse on orderly worship, and taken in that context, it is sound advice. In those days, and in those lands where women were commonly regarded as chattels or servants, it would not have contributed to orderly worship to have a woman speak out in their gatherings. It would have provoked feelings of outrage, and shocked those men brought up to believe that women should be silent in public, in the presence of their husbands. But is this to be applied today, in our western world where we are perfectly accustomed to being addressed by women?

I live in New Zealand among an indigenous race of Maori people who have an established and strict protocol for speaking on their 'Maraes', in their meeting houses. I can easily imagine that were Paul to have written an 'Epistle to the East Coast Maoris' of New Zealand, that he might well have said, "...it would be a shocking thing for a stranger to address your meetings..." If that were in the New Testament, would we then have a doctrine that said 'only residents may teach'? That was not a fair question because I didn't give you any context to put that question into.

If you flick back a couple of pages to Corinthians 12,5 you will find, in a passage on propriety of worship, Paul saying; *"..and every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered..."*; which clearly implies that women were speaking out in prayer and prophecy. Without precise knowledge of those local conditions, it is very difficult to come to a clear understanding of this, but I feel that the thrust of Paul's writing here is that we must not offend local custom, and that we are to respect the established order of things. To outrage somebody's feelings is not to act in love. To come up to today in this, then my feelings are outraged if somebody says, "women ought not to speak in our meetings".

I have known two women intimately, my wife Mary, and my mother. Through a close study of these two examples, aided by general observation of the specie, en masse, I have concluded that they are in fact people - not servants, chattels, or any other lesser form of man. This being so, I further conclude that when the Bible speaks of people in general, it means women and men. I can remember no specific exclusions on the grounds of sex. So if the Word says 'some will be teachers; some will be prophets; etc.'; then I can deduce that women can and will teach, and prophesy, etc. I am happy with that, but you may be not.

How then to resolve what look like strong differences of opinion. I can follow my own advice and say, "no matter what you believe, I love you anyway". Or I can appropriate Paul's advice to *'keep what you believe on such things between yourself and God'*. But is that sufficient? No, I think I have to broaden my perceptions until they can accommodate yours as well. There is an interesting 'cop-out' that suggests that women may teach women (and children), but I don't really believe that that gets me off this hook.

I do have a sort of answer for you. It appears to digress a little by suggesting that all teaching ought to come from the Holy Spirit, and that it is entirely irrelevant whether the 'earthen vessel' chosen by God is male or female. Consider what Paul was saying earlier in this passage. *"When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation"*. (14,26). Can you be happy that I interpret 'everyone' in this passage to mean women and men; and that I believe that Paul means here that the whole conduct of the meeting is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? More to the point, perhaps, is my belief that a meeting under the control of the Holy Spirit would not, indeed could not, outrage my feelings, or yours.

I am very happy that Mary is not a 'servant' wife because if I am in error, I want to be told as soon as possible. Who better to tell me? Who knows how to do it gently without me feeling put down? I see that this 'doctrine of submission' can be misinterpreted to give a husband a false sense of infallibility.

If, whatever his pronouncements, his wife believes that she must just say, "Yes dear", and obey, then he will soon get the feeling that he is always right; and that is unlikely.

Most of the misunderstandings that arise from this doctrine can be laid at the door of our differing perceptions of language. Obviously, to submit to one's spouse today means something quite different than it did in AD 100. To me, the idea of submission here is not a master/slave form of submission, but rather a recognition of good. All those passages in the New Testament that advocate submission also advocate loving and cherishing; and in that sort of context, I see submission as recognition of leadership. Now if we take leadership to mean 'going in front and showing the way by example', then I am pleased to follow any spiritual lead that my wife may offer, and she with me. There are times when God shows her some truth that I must respect as coming from Him. There are times when I have a spiritual insight that will fill a need for her. There is never a time when I can order her to, "Do this", or "Do that".

We recently had a discussion about sharing some of our spare accommodation with a single parent in need in our village. My role was to offer 'spiritual leadership' by seeing the moral issue at stake - "Could we afford not to make this offer solely because it might cause us some inconvenience?". That would be just selfishness. But Mary 'made the decision' because only she could determine whether the domestic systems were adequate for two more people. Who is submitted to whom in this case?

If I can cherish Mary properly; if I can love her 'just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her'; then any 'submission' will follow naturally. The compulsion element in the word obedient will not be there. The first rule of successful salesmanship is to, "Find out what the other fellow wants, and offer it to him". The first rule of a successful marriage is the same. When I grew out of my early selfishness in marriage and started to study what would make Mary happy, and tried to give it to her, then I found that my own satisfactions increased dramatically. The joy I found in satisfying her was much greater than the transient satisfactions I used to get from persuading her to please me. However, we have only been married 43 years so far, and I must have a lot more learning to do yet.

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### 13. THINGS - YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Don't buy anything that eats, or needs painting. I can't tell you where I heard that advice, but I agree with the sense of it. There is a tyranny of things. It comes from the fact that whatever you own involves you in some kind of continuing cost. Even the simplest things require space, and that space costs you something to own. The costs of property ownership are obvious; the rates, insurance, maintenance, etc. And everything on the property is getting dusty, rusty, or musty, and will inevitably involve you in some effort to weed it, clean it, paint it or get rid of it. It is a simple equation. The more you own, the more time and effort there is involved in looking after it all.

I have the responsibility for a lot of things. We live on a one hectare property with a lot of shed space, and the things have accumulated. It is 'Murphy's Law', I think, that states that, 'Things will increase to fill the available space'. Well, they have. I asked The Lord the other day whether I was too busy working, because I felt that I needed some space to deal with all these things. He didn't answer that question specifically, but He did send me somebody with a need for some of the things that were bothering me.

I forgot to make a will. When I died to my self, to the world, I didn't make any arrangements about all those things. When I went down into the waters of baptism I left it all behind. I was born again as a spiritual being, and in N.Z. there is no provision in law for spirits to own property. So what happens to it all? I can't be my own heir; nor yet the executor of the estate of R M Bartle (formerly of The World, now Deceased.)

Do you remember how Jesus likened the Kingdom of Heaven to a pearl of great price; and that a man sold all that he owned to get this pearl? Well that is exactly what happened to me. I gave everything that I owned to get into God's kingdom. I gave it all to Him, and my position relative to all those things is now that of a steward. Isn't it interesting? I never really saw the relevance of that story about the merchant finding the pearl of great value, until He guided me to put it in this chapter.

Now we come to the part you might not like. Because God owns these things, I have to look after them properly. I have to be a good steward, and hold it all ready and available for my King. At any time He may want some, or all of it, to use for someone in need. Before, I could let a piece of machinery rust away under a tree and not care too much. Now I am conscious that it isn't mine, and that I have to take good care of it. Given that I am not fond of wire- brushing rust off and painting things; then this is a good argument for getting rid of a lot of unnecessary things.

From force of habit I still say "my car, my screwdriver, and our house", when talking about those objects; but it is a trap, because I then will keep on thinking that they are mine. The reality is that they all belong to Him and I can use them freely in His work. The 'Blessing Principle' applies here too. As long as I start using what I have, then He will bless it to His use; and if more is needed; then He will supply it. It is one of the ways that we can limit God, when we think that what we can see is all there is. They are not our resources that we use, but His, and that being so, there is no limit to what He has available.

I met a young man today who had a face of gloom and a tale to match. He told me the extent of his troubles, and as a stop-gap measure I suggested that he start counting his blessings; beginning with the ones he had just kissed good-bye at home, but warned him that he might finish with a smile on his face if he wasn't careful. That got a small chuckle from him, so I felt it was O.K. to leave him to start work. I checked on him before dinner, and he had been praising The Lord. When I told him that after thinking about his problems all day I could see that they were obviously too big for God to cure and that he had better stop work and start worrying full-time; he saw that that was just what he had been doing, and the cure was completed.

Can you pose a problem that would be too big for God to handle, or think of some need that He could not supply? - if you would only let Him.

In his letter to the Ephesians (4,20), we find Paul telling them that they are to "*be made new in the attitude of their minds*". I have found that the attitude of my mind has been renewed towards the things of this world. I have been given a new treasure; the 'pearl of great price'; the Kingdom of Heaven.

There are other treasures too, the gifts of the spirit; and the fruit of the spirit. In our house we have a wall plaque with this text; *"God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."* That love, the fruit of the Spirit, is a very beautiful treasure, to be valued above anything the world can offer. When I meet somebody now who is not in God's Kingdom, I find it hard not to show this love for them in the way that I am accustomed to loving my brothers and sisters in Christ. They would think me odd to offer them enthusiastic hugs, so I have to think of other ways to show them the Love of God.

As a citizen of the world, I had only my family and a couple of friends to love, but now I have everybody who comes into my orbit. Treasure indeed.

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## 14. WISDOM FROM GOD - CONSCIENCE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

A friend tells me that knowledge is caught, not taught. I understand this to mean that when we are in need and we get the answer to our need, then we really take hold of that knowledge and apply it. That knowledge 'gets in' to us, and we will very likely never forget it. If your washing machine will not go and your neighbour comes and shows you the little red 'reset' button on the motor, you will always remember and apply that useful tip if the machine ever overheats and stops again. That piece of information you have just got would have been meaningless if you had been offered it beforehand. Interesting, maybe, if your taste in information lies in collecting electronic trivia, but irrelevant. I suspect that a lot of the learning we do as Christians is equally irrelevant.

Do you take notes when you go to a seminar or at interesting moments during the sermon? I always used to do that. I thought that whenever I needed that fact or idea, I would be able to refer to the note and fill my need. The reality is that I have never referred to any of those notes again. The ideas I noted seemed very relevant at the time, but I think that any truly memorable fact or idea stuck in my head anyway. With most of these 'good' books and very 'helpful' seminars, there is little real relevance to our needs. I found it almost impossible to remember what they were all about a year later. The real knowledge I have, the truth that sets me free, has all come from the wisdom of the Holy Spirit; through real life experience. When you are down in a valley and you spy a gleam of light from above, then you 'catch' it all right. Joyfully, and with thanks giving. You do not say, "that's interesting", and take a note of it.

We had a visit last week from a pair of ladies from the Watchtower Society. They have often been before and have as often been shown the door. This time, however, Mary felt impelled to ask them in, and she shared with them some of the joy and fulfillment she gets from her walk with God. They asked a lot of questions about her experience, and were interested in all she had to share. When they left they were roundly hugged. One looked startled, but submitted, and the other hugged her right back.

Those ladies got a lot to think about, and none of it was logical argument, or scriptural teaching. What Mary shared with them was truth, the truth of her reality with God. That is what the Bible means when it says 'the Holy Spirit will come, and will teach you all things'. You can't evangelise somebody with logic, or with eloquence, or with doctrine, or with theology; but you can convince them with the sound of conviction in your voice when you testify about what you know to be truth. Mary knows her God is real because He is real to her; He answers her prayers and supplies her needs. Because she was obedient to the inner prompting from the Holy Spirit, she was blessed in that sharing, and those two women heard and experienced what God wanted them to have.

Truth is experienced; it is real; and it is perceived as we experience the reality. The thoughts of Chairman Mao were probably truth to many millions of Chinese when he wrote them, but the present reality for those same Chinese people has cast much doubt on the truth of most of those thoughts. The official writings of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa (New Zealand), are truth to the writers, at the time, and as they write; but I have to make my own mind up about what God wants of me, here, and now. I have to obey the edicts of the church of which I am a member, because God has put in place the authority under which they govern, but my relationships with its members and my neighbours is a matter between me and God. And I will interact with them according to my perceived truths; those beliefs that He has put in my heart. *"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts"*. (Hebrews 8,10)

What God tells you today is for here, now, today. All the schisms and 'isms of our fragmented modern church are in place because somebody or a group of somebodies got a vision or a revelation. Then they proceeded to set it in concrete. Then they surrounded it with thou shalt do this's and thou shalt not do that's. Frequently the original revelation disappeared beneath the man-made structure erected on it.

The founding fathers who began the 'traditional' churches that I grew up with were sincere and dedicated men. They had a vision that was right for that time and for that place. But that vision doesn't encompass the church that has grown up since the 'sixties', and there are a lot of dwindling traditional churches that will not recognise that God is offering a different vision to people today. When God makes a covenant, it is for keeps, but when he tells you something today, it is only to be acted on until He speaks to you again. If He told me to leave the car and walk to church this Sunday, would we then have a church that had to be walked to for ever after? I hope not, it's nearly 12 kilometres from here.

The truth doesn't change. What does change is our perception of it. My perception of what is meant by obedience to God has changed in the relatively short time that I have been called out from the world. You can see from what happened to me in earlier chapters that my understanding was so bad that God had to 'explain' it to me.

This changing perception is equally true for fellowships. The responses required from, and the spiritual nourishment offered to churches changes as the congregations mature. The right and proper order of service of the church of my father is quite inadequate for the 1990's. It is significant here, I think, that he always finished a service with the benediction; *"May the Love of God and the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you, now, and for evermore. Amen"*. If the Holy Spirit had indeed manifested Himself to us, we would have fled from our pews in terror.

It was a cousin of mine that advised me not to 'throw the baby out with the bath-water'. My low opinions of the traditional churches were based on my perception of their inadequacy for today. Now I see that their perceived truths were right for them in their time, and were in fact as comprehensive as I could wish them to be. I wrote in an earlier chapter that the old hymns 'said it all'. The fact that I couldn't see those truths then is not their fault. In fact, I really owe my present joys to the nurturing of those 'old' churches.

The truth is essentially simple. We make it complex with all our interpretations that result in rules for this and that situation, but it is observance of the simple commands of Our Lord that gets us out of difficulties. 'The whole law and the prophets' is summed up in the command to love one another. However complicated the situation we may find ourselves in; it is soluble with the simple steps of obedience. We had a difficulty with a particular thing that we were saving for. No matter what we did, the special account for that payment would not grow. It was part of a plan we had for paying off an old debt, and we felt strongly obliged to keep that account up to date. Whenever we saved a little for it, then something unexpected came along that used up that saving. Then we realised that, despite our 'plan', it was only another need in God's eyes, and that He has promised to supply all our needs. So we abandoned the 'plan'. Such a simple answer from such a basic truth. We knew that we ought not to worry, yet fell into that trap because of the conditioning of the world; the 'save for a rainy day' thinking, that blinded us to His promise of provision, and led us into trying to solve the problem in our own strength.

God always gets at least two birds with the one stone. We have found that His answer to a need always blesses more than the needy one. We can pray for a particular answer to a need that we have seen, but He will often answer in an unexpected way, and His answer will be much better. I have noticed this with His revelations too. When I need an example or something for the next piece of writing, He will enclose it with a practical blessing as well. For instance, the two Watchtower ladies mentioned above. Mary was blessed; the ladies were blessed and I was given a piece of truth for this chapter. When we minister God's truth to each other then we are all blessed.

There is a joy that follows such ministry that is not apparent when we minister in our own strength by offering opinions and advice. I had a man to see me today and he wanted to talk about 'hearing from God', so I was able to rehearse the bits of this chapter that I am writing now. If I blessed him, then he also blessed me. Coincidence, or His all-encompassing provision?

I said before that the idea for writing this book came from God. Not only the idea to write it, but the inspiration too. I had some truths I felt I ought to share as a consequence of my earlier experiences, and they were the 'bones' of the first few chapters.

I have always been a keen reader and have often wondered about the business of book writing. I imagined that it would be hard, tedious work, and that I would not have enough 'stickability' to last the course of a complete book. That could well be true in ordinary circumstances, but in this case I have been blessed right down to my boots by this experience. I am keen to begin each night, and it has all happened very quickly. So far I have been writing for only 5 weeks and 3 days, and that in part of my evenings after normal working days. I just put up a blank screen and type the first words that come to me, and the rest flows on from there. I have tried not to use the work of other writers except to illustrate a point. If you find any truth or wisdom in this book, then I must give the credit to God. I know how I have been blessed in the writing of it, and if you receive even a fraction of that blessing

from reading it, then I am well rewarded. My testimony after this experience, has to be that the Holy Spirit does indeed provide knowledge and wisdom, and that God does supply ALL our needs.

To teach is to impart knowledge. Knowledge is what you know - in this context what you have been told at second-hand is hearsay. So when we tell what we know of God's dealings with us we are teaching. We commonly describe this as testimony. When somebody brings a 'word' from God in a meeting and someone else confirms that word from their experience, then that is a form of teaching. It is relevant. It is believable, because we can hear the conviction in the voice of that person as they relate what they know; what happened to them.

I have come to believe that this is the form of 'teaching' that God intended for us when he had Paul describe a form of orderly worship in that passage in Corinthians 14. When a teacher adds exhortation to teaching, then it becomes preaching. E.G., "Repent, you sinners, or you will be cast into the eternal fire"; characterises preaching, rather than teaching. Exhortation of this nature is more likely to be opinion, than a word from God. I see in our own worship service that God provides the exhortation himself as one or another brings a 'word'. If the meeting is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then the 'words' and the 'teaching' are complementary and will be entirely relevant to the needs of those present.

I didn't always hear that ring of conviction in the voices of the preachers I have sat under, and I wondered what part the Holy Spirit played in the delivery of a standard 20 minute sermon. I have discussed this with some trained preachers, and they say that "the Holy Spirit is present in my study when I am preparing". Well, if the Spirit is in them, then that is so, but what part does He have in that preparation. Would He tell that preacher to go and consult this or that book and then relate some third person's religious experience? I believe that wisdom from the Holy Spirit is always fresh and new. Never second-hand.

What is truth? The writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 4, vs 12 that *"..the word of God is living and active. Sharper than a double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* It is a sword that cuts away the dead works of the flesh and exposes the reality. It is a tool of life for us, just as is love. If a sermon, or teaching, hasn't given you a tool of truth to put in your tool-box to take with you on Monday morning when you venture forth, then you have wasted your time listening.

The knowledge that we 'catch' is knowledge that we need. Only God can know in advance of a meeting what this need will be. I accept that frequently a preacher will be given a theme that is appropriate to the day's need, but cavil at the established practice of embellishing that theme with learned or second-hand illustration. When a person has been shut up in a learning institution for years, and then takes on the mantle of a salaried preacher, they are insulated from the cuts and thrusts of ordinary living. Gold is refined in the fire. We are likewise refined in the fire of battle, and our knowledge gleaned from that fire is pure and true. It is this knowledge, this testimony, that we can impart to fill the needs of others.

A friend of mine is keen on what he terms 'interactive' preaching. The term is really self-explanatory, but he described it simply to me as congregational involvement in the sermon. To me, this is what I have just been advocating.

It looks very much as though the wheel has turned full circle here with a modern term for, and a return to, the very method of teaching that Paul was recommending to the Corinthians.

An essential part of the process of receiving wisdom from the Holy Spirit is in the operation of our conscience. We are born with this strange organ and it develops as we do. I suspect that the Holy Spirit lives in the same room inside us as our conscience does. I think that I got this idea from my reading somewhere, and I apologise to whoever first wrote it if this is so, but I am sure that the still, small voice we hear in us, is in fact the Holy Spirit.

I have found that if I pose a question to my head, then before the question is properly framed, there is a reaction. It is so fast that it almost precedes the question. I invite you to experiment with this concept. Try it for yourself and see if that first, lightening-fast reaction is not the one you ought to adopt. There are secondary reactions, or answers, to the question, but they come from the mind,

which reacts much more slowly, and usually consist of a more palatable course and with 'good reasons' for adopting it. They are the kind of reasons your old self would have considered normal. In fact you will find, I am sure, that it is your self speaking them. It is interesting, in this context, to note that when you give your heart to The Lord, then your conscience suddenly becomes very tender. You remember old sins and want to make reparation.

When God speaks to us, He talks in our language; not just our ethnic language, but He uses the kind of idiom we best understand. Mary often gets choruses - she loves them and sings them all the time as well as listening to a lot of devotional and 'singspirational' tapes. They are more familiar to her than a lot of the scriptures, so God speaks to her in this way. I am a 'touch' person, so I mostly get feelings that I have to clothe in my own words. Some folk get pictures, others get words or scriptures, and some people are not listening at all and God has to nudge them a little with circumstances to get their attention. Because we are unique individuals, there are no hard and fast rules about this matter of hearing our Father's voice, it is simply a matter of His using the medium that we will best understand.

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## 15 THE SACRAMENTS - SOLEMNITY AND JOY

May I be quick to say that my purpose here is not to fire shots at the establishment. It is an attempt to hold up a different vision for you to inspect; a vision that I hope might enlarge and enrich your feelings for our sacramental occasions.

We very much tend to limit our celebration of the sacraments to a sense of the awe and reverence that God inspires in us. We have firm traditions that demand a crypt-like quiet, and that are structured to induce an attitude that is in keeping with a visit to the 'Holy of Holies'. I believe that such an attitude does have a place in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but I believe that that place is small, and that we have things to celebrate in that same service.

I know a man who likes to have unleavened bread to use for a Holy Communion. I am tempted to ask him if he would like to go all the way with that idea - which I presume is an attempt to get as close as possible to the Last Supper. I wonder if he would like to recline on a low couch, and drink the rough red wine of Galilee as well? Unlike modern vintners, they wouldn't have had a clever chemical to add to get rid of the hydrogen sulfide odour, and I can imagine the reaction of the educated palates of today to such a brew.

If there is scriptural precedent for the way we celebrate Holy Communion, I have not found it. Both Luke and Paul report the command of Jesus to be: *'...and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me".'* And *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'*. My feeling here is that Jesus intended us to 'do this in remembrance' whenever we break bread together. His word was 'whenever', which means just that: Not occasionally, or quarterly, or monthly, but whenever. We are accustomed to giving thanks before a meal, and I notice that Jesus went straight from that giving thanks to the breaking of the bread and the command to use this as a way of remembering Him.

I have long felt that God intended us to live as a church family - That family that appears in the Bible illustrations. We should eat when we meet on the Sabbath. Fellowship is a broad term that includes a lot more than worshipping and praying together. Eating is a communal activity, as well as enjoyable, and should be as much a part of our meeting together as brothers and sisters as is praise and worship. Then we can give thanks, and 'break the bread' together, and proclaim the Lord's death 'till He comes.

To me there is a very clear implication in Paul's letters to the churches, that they were in fact eating and drinking together. He says; *"When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk....."* No-one could get drunk on the symbolic sip that we customarily use; nor could they become hungry from the lack of a 'wafer' of bread. This is quite clearly implying that they were having a regular meal.

Meals are essentially happy occasions. I believe that God instituted this sacrament as a meal so that we might associate that joy of eating with the joy of the resurrection life. What is the significance of the Cross to you? Do you only see the agony of Calvary; and perhaps the shedding of the burden of sin; or do you see the Blood of the Cross as the seal of the new covenant? Jesus said "This cup is the new covenant in my blood". I cannot see that the Communion service should be a funeral wake. To me that negates the whole message of the Cross; the 'Good News', the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The favourite song of a previous minister at our church used these words, 'We serve a risen Savior; He's in the World today...'. Is this not so? Jesus took the sins of the world on His back on that ghastly day, that we might be freed from the law and the rituals of sacrificial atonement, and live together in love. That was the preliminary step for the new covenant, and His Blood sealed it.

Can you visualise this in the middle of your communion service - the organ gives forth an 80 decibel chord, and the choir bursts into a full-throated rendition of; 'Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes...'. That is what I think we should be feeling about the new covenant, the resurrection, the Good News. I can be very joyful about that; can't you? *"Do this in remembrance of me,"* said Jesus. In remembrance of what? - The preliminary, or the outcome? Jesus died all right, He died to save us from our sins and the world, and He rose again that we might have eternal life. We can celebrate that with joy, and with thanks giving, and we can be humble and reverent and awed at the

same time. The key word here is save. Jesus died to save us. "Thank-you Lord that you did die for me, I am very happy that you loved me enough to die for me and to save me from the world."

What do you think about baptism? Do you see this as an occasion for only solemnity? We have developed a custom in our fellowship where we have a celebration after a baptism. We have tea and coffee and cakes and we fellowship together. Jesus said, *"I tell you..... there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent"*. (Luke 15, 7). If there is that much rejoicing in heaven then should not we, who are a very real part of the process, be equally joyful? There is a time for solemnity; a time when that person confesses their sinful nature, and dies to the world. But when they have been born again, and God has baptised them with water and with fire and they are saved from their sin, and are entered into the Kingdom as a newborn child of God; is that not a time for joy and for celebration? If you have just been born again, you should have a birthday party, shouldn't you? How is your imagination here? Can you picture what might be going on in heaven? How would they celebrate the saving of a soul? I can see a heavenly choir singing a hallelujah chorus, and the little-est angel doing 'Jonathan Livingstone Seagull' type swoops out of sheer excitement, and God is smiling, and they are celebrating, and they are having a party; they are rejoicing over one sinner who repented. Solemnity and joy.

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## 16. QUESTIONS - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Are you getting shot at? If not, then why not? Is it because you aren't in the battle at all; because the devil has written you off as not being any danger to him? The front line starts at your front door. You may not be a missionary, in the accepted sense of the word, but you ought to be passing the ammunition to those who are, or busy knitting socks for those too involved on the battle front to do it for themselves.

Whatever talents, gifts, or just plain abilities God has blessed you with are what you can be using for Him. I have one of those 'pass it on' cards that says- "What you are, is God's gift to you: What you become, is your gift to Him." The battle really starts on the 'home front', when we simply begin to offer something in neighbourliness and love to the nearest person.

Are you busy improving yourself? Do you go to all the seminars and study groups? I heard a lady today describe herself as a 'seminar groupie'. I asked her what impact the last seminar had had on her practical Christian life, and all she could tell me was, "that if I want to explain something to somebody, then this material is very helpful": And she showed me her \$100.00, hardcover manual (not included in the seminar fees). I looked in vain for any effect that seminar had had on her loving or discipling.

The general doesn't send in his soldiers without equipment. What ever you have right now is what God wants you to use in His service. Use what you have, and He will bless it to His use. The training given to soldiers in real war is minimal. They get given a gun and are told how to aim, fire and clean it. They do enough 'square-bashing' to ensure that they will obey orders, and then they start fighting. We are given a weapon, the 'sword of truth', and a lesson or two in obedience, and then we begin. Like the soldiers, we learn the rest of what we need to know as we go along.

Lessons learned on the battlefield are real and relevant. To be blunt about this, you can use all your training and self-improvement to put off the actual fighting. It is just an excuse to keep out of the battle.

The excuse, "I'm sorry General, I can't fight today, I'm booked into this seminar on battle strategy", would go over like a lead balloon with any battle commander I ever heard of.

Are you too busy doing good to help someone in need? Extraordinary as that may sound, it is nevertheless true that some of us are so busy with good works that we can't spare the time that is needed for the folk that knock on our doors. "Could you call me back tomorrow? I have to be at the Ways and Means meeting in twenty minutes." Where are we at when we have to have a committee to find the ways and means to help people, yet can't meet the needs of the people that God puts directly in our path? Even worse is the probability that that same committee will be busy propping up the church structure, rather than the people in need that don't ever get to use it.

Are you doing what God wants you to do, or are you busy on some plan of your own, or of some others? Do you report to the general each morning when you come on duty? Do you say, "Here am I Lord, what would you have me do today?" How can He use you if you are busy on some scheme of your own devising? God gave us free will and that freedom that we enjoy includes **the right to choose to serve Him**. How can we serve Him if we are too busy to ask Him what He wants us to do?

When did you last invite somebody to come home with you and to share a meal? Why don't you do that regularly? Is it because you haven't enough in your cupboard? We find that people usually bring something with them anyway, and there is more food than we need. If you use what you have it will be sufficient, because God will bless it.

Do you value your peace and privacy too much to ask people in? The rewards of offering hospitality are far greater than the value to you of your Sunday afternoon snooze. Are you too busy to have people in? If that is so, then I suggest that your busy-ness is not of God. His work is never frantic or worrisome. It proceeds at a calm and beautiful speed and always has room in it for someone in need of love.

Is there anywhere in your life that God can not go? Is the bedroom door, or the office door, or any other door in your life closed to Him? Are there things in your life that God is not allowed to see or touch? How can He bless anything that is out of His reach? If we think about it, would we really want to

have anything that was beyond God's blessing? If it is out of bounds for Him then it must be in the other kingdom. Think about that.

What is your reality? Does it have God on a cloud; Jesus walking on the water; and the Holy Ghost some mysterious kind of spirit that descends like mist from the church ceiling on the Sundays that we are particularly pious? Or does it see God the way my friend George sees Him - "Mighty God, who so loved the world, that You sent Your only Son..., that whomsoever...; and that's a mighty big word, Mighty God, that whomsoever...". Which it is, it is big enough to include the whole world. That's about the size of George's God. You haven't heard praying until you have heard George pray. You picture the whole trinity, right there where you are. Reality.

Do you have the reality or the plan? You can plan anything at all if you want to. A new house, or a holiday at the seaside, for instance. However, the plan is valueless until it becomes a reality. You can't ask your friends to stay in the spare bedroom of a plan, or get a suntan and the sand on the beach between your toes with one. We like making plans, because they offer the joy of anticipation. How much of your time and of your church's time is spent making plans and organising the 'necessary steps'? Those 'necessary steps' can consume all the time (and money!) there is, and the plan will never get off the paper. God's plan for us is to love Him and each other and to make disciples. The plan is already made. What is there to talk about?

Mr and Mrs Traditional Christian can spend their whole lives going to meetings and services and being good parents and working hard all the week, and never win one soul for Jesus. They enjoy a comfortably stylized order of service for Sunday worship, and will even get up often enough for the 7 a.m. Saturday prayer meeting to get a comfortable glow of self-congratulation for their personal sacrifice.

They are like classic-car club members who religiously attend the Sunday Car Meets; wash and polish their cars; and go along to the mid-month lecture on car-care. They know all about getting the most out of their engines, and making the tyres last a long time. They know to the last cubic inch what their beloved machine is able to do, but they never use it for the purpose it's maker built it. They testify to each other about these capabilities, and might boast about what one exactly like it did on the Grand Prix circuit in the year of '82. However, what good is it?

Is God going to say to you on that vital day; "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"; if you are still bright and shiny with the glow of self-satisfaction; and if your outside is still pristine and un-dented from any real contact with life; and if you have none of the travel-stains that come from spending yourself on the work of his Kingdom? You can't disguise the reality by winding the distance recorder forward.

How then do we live our lives? In its simplest form, living is loving. From that love comes obedience to Him. Obedience is just that. Nothing less, and nothing else. We are obedient for 24 hours a day. The soldier is not released from his oath of allegiance until the war is over. He is ready to fight whenever he is asked. From that same love comes all the rest. It encompasses forgiveness, fellowship, submission, perseverance, and every other '-ness', '-ship', '-tion' or '-ence' that men have made into complicated doctrines. It is like the all-purpose tool that the soldier has. He digs his trench with it; hammers his tent pegs in with it; fries his egg on it; and when he runs out of ammunition, he fights with it. We must do the same - Love conquers all.

To *'Go and make disciples of all nations'* is how Jesus described our task. That too is done with love. Especially that too! If you love your neighbour, the first thing you will want to give him is some of the love and joy of The Lord and the hope of salvation that you have in your heart. *"Knowledge and prophecy and tongues will all pass away but Faith and Hope and Love will remain."* Faith and hope are not things that we actively do, rather they are things that we have; they are grounded in the Cross, and come with the Promise of Salvation. We don't get into the Kingdom until we have got those two bits right, and are repentant. Then He promises *"that the Love of God will be poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit"*. So all that we have to do is to use that love.

As you will have seen, I tend to be unimpressed by man-made doctrines. My contract with God says that *'He will write His laws on my mind and on my heart'*. When He has said that - I believe Him, and am prepared to trust Him to *'Teach me all things'* through the Holy Spirit, which He promised.

Some of the members of our fellowship have been on an out-reach to India, where they saw and helped 'The blind to see; the lame to walk; and the prisoners [of the world] set free'. I shared their confusion when, on their return, the same methods they had used to such effect in India didn't work in New Zealand. The people they were ministering to in that land were more childlike in their attitudes. They were accustomed to believing in spirits, (unlike us); and when they were told that if they would only believe, they would be healed; they did, and they were.

With all our western education, and its built-in questioning and disbelief, we immediately go into 'but what if' mode when we are offered miracles, and our doubts take over. *'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".'* (Matt 18; 3,4). I have been privileged to watch some of our junior school children sharing the love of Jesus with their classmates. They witness in love by their actions; by their standards; and by their words. It is simple and it works - it is so simple that a child can do it.

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