

# GOOD NEWS

*Unlimited*



*The Victory That Overcomes – Faith*

A Scene That Evokes Ideas of Victory

# EDITORIAL . . .

**F**ear is perhaps the oldest instinct—and the most universal. It has a legitimate role to play in the preservation of life, and as a motivator in times of emergency. Yet, for all that, fear, itself, can be terribly destructive. Rampant fear cripples and destroys. Some who are well, are afraid they will get sick. Others, being sick, are afraid they will get well, and have to take up their responsibilities once more. There are those who are afraid of growing old, of losing their youthful beauty. Some are fearful of relationships, afraid of love. Others worry that they will lose love. One man is anxious because he thinks he may lose his job; another is anxious because he might have to go to work. A woman is in nervous disarray because she thinks her husband is going to lose all the family's money. Another man is sick with fear because he thinks he is about to lose his good reputation.

Fear spoils life. Perhaps the greatest boon that anyone could bring to the human race, would be to devise a way to banish fear. For this reason, the Bible, and the religious perspective that it presents, deserves serious consideration. Here are some practical proposals from Scripture:

Things we fear usually don't last long. "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). In the midst of his many worries, Abraham Lincoln used to say, "This, too, shall pass."

Once in Persia reigned a king  
Who upon his signet ring,  
Graved a maxim true and wise,  
Which, if held before the eyes,  
Gave him wisdom at a glance,  
Fit for every change and chance.  
Solemn words, and these are they:  
'Even this shall pass away.'


It is well to remember, that fear and worry are useless. Jesus spoke about this when he said: "Who by worrying, can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27). Many are desperately

afraid of the future. Yet Jesus wisely advised us to limit our concerns to the responsibilities of the present. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

Related to the previous thought, is the simple fact that men and women allow themselves to be terrorized by things that never happen. For this reason, the best cure for anxiety is trust in the providence of God. The gospel of Jesus reveals a God who is kind, good, merciful, and loving. He answers our longing for surety, not so much by removing the cause of our fear, but by being with us in all the circumstances of our life. He spreads a table for us "in the presence of our enemies."

When Paul was desperate for God to rid him of a problem, the received reply was: "My grace is sufficient for you." To believe that existence is not a chance affair; that we are God's creatures, and that we are the objects of an infinite love, is to possess the key to dealing with fear. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

In 1583, on a stormy sea, the 'Golden Hind,' commanded by Sir Walter Raleigh, drew alongside another ship, the 'Squirrel,' captained by Sir Humphrey Gilbert. The 'Squirrel' was foundering, and Raleigh shouted out across the waves for Gilbert to leave his ship and come aboard. But Gilbert refused, calling back: "Heaven is as near by sea as by land." Soon after the 'Squirrel' sank, and Gilbert with it.

It makes little difference to the believer, whatever happens. No matter how the story of his life be written, or what road he travels, his steps are taking him home. Home to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 



**Ron Allen**

## GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

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# WHAT ABRAHAM TEACHES ABOUT FAITH

by Ron Allen.

When I was married, I was broke. I had no money, and no job. My prospects were uncertain. I suppose you could say that I was lucky to find anyone who would marry me, but I did, and after a short honeymoon we came back to my wife's parents place, and her father said, "Come with me." I went, and he took me to his furniture store. Pointing to a big bed with a fat mattress on it, he said, "See that? You can have it." Then he showed me a dining room table with chairs. "You can have that too," he said. Some single beds followed, and wardrobes to match.

"I can't afford all this," I said.

"You don't have to," was his reply. "I'm giving it to you. All you need to do is take it."

Well, I was not comfortable at all. I didn't like it. I was too proud to like it. I knew we would have to get some furniture somewhere, but, of course, I had no money. And here was my newly acquired father-in-law short-circuiting my independence by granting all my needs free of charge. I took the furniture, but how I wished I hadn't been so needy. It would have been wonderful to be in a position of strength, from which I might have said, "Oh no, you certainly will not be giving me all this stuff. Here, I'm writing you a check." But I could do nothing of the sort. I had nowhere to turn. I had to eat humble pie and accept what was offered.

It is always a disagreeable thing, when in order to get through a difficulty, or in order to merely survive, one has no choice but to be helped by what others are willing to give. Self-sufficiency is very precious. We would rather not feel beholden to anyone.

There is a man in Scripture who was in just such a situation. His name was Abraham, and he was childless. Many couples, now, do not see this as a bad thing, but no one thought that way then. Childlessness was a disaster. Sarah, Abraham's wife, wanted so much to give him a son and heir, but they both lived a long time without realizing their hope. When Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah, ninety, God told them they would indeed have their own child. This family situation forms the background to Romans 4:16 which reads: *"Therefore the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace."*

In the first three chapters of his Romans letter, Paul shows that people within or without religious traditions are plagued by sin. Because of sin the time-honored method of seeking closure with God through self-regulation is shown to be inadequate. Since that is so, Paul introduces his grand teaching of 'righteousness by faith.' In order to clinch his argument, he delves into Jewish folklore, and brings up one who is the archetypal, righteous Jew—Abraham, the father of the race. If it can be demonstrated that Abraham was righteous by faith, and not by any other method, Paul will have made his point very convincingly.


The argument runs this way: When God gave his promise to Abraham, the patriarch, *"Against all hope, believed in hope" (4:18)*. But what reason was there to hope? *"His body was as good as dead, and Sarah's womb was dead" (4:19)*. Imagine a man, one hundred years of age, with a ninety-year-old wife, showing up at a fertility clinic. Heads would wag solemnly. There would be a lot of: "I'm sorry sir, madam, there is nothing we can do."

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For Abraham to believe that he would have a son and heir in his particular circumstances, involved thinking great thoughts about God. It meant a confidence that God could do impossible, unexpected things. It meant stretching his spiritual imagination to accommodate the idea of a God who could *"give life to the dead; who could call things that are not as though they were."* (Romans 4:17)

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In Abraham and his wife, Paul finds the best possible material to make his case. In the pathos and tragedy of this couple's hope for a child, he sees a model, and a prototype for Christian faith. For Abraham to believe that he would have a son and heir in his particular circumstances, involved thinking great thoughts about God. It meant a confidence that God could do impossible, unexpected things. It meant stretching his spiritual imagination to accommodate the idea of a God who could *"give life to the dead; who could call things that are not as though they were" (4:17)*.

If Sarah had not been barren, and Abraham had still been in his forties, they would not have suited Paul's purpose. They are brought in, since in terms of what human beings usually can do to produce young, they were bereft. They were powerless. They had no chance; no hope. All they could do was believe God's promise. The apostle says that the promise is awarded to faith—in order to be by grace. Faith is the only human function that permits grace (God's kindness) to determine the divine-human relationship. That is why Abraham fits the bill. Implicitly, his faith was a confession of his complete lack; his profound need. 

# TWO VERY IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT FAITH

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by Ron Allen

In Ephesians 2:8, Paul is careful to say, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God.”* In the seven preceding verses, there is a list of things that God does to ‘save’ people. They include: *making them alive with Christ (v.5); raising them up with Christ, and seating them in heavenly places in him (v. 6).* These things were done by God in order that *“in the coming ages, he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (v.7).*

The great blessings that are included in salvation flow entirely from God’s grace—his kindness. This means that men and women are saved in spite of their sin, and without regard to any virtue they may have imagined for themselves.

In order for this to be, the salvation that comes from God is linked to faith in man.

Two things need to be said about faith. First, it is a thoroughly human activity. In the same way that it is true to say that humans breathe, so it is true that they believe. When Abraham believed God, it was not God who believed for him. God has ordained that we relate to him in faith because faith glorifies him, and dignifies us. Faith means we are volitional creatures; not robots. We do not turn to God like windmills in the wind. We look to him with our will. Faith enables us to love God. “Faith works by love,” the Bible says, but there is a sense in which love works by faith. Only where there is a measure of freedom, can love grow. Faith provides that these little islands of self-consciousness, that we all are, may fall in love with him who first loved us.

The second important aspect of faith is this: Evangelical faith has no confidence in itself. Faith admits its own emptiness. Faith is a declaration of inadequacy. Faith says, “Alas, I can do nothing.” In faith, I take stock; I take an inventory of my own spiritual resources, and I find I have nothing with which to trade. Faith—Abraham-like, says, “I am as good as dead. What hope is there of a corpse?” In faith the believer is naked, asking to be clothed; hungry, asking to be

## FAITH

### 1

It is a thoroughly human activity.

### 2

Evangelical faith has no confidence in itself.


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nourished; sick, beseeching the physician; blind, calling for sight; dead, pleading for life. Faith says, “I cannot, but he can; I have not, but he has.” Faith is an emptiness waiting on God’s fullness. It is a movement of the human spirit that allows God to be all and in all.

With this in mind, Paul can say, “By grace you have been saved—through faith,” but he does not neglect to also say that the faith which saves, is “the gift of God.” So that even that which we know is our action, and which, in moments of religious enthusiasm, we feel we deserve to be recognized for, is God’s gift to us.

It is my birthday. My son, who is only five, is being helped by me to write a message to me on a birthday card, which he will later present to

me. I help him spell out the words: “Dear Dad, this is the first birthday card I have ever sent you. I am writing this to you, myself. You are the best Dad I ever had. My friend Tommy says his Dad is the best, but you are better. I hope you like the card. Happy birthday.”

After a while he comes and gives me the card. I am filled with joy and surprise. My son has given me a message, and he tells me he loves me. Even though it was I who bought and paid for the card; I who thought up the whole wording, and helped him spell it out; even though the whole thing came from me, my son feels that he is giving me something. As much as it is possible for him to give me anything, he gives to me. His heart is toward me. This is something like our relationship to God. Everything comes from him, even our faith. That is why faith helps define grace. If faith were something we tendered to God as part of a bargain between us, it would cease to be faith. For faith is a receiver. It exports nothing. The sign over the door of the house of faith is: GOODS INWARD. Grace, on the other hand, is the kindness of God in action. In grace God has established us in fellowship with himself. There is nothing more that can be done to make the relationship more complete, or secure. Even faith, by which we receive these benefits, is planted in us by God. 

**F**rederick Buechner tells of his daughter's battle with anorexia. A time came when she began to hate food. She went to enormous lengths to avoid food. As each day, and each week passed, she became more emaciated. Her lovely face became hideously skull-like. Summoning all the authority he felt he had left to him as her father, Buechner threatened, pleaded, cajoled, and bribed. It was useless. Nothing worked. For a year he meddled desperately, and clumsily; trying this ploy, and that device; thinking up new things to say and do; clinging to the notion that soon he would hit on the right formula.

One day a doctor called Buechner aside and said to him, frankly, that he, her father, could not cure his daughter. The doctor advised sending her to a clinic three thousand miles away from her home. And so it was. Buechner remembers holding a telephone in his hand, with tears streaming down his face, listening to a doctor far away, tell him that his daughter would soon die unless a court order could be obtained to feed her against her will.

The daughter did recover. And when she did turn the corner, and begin her long journey back to normality, it was without her father. He could not even see her, or talk to her. In the end the best contribution he could make to his daughter's recovery, was to get out of the way; to stand back, and let others do what he could not.

# AN ILLUSTRATION OF FAITH

by Ron Allen


**Then ask yourself if you can believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ again for that particular day. If your answer is always Yes, then you probably don't know what believing means. At least five times out of ten the answer should be No because the No is as important as the Yes, maybe more so.**

*Frederick Buechner*

This poignant family episode illustrates one of the elements of faith, as understood by Paul. It is the confessional acceptance of an important truth about ourselves—namely, that we do not possess all the resources within ourselves to meet all the challenges of existence. What is there that we ever do, anyway, that amounts to anything in the broad view of things? *“What have you, that you did not receive?”* the Bible says.

The sun will shine tomorrow, but it does not depend on us. Tomorrow there will be air to breathe, but we will not produce it. The rain will fall, the grass

will grow, our stomach will digest our food, and our heart will beat reliably. Tonight, after you have read this paper, you will lay down and sleep. For a few hours you will be unconscious, while all the things you think depend on your supervision will go on just the same.

Why is it so? Because there is a God who is benevolent, attentive, faithful, generous, and kind. Faith holds to this view of the world. Faith lets its weight down on the proposition that this God will go on caring for us, forgiving us, providing for us, looking after everything about our lives that really matters; and that he will go on doing this into eternity, so that, in the end, our very selves, and our future, depend on God's competence—not ours. 

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# FAITH'S GREAT INTEREST

by Ron Allen


**I**n the Gospels, faith is seen and known in relation to its object—Jesus. A wide range of different people encounter Jesus. Their meeting with him helps form a composite picture of faith. We see faith in the pigsty, where the prodigal's heart begins to turn homeward. The Canaanite woman expresses faith when she holds out for as little as a crumb of Christ's pity. There is faith in a desperate father's plea for faith. Faith is coming to Jesus. Faith is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. There is faith in mere looking unto Jesus; receiving from Jesus; listening to Jesus. A thief, with nothing to plead but his guilt, asks the dying Christ to remember him—not an example of great worthiness—but an example of faith.

God is the great interest; the object, and topic of faith. We ought never make a god, or an ethical standard out of our faith. God is infinitely more than our belief in him. In the end, the chief benefit he has for us, is himself.

When I was farming with my dad, we were frequently working on machinery; bending over, or lying beneath farm equipment with wrench in hand. Sometimes a bolt would be hard to move. Dad would say, "Here, let me have that wrench." Then he would grunt, and wriggle, and puff. When he was really

exerting himself he would hold his tongue out of one side of his mouth. "You have to hold your tongue in the right place," he would joke. "It works every time."

Faith is not a technique like learning to hold your tongue in the right way, so you can have the result you are looking for. There is a temptation, when prayers are answered according to our desire, to think that we must have hit on the right formula of faith. This is never really so. In following Jesus, we are always his novices. The essential characteristic of gospel faith is its negative self-orientation. It looks away from itself; reaches out away from itself.

If what is being said here is even partly the truth, it must be the best news ever, because it means that there is no reason why the weakest in faith should not undertake the Christian pilgrimage. The best Christians have faith that is inhabited by doubt, and ignorance. The best Christian faith is peppered with anxiety, and distrust. These defects all existed in that which Jesus was willing to call faith. So let no one hold back. After all, it's not about us. It's about him. And he will never leave us, nor forsake us. 



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# One Woman's Faith

by Ron Allen

Most parents teach their small children to practice good manners; to ask nicely; to say 'please,' and 'thank you.' Requests are granted or withheld, as a means of reinforcing this behavior. This explains a familiar scene in, say, a supermarket, where a mother with a toddler in tow, is trying to get her shopping done. The toddler has spied some candy which he desires very much. "Please, Mommy," he says. "Not just now, dear." The child tries again; this time louder. "Pleease." Now fast forward a few minutes and witness the little boy lying on his back in the supermarket aisle, beating his legs and fists in the air, and bawling with all the lung power he can muster. "Please, Mommy, please." He has taken the 'please thing' too far. He thinks please is the key to everything he pleases.

None of us always get what we want, no matter how well-mannered we are. From our earliest conscious moments, we are a bundle of needs and desires. Many of these, if granted, would do us no good, but some are legitimate, and these become the prayer and hope of our lives.

When it comes to God, and what we hope for, and expect from him, how shall we approach him? Should we learn to say "please"? Is there an appropriate formula of address that needs to be used in approaching God? Does faith involve learning God so that we can play him to our own advantage?

In Mark 5:25-34 there is a woman with a bodily ailment that has been the plague of her life for twelve years. It has dominated her being, soaked up her means, and drained joy away. Rarely has she been able to think of anything else but her problem. She is desperate.

The woman seeks contact with Jesus. She does not have any high views about him. Clearly she thinks he is some kind of magician. "*If I just touch his clothes I will be healed,*" she thinks (Mark 5:28). She has no accurate conception of Jesus' person, nor does she really care. This is shown by the fact that she is not interested in talking to him, or having him talk to her. A personal encounter is the least thing she wants.

Waiting till he passes, she comes from behind. There is no altruism in her approach. Suffering, and self-interest drive her. If she could just have some of his magic, she would be content never to see him again. So she comes, pushing, reaching, and jostling through the crowd, at last to lay her finger-tips on Jesus' garments. And, immediately, her bleeding stops. She is healed.

Yet, Jesus will not permit this woman to have healing altogether on her terms. She wanted anonymity. It is not allowed. "Who touched my clothes?" Jesus asks. He is not asking who might have inadvertently brushed against his clothing. He means: "Who touched my clothes hoping for healing from me through that touch?" Timidly, the woman is forced to identify herself. "*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace, and be freed from your suffering*" (v.34).

Why did Jesus embarrass this woman? Why expose her publicly, against her will? The answer must be, that he wished



to teach something, using her as an example. Here is what I think it is: Jesus drew attention to this woman because she was an example of faith. Though she drew near to him ignorantly, superstitiously, apprehensively, haltingly, Jesus called her primitive approach, faith.

Whatever else this woman's faith was, it was not a virtue. All it amounted to in her, was a shrinking, deluded, and confused idea that Christ might be able to help her. There was nothing noble about it. It was, at best, desperate, and pathetic. But it took her to Jesus. When he said to her, "Your faith has healed you," those were not words of congratulation.

There is a need for Christians to guard against a view of faith that sees it as a spiritual quality that must be gotten just right. Faith is not a formula to be learned. There are seminars that aspire to teach people how to 'get into faith'; how to grow faith so that the believer can begin to get all the things from God she has always wanted. "You want more money to pay your bills with? Get deeper into faith." "You want your loved one to be well? Practice deeper faith." "Learn to believe more thoroughly, more truly."

This teaching about faith trains persons to think that they must develop faith as a moral quality, which they bring to God, and to which he is more likely to respond. The good news is better. Faith, even ignorant faith, is God's gift to us, not our gift to him. That, in the sick woman, which Jesus called faith was not an attitude of trust in God which she had been striving to achieve in herself. It was more a troubled yearning for relief. Whatever it was, it brought her to Christ, and that was enough. "*No one can come to me, unless the father who has sent me draw him*" (John 6:44).



# A Solemn Impeachment of Unbelievers

by Charles Haddon Spurgeon

## Without faith the man himself is not pleasing to God.

*“Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing unto God” (Hebrews 11:6).* The way of acceptance described in Scripture is, first, the man is accepted, then what he does is accepted. It is written: *“And he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord, an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:3).* First God is pleased with the person, then with the gift or the work.

He who is a rebel, outlawed and proclaimed, cannot gratify his prince with any fashion of service. He must first submit himself to the law. All the actions of rebels are acts done in rebellion. We must first be reconciled to God, or it is a mockery to bring an offering to his altar. Reconciliation can only be effected through the death of the Lord Jesus; and if we have no faith in that way of reconciliation, we cannot please God. Faith in Christ makes a total change in our position towards God—we who were enemies, are reconciled; and from this comes toward God a distinct change in the nature of all our actions; imperfect though they be, they spring from a loyal heart, and they are pleasing to God.

## In human associations, want of confidence would prevent a man from being well pleasing to another.

If a man has no confidence in you, you can have no pleasure in him. If you had a child, and he had no trust in his father, no belief in his father's kindness, no reliance on his father's word—it would be most painful. If you had a servant in your house, who always suspected your every action, and believed in nothing that you said or did, it would make the house very miserable. How can I take pleasure in the man who associates with me, and pretends to serve me, but all the while thinks me a sheer impostor, and gives me no credit for truthfulness?

When the creature dares to doubt his Creator, how can the Creator

be pleased? When the word which wrought creation is not enough for a man to rest upon, he may pretend what he will of righteousness and obedience, but the whole affair is rotten at the core, and God can take no pleasure in it.

## Unbelief takes away the common ground on which God and man can meet.

Two persons that are pleasant to one another must have certain common views and objects. God's great object is the glorification of his Son, and how can we be pleasing to him if we dishonor that Son? If you and I believe in God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, we have a common ground of sympathy with God; but if not, we are not in harmony. How can two walk together except they be agreed? According to the well-worn fable, two persons who are totally different in their pursuits cannot live well together: the fuller and the charcoal burner were obliged to part, for whatever the fuller had made white, the collier blackened with his finger.

Unbelief deprives the soul of the divinely appointed meeting place at the mercy seat, which is the person of the Lord Jesus, where God and man unite in one mediator, and the Lord shines forth on the supplicant.

## Want of faith destroys all prospect of love.

Although we may not perhaps see it, there lies at the bottom of all love, a belief in the object loved, as to its loveliness, its merit, or its capacity to make us happy. If I do not believe in a person, I cannot love him. If I cannot trust God, I cannot love him. If I do not believe that he loves me, I shall feel but slight emotions of love toward him. Is not the Lord's chief demand of all men, that we love him with all our heart, all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength?

The sinner pleads that 'he cannot believe.' He often says this, and quiets his conscience with it. When he is aroused, and awakened, he declares that he cannot believe in Jesus Christ, and in God, and goes off to sleep again. He quotes

**We must first be reconciled to God, or it is a mockery to bring an offering to his altar. Reconciliation can only be effected through the death of the Lord Jesus, and if we have no faith in that way of reconciliation we cannot please God.**



Scripture to back up his excuse, and reminds us of the words of the Lord himself: "No man cometh unto me except the father who hath sent me draw him." To such we reply that the words of the Lord are very weighty, and we would not wrest one of them for a moment: but in another place he says: "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

So then the sinner's inability lies in his will; it is because he will not that he cannot. There are many things which men ought to do which they have now lost the moral and spiritual, though not the physical power to do. A man ought to be chaste, but if he has been so long immoral that he cannot restrain his passions, he is not thereby free from the obligation. It is the duty of a debtor to pay his debts, but if he has been such a spendthrift, that he has brought himself into hopeless poverty, he is not exonerated from his debts thereby. If the law of God is to be lowered according to the moral condition of sinners, the worst man would then be under the least law.

### **Let me take your unbelief to pieces and show why it is that you cannot believe.**

A great many do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because you do not care about your souls, or see the importance of being saved. You give your minds to your business, your pleasure, your sin. You dream that there is time enough yet to think of heavenly things. This is the source of a large proportion of unbelief.

Many, however, say, "Oh yes, I believe the Bible, I believe it is God's book, I believe the gospel to be God's gospel." Why then do you not believe in Jesus? It must be because you do not think the gospel message important enough to be obeyed.

In refusing to come to the gospel feast you do as good as tell the Lord that he makes too much of it, that he makes heaven and earth ring with the glory of it, but in your esteem, your farm, and your merchandise are far more worthy of attention. By your neglect of the great salvation, you declare that you are not in any pressing danger, and do not stand in urgent need of a savior. You also say that the pardon of sin, the favor of God, and good hope of heaven are not worthy to be sought first, and above all other things.

### **To disbelieve God is the mother sin of all, the door by which all other evil came into the world.**

The devil whispered to mother Eve, "Yea, hath God said?" That insinuated doubt commenced our fall. Unbelief of God turned our race out of Eden; and, in consequence, we are born in sore travail, and plow the ground with toil.

O, accursed unbelief! It is time thou wert hung up on a gallows high as that of Haman. Alas, that any man should hug thee to his heart. O, accursed unbelief. It spits its venom against the holy God, and he cannot but abhor it. How can the absolutely true, submit to be charged with falsehood? The sin of making God a liar, I do pray you look at it very solemnly, for it is a stab at God himself. Surely, man has reached the climax of enmity to God in this. Nothing proves the utter baseness of man so much as this refusal to believe his God, and nothing proves so much the greatness of almighty grace, as that God should, after all this, condescend to work faith in a heart so depraved. O miracle of sin! O greater miracle of love!



***"It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8)***

**C**hristians often look to man for help and counsel and mar the noble simplicity of their reliance upon God. Are you anxious about temporal things this evening? You trust in Jesus for your salvation. Then why are you troubled? "Because of my great care," you answer. It is written, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord" (Psalm 55:22). "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). If you cannot trust God for temporal things, how dare you trust Him for spiritual things? Can you trust Him for your soul's redemption and not rely upon Him for a few lesser needs? Is God enough for your need, or is His all-sufficiency too narrow for you? Is His heart faint? Is His arm weary? If so, seek another God; but if He is infinite, omnipotent, faithful, true, and all-wise, then give up your frantic search for another confidence. Why do you think you need another foundation when this is strong enough to bear all the weight you can ever build upon it? Do not alloy the gold of your faith with the dross of human confidence. Wait only upon God and let your expectation be from Him. Let the sandy foundations of earthly trust be the choice of fools. But like one who foresees the storm, build your house upon the Rock of Ages.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

**When we get our spiritual house in order, we'll be dead. This goes on. You arrive at enough certainty to be able to make your way, but it is making it in darkness. Don't expect faith to clear things up for you. It is trust, not certainty.**

***Flannery O'Connor.***

# DOUBT— The Primary Problem

by Desmond Ford

**I**ron cages, screaming maniacs, gory slabs of beef, these fill the canvasses of Francis Bacon when he depicts what life is. On the other hand, when Heine, the German poet, knelt before the Venus de Milo, he cried out, “It is beautiful but it has no arms.” That is a second view of existence, that it is good, but it lacks the best, and has no encompassing arms of compassion.

Bacon would have told Heine that the world does have arms—the arms of a cross to be crucified on. Is this true? Is life just a cross on which our body, mind, and spirit are impaled without release till death?

For a sensitive soul, being alive can be a dreadful experience. By the time such a person has learned what existence is about, it is too late to crawl back into the womb, and be unborn. From the moment of conception, each soul has a definite date with destiny. We are all chained to a giant conveyor belt taking us to—where? And it is no good crying with the pop singer, “Stop the world, I want to get off.” Suspended in an endless sea of space, this globe is a devil’s island where all men are confined and condemned, unable to escape. Earth is a floating, geographic death row where each and all await execution.

## Meaninglessness a Problem.

The primary disease of earth’s prisoner is neither coronary heart disease nor cancer. It is meaninglessness—doubt of the reality of good at the heart of the universe. Victor Frankl, a World War II concentration camp prisoner, has documented the way strongmen collapsed if they had no sustaining philosophy of life, while weaker men with a “why” for living, survived. Today, suicide is pandemic, and it is more a problem among the young than the old, white than black, the educated than the uneducated, the rich than the poor—because none of life’s apparent advantages give a clue to the riddle of existence. Therefore, 5,000 teenagers will suicide in the USA this year—400,000 other people will make the attempt, and literally millions of U.S. homes are haunted by this specter of the sudden, despairing, self-initiated end of life.

## The Murmur of Gnats.

Is life a disease for which the only cure is death? Is it a punishment for the crime of being born, a nightmare between two eternities, the bubbling, senseless flow of time and space of which man is a part—man being but a parasite on the epidermis of a midge-like planet, hardly perceivable, in the backwater of one of a trillion galaxies? “For what is it all but

the murmur of gnats amid the gleam of a million, million suns” (Tennyson). Is human life no more significant than that of a fly which is born and dies within a single day? Is human existence just a dusty scuffle across a parched terrain? Is thinking only itching, and are values only feelings? Is love just a chemical phenomenon, even mother’s love? Is death the great benefactor, releasing us from struggle and pain?

## Are There Any Answers?

Can anyone really discover the right answers? These questions plague us all unless already we have given up the battle and joined the beasts. Berdayaev, the philosopher, has given his opinion that modern man has not only lost his way but also his address. Modern man is like the little dog in the freight van, who had lost his label and gone on to Washington with a new one: “Here is nobody, from nowhere, going no place.”

## Choosing to Believe.

We are children in our Father’s house if we choose to believe it. Nothing about the real world can be proved, for it would require perfect measuring instruments, complete objectivity, and an infinite number of observations. Only God could prove God or disprove him. Omniscience and omnipresence belong only to him who has given us enough evidence for human certitude, that neither doubt nor death nor any other enemy need conquer. It is time to sing. Life has meaning, and the meaning is infinitely good.

In conclusion, may I offer two thoughtful statements—one from Frederick Buechner, and the other from Bruce Barton? Says the former:

We all want to be certain, we all want proof, but the kind of proof that we tend to want—scientifically or philosophically demonstrable proof that would silence all doubts once and for all—would not, in the long run, I think answer the fearful depths of our need at all. For what we need to know, of course, is not just that God exists, not just that beyond the steely brightness of the stars there is cosmic intelligence of some kind that keeps the whole show going, but that there is a God right here in the thick of our day-to-day lives who may not be writing messages about himself in the stars, but who in one way or another is trying to get messages through our blindness as we move around down here knee-deep in the fragrant muck and misery, and marvel of the world. It is not the objective proof of God’s existence that we

want, but whether we use religious language for it or not, the experience of God's presence. That is the miracle that we are really after. And that is also, I think, the miracle that we really get. (Frederick Buechner. *The Magnificent Defeat*, New York, 1966, p. 47)

The story of the bishop by Bruce Barton illustrates Buechner's point:

Some upper classmen were assembled one night in a college hall to listen to two speakers. A bishop of distinguished service and great spiritual power was one of them, and a public lecturer, widely advertised as a professional agnostic, was the other. The plan was for each man to present his own philosophy of life. The audience, while not large, was very earnest, and obviously looked for a spirited debate. The bishop spoke first.

His tone was deep and sympathetic. "Nothing that is worthwhile in life can be proved," he said. "Men speak of depending on science, but science itself depends upon faith. It assumes that every effect must have an adequate cause—a tremendous assumption which no one can prove. It assumes that the world that each man builds up inside his own mind corresponds to the outside world of reality, that the universe which you see, is the same universe which I see—another great act of faith. All scientific discoveries have been made by men who believed more than their eyes could see, or their fingers handle. 'He who does not look beyond the fact,' said Darwin, 'will hardly see the fact,' by which he meant that the eyes of the imagination—of faith—must first see what *may* be, before the eyes of flesh can see what *is*.

"I cannot prove to you that there is any purpose behind the universe. It may be that the whole thing is a mere happening, a jest of circumstances that we, and all who have been before us or are to come after us, are no more significant than the flies that live their whole existence in a single hour, or the bubbles that appear on the surface of the stream, and break, and reappear. I cannot prove to you that this is not so. But, my friends, no man can prove to you that it is so. The existence of reason behind the universe, or its nonexistence, are both beyond the power of finite minds to establish. Since, therefore, the choice is free between the two alternatives, I choose to accept the positive faith. For that faith gives significance to my life, and to the lives of all men. It clothes me with conviction. It invests me with the right to go forward with firm step and head erect, as one who shall not perish. In place of worry and fear, it sets up hope and courage. It is the pathway to power."

When he had finished, the other speaker rose very slowly, and looked down into the eager faces of those young men. Stood silent for what seemed a very long time, searching their eyes. "I am going to surprise you, my young friends," he said at last. "Perhaps in a sense I shall disappoint you. I am an agnostic. Some of you have come here in the expectation that the bishop and I should vigorously disagree. You had expected that I should call the great skeptics of history to my aid, and

marshal the arguments that seem to prove that man is the creature of the moment, bound for oblivion in death. I confess that this was my purpose when I came.

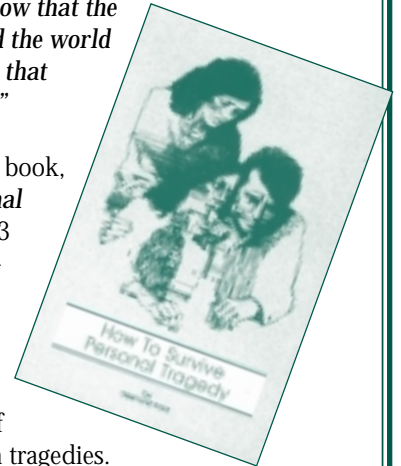
"But I have changed that purpose. I am going to say only one thing to you young gentlemen. It is this: If you can believe the things that our friend the bishop has been saying, then, in God's name, believe them! The texture of my mind is such that I myself cannot go farther than to say I do not know. If you can go farther, if you can have the positive faith, then with all my heart I congratulate you. I would give anything in the world if I could. For what the bishop has claimed for his faith is true. Skepticism has no vitality; the motive power of progress is faith."

He sat down, and after a few minutes of rather embarrassed silence, the meeting disbanded. The students were surprised but the bishop much more so. He had expected a contest instead of which he had listened to a testimony far more moving than his own, the almost tragic confession of one whose honest intellect would not let him go a step beyond the things which can be seen and heard, and felt, but who looked with hungry yearning into the richer lives of those who can believe, and do. (Bruce Barton. *What Can a Man Believe?* London, 1928, pp. 162-164)

The above article was adapted from *Kaleidoscope of Diamonds V.1* by Desmond Ford. 

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# BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH

by Thomas Watson

**F**aith is the chief grace that the Holy Spirit works in a man. This working of the Spirit is exceedingly powerful. When Christ laid in the grave, he had a tombstone of the world's sin upon him. But the Spirit raised him from the dead, notwithstanding. The same power is put forward by the Spirit to produce Christian faith.

**1. Self-renunciation.** Faith is going out of one's self; being taken off from our own merits. Repentance and faith are both humbling graces. By repentance, a man abhors himself. By faith he repudiates himself. *"Not having a righteousness of my own" (Philippians 3:9).*

**2. Reliance.** Faith believes the promise, but that which faith rests on in the promise is the person of Christ. The promise is the cabinet, and Christ is the Jewel in it, that faith embraces.

**3. Appropriation.** By this is meant, the applying of Christ to ourselves. This is called *"receiving him" (John 1:12)*. The hand that receives the gold, enriches the receiver. So the hand of faith, receiving Christ's golden merits, enriches us.

Faith is the chief gospel grace because it enriches all other graces. As the clothier sets the poor to work; sets their wheels turning, so faith sets hope to work. If faith did not feed the lamp of hope with oil it would soon die. Faith sets love to work. Believing the mercy and merit of Christ causes a flame of love to ascend. Faith sets patience to work. Faith believes the great rewards given to suffering, which makes the soul patient in suffering. Thus faith is the master wheel which sets all the other graces running.

True faith is a Christ-prizing grace. *"To you who believe, this stone is precious" (1 Peter 2:7)*. Paul stoned all other things refuse, in comparison to Christ.


Faith is a refining grace. Morality may wash the outside, faith washes the inside. Faith makes a Holy of Holies out of the heart.

Faith is not an idle grace. It has an eye to see Christ, and a hand to work for him. It not only believes Christ's promise, but it obeys his command. The obedience of faith is a cheerful obedience. God's commands do not seem grievous.

Faith is an assimilating grace. It changes the soul into the image of its object. Looking on a bleeding Christ causes a soft and bleeding heart. Looking on a holy Christ causes a sanctity of heart. Looking on a humble Christ causes the soul to be humble. As the chameleon is changed into the color of that which it looks upon, so faith, looking on Christ, changes the Christian into his similitude.

It is necessary to distinguish between weak faith, and no faith. A weak faith is nevertheless true. The bruised reed is weak, yet it is such as Christ will not break. Though your faith is weak do not be discouraged. A weak faith may receive a strong Christ. The woman in the Gospel only touched Christ's garment, yet she was healed. It was the touch of faith.

The promise is not to those who have great faith but to *"Whosoever believeth."* A weak faith may be a growing faith. Seeds spring up by degrees. First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn. Therefore, do not be discouraged. God, who would have us *"accept him whose faith is weak" (Romans 14:1)*, will not himself reject such a one. A weak believer is a member of Christ. And though Christ will cut off rotten members from his body, he will not cut off the weak.

**Thomas Watson was one of the great nonconformist preachers of the seventeenth century. The present article was adapted from his book: *A Body of Divinity*.** 

## Understanding the Spirit

by Ron Allen

In Romans, Paul teaches that the gift of God is *"by faith from first to last" (Romans 1:17)*. He means that the gift is altogether by faith; never anything else but by faith. The righteousness of God, *and* the gift of his Holy Spirit, are the heritage of God's people, by faith from beginning to end. There is never any change in the way an individual receives the gift of God, or in the way it is retained.

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# THOUGHTS ON UNBELIEF


by Ebenezer Erskine

**F**aith is a shield that beats back the fiery darts of Satan; so unbelief is a shield that beats back all the good motions of the Spirit of God. Faith is the victory by which we overcome the world; unbelief is the victory by which the world overcomes us.

**See, hence, a very relevant reason why ministers harp so much upon the subject of faith, or believing.** Why, it is for unbelief, that sinners are condemned already; and there is no way to free them from this sentence, but by bringing them to believe in the Son of God. Unbelief is the main pillar of the devil's kingdom; and therefore the main batteries of the gospel must be raised against it. It is but at best a foolish, ignorant cavil of some against ministers. Why so much insisting upon faith? Are not other things as necessary to be preached? I answer, "Other things are as necessary in their own place, but faith, or believing in the first place, and until we bring you to believe, we do nothing at all, this being the laying of the foundation of all religion." It is foolish to think or speak of rearing up a superstructure till the foundation be once laid. . . . In one word, whatever duties we inculcate upon you, we only call you to build castles in the air, to build a tower without a bottom, unless we first bring you to Christ, by that faith which is of God's operation.

**See how fitly the gospel is called a joyful sound,** "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound" (Psalm 89:15). Among other reasons why it gets that denomination, this is none of the least: it brings a proclamation of life to the sons of death, a sound of liberty to the captive, and of pardon to the poor sinner, condemned already. One would think that the very hint of a pardon to a condemned criminal, would make his heart to leap within him for joy, but, alas! sad experience tells us that the gospel, which brings such "glad tidings of great joy" to condemned sinners, meets with a very cool reception from the generality.

**See how ill-grounded the joy and triumph of a Christless, unbelieving world is.** . . . All I shall say, to stop your career at present, is this: the triumphing of the unbelieving sinner is short, and his joy but for a moment. You may, indeed, "kindle a fire, and compass yourselves about with sparks, but this shall ye have of the Lord's hand: ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isaiah 50:10).

**See, hence, how much we are obliged to Christ,** who came to save us from this heavy sentence of death we are under. "He came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." He himself was condemned that we might be acquitted. Judgment passed upon him, that it might not pass against us. He was made a curse, to redeem us from the curse of the law. When Adam had entailed death and condemnation upon us and all his posterity, Christ came, and by his obedience unto death, cut off that entail, procuring our justification. 

**It is the spectators, the people outside, looking at the tragedy, from whose ranks the skeptics come; it is not those who are actually in the arena, and those who are suffering from the inside. Indeed, the fact is that it is the world's greatest sufferers, who have produced the most shining examples of unconquerable faith.**

*James Stewart*

## **A foreword to "From Me to You."**

From Dr. Desmond Ford.

Years ago, a former college professor, known for his purity and precision of language, interrupted our conversation by saying, "Ron Allen's letters! They are splendid!" He was altogether right. Countless families in the United States of America, Australia, and scores of other countries, have been blessed by the glories and implications of the New Testament gospel, as explained and applied to our day by this Australian pastor.

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# Looking Unto Jesus

by Theodore Monod

*“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, KJV).*

**Looking unto Jesus in the Scriptures**, to learn what he is, what he has done, what he gives, what he demands; to find in his character our model, in his requirements our instruction, in his precepts our law, in his promises our support, in his person and in his work a full satisfaction offered to all the wants of the world.

**Looking unto Jesus crucified**, to find in his blood shed our ransom, our pardon, our peace.

**Looking unto Jesus risen again**, to find in him the righteousness which alone justifies us, and permits us, all unworthy as we are, to approach with assurance in his name, him who is his father, and our father, his God and our God.

**Looking unto Jesus glorified**, to find in him our heavenly advocate, completing by his intercession the work of his mercy, and of our salvation, appearing even now for us in the presence of God, and supplying the imperfection of our prayers by the efficacy of those which the father always hears.

**Looking unto Jesus revealed by the Holy Spirit**, to find in his abiding communion the purification of our defiled hearts, the enlightening of our darkened minds, the transformation of our rebellious wills; to be enabled to triumph over all the assaults of the world, and of the evil one, withstanding their power by Jesus' strength, baffling their wiles by Jesus our wisdom; sustained by the sympathy of Jesus who was spared no temptation, and by the succor of Jesus who yielded to none.

**Looking unto Jesus to receive from him the task and the cross of each day**, with grace sufficient to bear the cross, and to fulfill the task; patient with his patience, active with his activity, loving with his love, asking not “what can I?” but “what cannot he?” And waiting upon his strength which is made perfect in weakness.

**Looking unto Jesus** in order that the brightness of his face may be the light of our darkness; that our joys may be holy, and our sorrows calm; that he may humble us, and he raise us up; that he may afflict, and he may comfort us; that he may teach us to pray, and he answer our prayers; that even while leaving us in the world, he may separate us from it, our life being hid with him in God, and our conduct bearing witness to him before men.

**Looking unto Jesus** who having reentered his father's house, is occupied in preparing there a place for us, in order that this blessed hope may encourage us to live without repining, and

may prepare us to die without regret, when the day shall come to encounter that last enemy, which he has conquered for us, which we shall conquer through him, that enemy of whom he has made a friend, once the king of terrors, now the messenger of eternal peace.

**Looking unto Jesus who gives repentance as well as remission of sins**, to receive from him hearts that are conscious of their misery, and come to deplore it at his feet.

**Looking unto Jesus**, that he who is the author of faith, as he is its subject, may teach us to look to him, that he who is its finisher may keep us in that faith unto the end.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to ourselves, to our thoughts, our desires, our purposes. Unto Jesus, and not to the world, to its lusts, its examples, its maxims, its judgments. Unto Jesus, and not to Satan, whether he seek to frighten us by his rage, or seduce us by his flattery. Oh, how should we rid ourselves of useless questions, of disquieting scruples, of dangerous parleyings with the evil one, of dissipation of spirit, of vain fancies, of bitter disappointments, of painful struggles, of lamentable falls, by looking straight to Jesus, and following him wherever he leads, too anxious not to lose sight of the path which he marks for us to cast a glance to those in which he does not think it fit to lead us!

**Unto Jesus**, and not to our meditations and prayers, to our pious conversion, or to our edifying reading, to the holy assemblies we frequent, nor even to our partaking of the Supper of the Lord. Let us faithfully use all these means of grace, but without confounding them with grace itself. And with turning off our looks from him, who alone can render them efficacious by communicating himself to us by their means.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to our position in the Christian church, to the name which we bear, to the doctrine which we profess, to the idea which others form of our piety, or to that which we form of it ourselves.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to our brethren, not even to the best and most beloved among them. In following a man we run the risk of going wrong; in following Jesus we are certain never to go wrong. If Jesus keeps his place between us and our nearest friend, our attachment to man will be at once less direct and more sweet, less passionate and more pure, less indispensable and more useful, an instrument of rich blessings in the hands of God when he pleases to make use of it, and in its absence a blessing still, when he pleases to do without it.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to the obstacles which meet us on our journey. As soon as we stop to consider them they startle us, they stagger us, they overthrow us, incapable as we are of understanding either the reason for which they are permitted, or the means by which we may overcome them. The apostle was engulfed as soon as he set himself to look at the billows, agitated by the tempest; so long as he looked unto Jesus, he walked upon the waves as upon a rock. The more difficult our task, the heavier our cross, the more needful it is that we should look only to Jesus.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to the temporal blessings that we enjoy. To look first to these blessings is to expose ourselves to be so captivated by them, that they hide from us the light of him who gives them to us. To look first unto Jesus is to receive from him all these benefits, chosen by his wisdom, bestowed by his love, a thousand times more precious because we take them at his hand, to enjoy them in his fellowship, and to use them to his glory.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to our sins. The contemplation of sin only brings death; the contemplation of Jesus brings life. It was not looking at his wounds, but looking at the serpent of brass that healed the Israelite.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to the law; the law gives commands, and does not give strength to perform them. The law always condemns, and never pardons; to place ourselves again under the law is to withdraw ourselves from grace. In proportion as we make our obedience the means of our salvation, we lose our peace, our strength, our joy, because we have forgotten that Jesus is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” As soon as the law has constrained us to seek him, our only savior, it is for him only to require of us obedience; an obedience which he at once bestows, and prescribes, and which, rightly understood, is less a consequence of our salvation than it is a part of that salvation itself, and, like all the rest, a grace.

**Unto Jesus**, and not what we do for him. Too much taken up with our work, we may forget our master; it is possible to have the hands full and the heart empty. Taken up with our master, we cannot forget our work; if the heart is filled with his love, how can the hands not be active in his service?

**Unto Jesus**, and not the apparent success of our efforts. Apparent success is not the measure of real success, and besides, God has not commanded us to succeed, but to work. It is of our work that he will require an account, and not of our success; why then take thought about it before the time? To look to success is to walk by sight; to look to Jesus, and to persevere in following him and serving him in spite of all discouragement, is to walk by faith.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to the degree of grief which our sins have caused us, or to the degree of humiliation which they produce in us. If only we are so humbled by them as to be no longer satisfied with ourselves, if only we are so grieved by them as to look unto Jesus that he may deliver us from them, it

is all he demands of us, and it is, moreover, this look more than all besides that will make our tears flow, and our pride fall.


**Unto Jesus**, and not to the liveliness of our joy, or to the sensible fervor of our love; otherwise, if only this love seem to cool, if only this joy chance to fail us—whether as the consequence of our sloth, or for the trial of our faith, immediately, our emotion being lost, we shall think we have lost our strength, and shall abandon ourselves to melancholy depression, if not to culpable inactivity. Oh, rather let us remember that, if sometimes the emotion and its sweetness fail us, faith and its power remain to us; and that we may be able “always to abound in the work of the Lord,” let us look without ceasing not to our hearts, which are always changing, but to Jesus, who is always the same.

**Unto Jesus**, and not to our faith. The last device of the adversary when he cannot make us look elsewhere, is to turn our eyes from our Savior to our faith, and thus to discourage us if it is weak, and to fill us with pride if it is strong. And both in the one case and in the other to enfeeble us; for it not from faith that strength comes, but it is from the Savior by faith; it is not by looking unto our look, it is by looking unto Jesus.

**Looking unto Jesus**, while we remain upon earth; to Jesus from moment to moment, without suffering ourselves to be distracted either by the recollections of a past, which we should leave behind us, or by the anticipations of a future, of which we know nothing.

**Unto Jesus now**, if we have never looked to him. Unto Jesus anew, if we have ceased to do so. Unto Jesus alone.

**Unto Jesus again.** Unto Jesus always, with a look more and more earnest, more and more confident: “transformed unto the same image from glory to glory”; and thus waiting for the hour when he shall call us to pass from earth to heaven, and from time to eternity—the promised hour, the blessed hour, when at length, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

—by the French writer: *Theodore Monod (1802-1856)*. 

## DOES GOD EXIST?

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# The Gospel and the Spirit

## 4

### The Spirit Arrives

(Acts 2:22-41)

by Rodney Nelson

#### Now that I have your attention

**M**iracles, in Scripture, never establish the message, they bear witness to its truth. At Pentecost, the message of the gospel was prepared for by the miracle of tongues. The audience was prepared to listen because there was no excuse for them to not understand what was spoken. The Holy Spirit thus prepared the crowd for Peter's message about Jesus.

#### Three works of God

Peter declares that God was involved in Jesus' ministry in three important ways. He tells the crowd, "Jesus was a man accredited by God" (v. 22). 'Accredited,' literally means, 'to prove.' God had proven who Jesus was through miracles (works of power), wonders, and signs. God was identified as performing these miracles through Jesus.

Peter tells the crowd that Jesus was 'handed over' to the Jews, by the will of God. Jesus was given up to the Jews by "God's set purpose, and foreknowledge." It was God's will that Jesus be delivered to the Jews because he had a fixed purpose for doing so.

The eternal tension between divine foreknowledge, and human free will comes together in verse 23. While Peter makes it clear that God 'handed over' Jesus to the Jews for his own purposes, he goes on to say, "You, with the help of wicked men, crucified him." The Jews, with the assistance of Roman authorities, were guilty of shedding innocent blood. It was the divine decision and purpose to hand Jesus over to Jewish and Roman authorities, but it was a human decision to crucify him.

Three important points arise from this. One, it was God's will that Jesus die for the sins of mankind (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:11). Second, the decision to crucify Jesus was made by human free will (Luke 24:7). Third, blame for his death falls on both Jew and Gentile. The implication is clear: all humankind is responsible for Jesus' death, and stands in need of salvation. "You put him to death," applies to you and me personally, not merely to those in Peter's audience.

Peter moves on to a statement of triumph: "But God raised him from the dead" (v. 24). No human, or other-worldly experience could stop God from accomplishing his purpose. As God had permitted human will to kill his Son, so God's will determines death's defeat.

Salvation could never have been accomplished without God's will. Only God could send his Son to earth; only God could allow his Son to be crucified; only God could raise his Son from the dead. Human free will was used, at Calvary, as a catalyst for effecting the will of God. We are guilty of slaying the Son of God, but God worked things out so that we could have salvation. Peter

quoted Psalm 16:8-11 (vv. 25-28). Permit me to paraphrase it: "The Lord is always before the believer, because he is at God's right hand. Because of this I will not be shaken in my faith. I rejoice, and my heart is glad, for my body lives in hope because God will not abandon me in the grave. This is possible because he did not allow his Holy One to live in the grave forever. Because Jesus was resurrected, I will be filled with joy in your presence."

The gospel, as preached by Peter in verses 22-24, describes a God who is not only in control, but who mysteriously works his will in unexpected ways. Salvation was accomplished in history involving human beings. Salvation is real because it is based on the reality of a real God working in a real world.

#### David trusted God


The Psalm Peter quoted did not apply to David. David's request was that God should not forget him in the grave (v. 27). The assurance was given to David that God would not abandon his "holy one" to decay. At this point, Peter makes a tremendous claim for David (v. 30). He says that David foresaw "what was ahead," which allowed him to speak of the resurrection of Christ. Peter, and the other disciples witness the fulfillment of what David foresaw (v.31). The NIV translates it: "We are all witnesses of the fact."

Now Peter draws attention to Christ's exaltation (v. 33). Jesus was "exalted to the right hand of God," a position of honor, and power (Acts 5:31; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13). The expression demonstrates that Jesus now enjoys all the rights and privileges, and authority of the Godhead. As a consequence, Jesus received the Holy Spirit from the Father, and poured out the Spirit at Pentecost (v.33). The Holy Spirit's power at Pentecost confirmed Christ's standing with the Father.

#### The high point

Peter proclaims the ultimate conclusion to his message: "God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ" (v.36). God had made Jesus Lord of all things (Philippians 2:9). As Christ, Jesus was God's anointed representative. In verse 37, Peter assures his people that they were responsible for putting to death a divine personage. They were cut to the heart. Many immediately asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (v.37). Peter replied: "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins" (v.38). This was a call for individual and corporate repentance for the sin of putting to death the Son of God. The result of Peter's sermon was about 3,000 baptisms in one day. However, not everyone accepted the message (v.41). Why? Because the Holy Spirit did not reach those whom God had not yet called.

#### The continuing call

While the generation spoken to by Peter was unique in its connection to Jesus, himself, people today must no less heed the same exhortation. We are those who are "afar off" (v.39), both in time and in our own separation from God. Though separated by two thousand years, people today, and back then, are equally separated from God. Time and circumstance are irrelevant to the sin that all humanity shares. Yet the gospel bridges sinners from the past, present, and future under the overarching forgiveness, and justification provided by the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus. By faith, people today stand on the same ground as those two thousand years ago. The blood of Jesus covers all sin for all time. 



## IT'S ONLY A LITTLE SNAKE . . . .

**D**r. Ford and Gill were living in Australia now, and Gill had lots of questions to ask the neighbors. First, she asked about cyclones. Des had told her that Caloundra never had cyclones. "Was that correct?" Gill asked her new neighbor, Shirley.

"Well," said Shirley, "not since I lived here, and I have been here for over thirty years. But there was one about forty-two years ago. It caused a lot of damage." That was one too many for Gill.

### Only Seven Cyclones

Gradually the information came out. Seven cyclones have passed Caloundra in the last thirty years, and one had hit Brisbane, which was to the south. Gill thought it sounded as though it was time for another cyclone to hit Caloundra. She thought it even more likely when she saw a tree, that had been marked in memory of some people who had been cast ashore in a big storm in 1860. Down the road at Dickey Beach, there was the skeleton of the ship, HMS Dickey, lying on the beach. That happened in an 1830 storm. "Hmm," Gill thought, "it sounds as though there's a really big storm every thirty years."

### Only One Shark

Then there were the sharks. Paul Ford, Dr. Ford's son, said sharks didn't appear in these waters, because they were too warm. Sharks liked cooler water. When several shark attacks took in South Australia and West Australia, Gill asked another neighbor about sharks at Caloundra.

Robin Eva, who swam in the sea three times a day said, "No, you never see them." Then he thought a minute. "Oh, yes, one day I got out of the water, and then saw a shark swimming near the shore." That was one too many for Gill.

### Cockroaches and Tarantulas

Queensland is a beautiful place, but it has its downside. Cockroaches fly in from outside at night, if the unscreened windows are open. They are one to two inches long, and ugly. One cockroach was one too many for Gill.

In her bedroom, Gill had seen a Tarantula a couple of times. It wasn't huge, only about the size of the long end of an egg. They are pretty scary looking, but people say they are harmless. They eat insects. Gill hoped that they wouldn't run across her face in the night. It was one too many for Gill.

### Only One Snake

Another day, Gill asked Shirley about snakes. "Oh, no," Shirley said, "You never see them." Then she thought a bit, and she said, "I did see one on the footpath one day, but only one in thirty years." That was one too many for Gill.

One night, Dr. Ford and Gill were taking their evening walk

from Shelly Beach to Moffat Beach. There was a footpath most of the way. That night the moon was just crescent, with most of it filled with shadow. The stars in Australia are much brighter and much more plentiful than they appear in the U.S. Maybe there is less pollution. Nevertheless, with the moon on the wane, it was fairly dark.

As they walked along, Gill noticed a curved stick on the path. Dr. Ford had just crossed it. "Isn't that a snake?" she asked. They turned around, still close to it, waiting for it to move. It did move, very slowly. It was spring, and snakes tend to be a bit sleepy then. "Yes," said Dr. Ford, "it is a snake." "Lucky you didn't step on it," said Gill. "Even luckier that I didn't step on it, as you have shoes on, and I only have on strappy sandals with mainly bare feet."

### It Was Only a Little Snake

"It was only a little snake," said Dr. Ford. He was very intrepid about things that would scare most people. Intrepid means brave.

"But small snakes are worse than big ones, I think," said Gill. "I know that baby rattlers in America, have more concentrated venom than the adults." Dr. Ford wasn't bothered. "The venomous snakes are all up north," he said. "This one was probably harmless."

Gill said, "We used to live six hundred miles south, and there were deadly red-bellied black snakes down there. We ARE north, Des."

Gill believed the snake may easily have been venomous, and that God slowed the snake down, and measured Dr. Ford's steps so he didn't tread on it. It was quite amazing that he didn't touch it.

There were lots of long, curly things on the path during the rest of the walk. Nine hundred and ninety nine percent were just brush from the pine trees and shrubs along the sides. But Gill imagined they were all snakes.

Long, long ago, in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve, "You can eat anything but not the fruit on my special tree." Satan, the biggest snake ever, said: "It's only a little piece of fruit. It's only a little sin. Surely God didn't mean it." But eating that little piece of fruit led to Adam and Eve being out of the garden. It began all the sin, and misery of this sad world.

Little sins, like little snakes, do matter. They can be as bad as some big ones. Sometimes they are even worse because they fool us into thinking they are so small they don't matter.

But do not be frightened about the snake of sin. God fixed it all back there. He told Adam and Eve that the snake would bite their heel, but he would crush its head. Jesus did this when he died on the cross, and bore our sins. Jesus is the remedy for the snakebite of sin.



# TO and FRO with the Editor

**Question:** *I've spent considerable time in the last few weeks, at an atheistic website, that devotes itself to countering biblical, political, and social movements. I tried not to go in with guns blasting, but, rather, with a conciliatory attitude; open, and willing to discuss the issues. Ultimately, I fear I did more harm than good, because I would not budge on the issue of abortion.*

*Is there a good way of discussing these sensitive issues with those who hold opposing views? I tried to be loving in my approach, but my pride, and my desire to be right probably got the better of me at times. How would you present the Christian position on the issue of abortion to someone who supports it, and doesn't believe in God?*  
S.K.

**Answer:** With you, I think that abortion has become a tragedy of holocaust proportions in our time. From what you have said, I think you have learned a lot from your encounter with the 'pro-choice' person you dialogued with. In any contest of opinion it is best to search for common ground. Those who argue for abortion have a respect for human dignity and freedom that centers on the woman. This is not something Christians would disagree with. Women's rights are outraged by men in many cultures. This is one reason why many women are so passionate on this subject.

If both sides of the debate can agree that women's rights ought to be protected, it is perhaps then possible for the Christian to take the argument another step, and say that for the same reasons that women who are weaker than men, ought to be protected by men who are stronger, so also should the unborn—the weakest of the weak—be championed by both men and women.

Christians can point out that this principle of the defense of the weak by the strong, is traceable to the religion taught in the Old Testament, and intensified by Christ in the New. Civilization, and human freedom, have risen to their highest levels in the world, where this ethic has been embraced. Where those with no say, no helper, no vote, or no advantage, have gone begging for a strong advocate, justice has fallen in the streets.

I would argue that abortion as it is largely practiced, represents an awful pause in human progress. A society that is willing to eliminate developing babies for no other reason than the convenience of an adult community, is a society going in reverse.

That is my view; remembering, of course, that there is an oppressor in me as well as the other person, and God loves us both.

**Question:** *Jesus forgave sins outside of the Levitical Day of Atonement, and he declared himself to be the sole pathway to the Father (John 14:6). Based on this, wouldn't the best interpretation of Galatians 4:4 be that, since it was certain that Christ would shed his innocent blood as the sinless, obedient sacrifice, he was therefore born under the curse of the law but not subject to it, since it conflicted with his Melchizedek priesthood?*

**Answer:** I'm not sure if I have grasped your question, but here I go with some comments. Galatians 4:4 needs to be interpreted in its context. The apostle's argument goes this way: All who rely on the law are under a curse (3:10). It is therefore not possible for anyone to achieve righteousness by means of obedience to law, because the law requires absolute obedience (3:10). Instead, the righteous shall live by faith. Faith is something other than law; it speaks of a different methodology (3:12). The curse, (which was upon all mankind, and which consisted of mankind's inability to render due obedience to law, even though the law demanded it) has been removed from mankind. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us (4:4). The logic of the passage seems to be that God has made a way for humanity to escape from the full exaction of the law—not by changing the law; nor by the law's removal—rather by Jesus allowing all that the law required of us, to be required of him.

So I would say that Galatians 4:4 means that Jesus was born under the curse of the law. He voluntarily made himself subject to it in every way that we are. Jesus was really made a curse—for us.


In Hebrews, the discussion about Melchizedek serves a different purpose to that of Paul in Galatians. There, Christ is a priest in the order of Melchizedek to show, not his subjection to the law, but his superiority to it.

**Question:** *I believe we are in the last days of earth's history. In order for Jesus to come, I understand some events must first occur—the gospel preached to all the world, close of probation, seven last plagues, etc. My question: Is there evidence that Jesus could come earlier, or must the above events first happen?*

L.M.

**Answer:** In my opinion, Jesus could have come at any time since his ascension. The second coming of Christ is not presented as the last in a series of required happenings. The New Testament seems to say that the death, and ascension of Jesus ushered in the last days. See Hebrews 1:1-4, 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20; Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 1 Peter 4:7. Through the preaching of the gospel, the impact of Christ upon the world unravels to its consummation. Men and women are brought to judgment through the hearing of the gospel. In this sense the end of the world is always present; the last days are always here. Jesus taught this when he told his disciples:

*"Remember the words I spoke to you. 'No servant is greater than his master'. If they persecuted me they will persecute you also" (John 15:20).*

I do not believe it is possible to calculate our position regarding Christ's appearing on a sequential line. What many have called 'last-day events' have occurred over and over again in different parts of the world, since Christ ascended. Perhaps they will occur on a global scale one day. But, remember, every generation lives on the brink of eternity. Good News! Christ already reigns, and we will reign with him. 

# GOSPEL ON THE RADIO

Appointments

## RADIO GUIDE

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KFIA 710AM

Monday-Friday 5 a.m.  
11 a.m.

*Auburn*

KAHI 950AM

Sunday 8:45 a.m.  
Ron Allen

#### HAWAII

*Honolulu*

KAIM 870AM

Monday-Friday 6:05 p.m.

#### WASHINGTON

*Blaine*

KARI 550AM

Monday-Friday 12:15 p.m.

Saturday 8:30 a.m.

Sunday 1:00 p.m.

*Spokane*

KUDY 1280AM

Monday-Friday 11:45 a.m.

## RADIO GUIDE

### CANADA

#### ALBERTA

*Edmonton*

The Light

Sunday 9:30 a.m.  
5:00 p.m.

*High River*

(covers Red Deer to Lethbridge)

CHRB 1140AM

Sunday 5:00 p.m.

#### BRITISH COLUMBIA

*100 Mile House*

CKBX 840AM

Sunday 8:30 a.m.

*Penticton*

CIGV 101.7FM

Saturday 8:05 p.m.

*Quesnel*

CKCQ 920AM

Sunday 8:30 a.m.

*Williams Lake*

CKWL 570AM

Sunday 8:30 a.m.

*Blaine, Washington*

KARI 550AM

Monday-Friday 12:15 p.m.

Saturday 8:30 a.m.

Sunday 1:00 p.m.

#### MANITOBA

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*Dauphin*

CKDM 730AM

Sunday 9:00 a.m.

#### NEW BRUNSWICK

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*Oakville*

CHWO 1250AM

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*Oshawa*

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#### SASKATCHEWAN

*Estevan*

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*Weyburn*

CFSL 1190AM

Sunday 9:00 a.m.

# 2002

The Auburn Bible School, "Scripture Alone" previously announced for August 9-11, 2002, has been cancelled for organizational reasons. Watch this page for information about future GNU Bible schools.

## WILL YOU WILL?

Nearly two million people die in the USA every year without leaving a will. Approximately 600,000 of these are evangelical Christians. In the majority of cases, they were good Christian stewards in life. But they made no provision to continue their stewardship after death. They left their lifetime savings for court distribution. While alive, they would never have sanctioned the decisions on distribution made by the court.

None of us will die any the sooner for making legal provision for the final allocation of our goods. These are goods God has loaned us. Legal provision should not be delayed for even a day, especially now, when the making of a will can be both simple and inexpensive.

If you have not already done so, will you pray and act on this matter of a will, or a living trust? Will you remember the work of the gospel, that others may come to share the eternal life in which you now rejoice? It is within your power to make provision that some find the treasure to which our Lord referred (Matthew 13:44). That gospel treasure illuminates the shadows of death, points to the everlasting gates of pearl, and reveals a welcoming savior (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

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**W**hen a woman gives birth to a profoundly retarded child, no “how to” book will remove the pain. Poverty and injustice do not go away despite our best programs. Kids in the most affluent suburbs shoot their classmates at school. Marriage problems don’t get solved. Death snares us all eventually. And any faith that does not account for complexities such as these cannot last. Quite simply, being human is hazardous to health. Unlike angels, human beings get cancer, lose their jobs, and go hungry. We need a faith that somehow allows the possibility of joy in the midst of suffering, as well as realism in the midst of praise.

*Phillip Yancey.*

Reaching for the Invisible God.



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