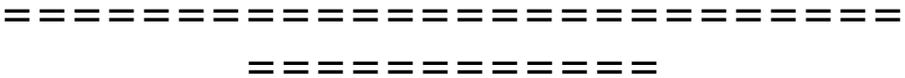


THE FAITH BUILDER

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God
(Romans 10:17).

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1 April 2014



From The Editor

A short while ago I gave a sermon at St Aidan's on Psalm 34. It was a very meaningful message for me and although it was planned several weeks ago that I should preach on this particular Psalm, circumstances arranged themselves so that the Psalm became very relevant to me. This made the message very personal and powerful. So, I think it is very appropriate that I reproduce the message

here. Although I gave several personal and family references in the spoken sermon, I have edited them out here because of the personal nature of them, and I want to concentrate on the powerful message of the Psalm itself.

I could never hope to give full coverage of the Psalm in the limited time I had to preach it on the Sunday morning, so I had to limit myself to the first four verses. So, here is the sermon, transcribed from my notes.

**¹ I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.**

In this verse there is a strong resolve that no matter what happens, and in all circumstances and situations, the psalmist will always praise the Lord. He will never blame the Lord for his troubles. He will always have the confidence that nothing happens without a reason.

Paul says “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”

(Romans 8:28).

Notice that Paul says, “We know.” How does he know? He knows by faith that over and above all his circumstances is a caring and loving God who is in complete control. He has the confidence that though things seem bad, they are working for his good.

A person moaned to his friend about all the negative experiences he had to cope with during his “storm and stress years” when life was not so easy for him. His friend replied, “If you hadn’t gone through all those things, you wouldn’t be the man you are today.” So if we are going through hard times at present, there has to be a time when the reason for having to go through them will be made clear to us, and we will end up being better people because of it.

David said, “Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me.” (Psalm 23)

But it is not easy to give praise to God when going through difficulties. We don’t feel like it when we have that weight in the pit of our stomach, and the feeling of depression and

hopelessness when things are going wrong and we don't know how to put them right. There is somehow a pretence in acting happy happy when we feel totally miserable. But going around with a long face which says, "I'm suffering, feel sorry for me," smacks a lot of self-pity.

So what do we do? Remember Job and all his misfortunes. His response was "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

Yet, look at the second part of that verse: "yet I will argue my ways to his face" (ESV).

What this means is that we do not have to blindly accept what is happening to us without voicing our feelings. It all depends to whom we voice our feelings. Some people go around spilling their guts to everyone they meet, playing the game of "ain't it awful!" These people end up being a pain in the neck to all they meet. When we see someone like that coming our way, we take off in the other direction, because, let's be honest, most of us don't want to be a rubbish bin for another's grotty feelings. Professional counsellors are trained to deal with people like that, and that's where they need to go if they need someone to listen to their issues and

gripes.

It's not that we don't want to be compassionate and understanding, but that's not what a lot of these people want. All they want is to use us for a sounding board for their endless problems. And most of us are not equipped for that.

But what did Job do? He argued his case to the Lord.

I remember getting a nasty, accusative letter from someone who accused me of things that I have never done. I felt that the comments were quite unjust. So I went into a quiet place with the Lord and I read the letter to Him and commented on each sentence. I argued my defence to the Lord.

What happened was a wonderful experience of a strong minds-eye picture of the Lord on His throne, seated in victory above all the circumstances and problems, and He told me that I was sitting right up there with him. After that, I did not have to worry about that letter at all.

The accusations were totally neutralised

by the revelation that I was seated with Christ, and that He was my shield and defence against all the accusations that were levelled against me. He was the One who knew the truth, and He promised to be my advocate.

What happened then? I went from being downcast and depressed, to running along that lonely beach, running and leaping and shouting “yahoo!” You see, the Lord, helped me back into a place where I could genuinely praise Him.

And this is the way that David could say, “I will praise the Lord at all times, His praise will always be on my lips.”

So, what were the consequences of that event? The encounter gave me the boost and confidence I needed to start on a new life-project that ended with me getting a university degree and a whole new career.

One encounter with the Lord, that enabled me to praise Him in the negative circumstances I was in, changed the whole direction of my life, and the positive consequences far outweighed those problems and difficulties that prompted me to argue my case before the Lord in the first

place.

**² I will glory in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.**

So, having experienced the goodness of God in negative circumstances, David has set his heart on continuing to glory in the Lord whatever happens to him. There is another positive spin-off – that trusting the Lord and arguing our case before Him, sets an example for others who are afflicted, so that they can go before the Lord and do the same thing, and end up rejoicing themselves.

What drags people down when they are suffering is, when they share with someone else, that other person starts sharing their own negative experiences. “You think you have it hard? Listen, my negative experience is worse than yours. Listen to this...” and they go on giving you their horror story, and this makes you more depressed than ever.

But a person who _____ comes to you when you

are feeling down and depressed, and they tell you that they went before the Lord and argued their case to Him, and He showed them that He was seated in victory and they are sharing in that victory, and they tell you their reaction – that they turned from depression to joy and praise, and the positive consequences that followed it; then this uplifts your own spirits, and encourages you to go to the Lord in the same way, and to come back out rejoicing.

**³ Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.**

So when we meet someone who is undergoing suffering and is down and depressed, the best thing we can do for them is to show them the example of what the Lord can do for us and encourage them to go to the Lord with their difficulties and be raised to victory with Him. Then, instead of having one person rejoicing and another depressed, we have two people rejoicing in and praising the Lord together. This is what Christian fellowship is all about.

When I was a little younger, in our church in Dunedin, there was an older guy who always

talked about his medical procedures. He had a number of medical problems, and could not talk about anything else. What a depressing subject to deal with in a social situation. We don't want to know all the gory details of someone's prostate operation or the nurse lancing and squeezing someone's boils while we are eating our afternoon tea scones! I had a friend who had a holiday job at the Freezing Works, and as we were sitting down at tea-time, he would describe all the gory details of what happened during his day. Some people get a weird satisfaction about telling their blood and guts stories. But that sort of thing leads to depression. It certainly does not lead to joy and rejoicing!

This is why Paul said, "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things" (Philippians 4:8). Doing that, and speaking about those positive things is much more edifying and healthy, and we should do it more often.

**4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.**

This is David's testimony, and it can be ours. There will always be a response from the Lord if we seek Him in times of difficulty. He will not be silent. He has many ways of answering us. There is no doubt about it. It is definite. He will answer us.

Sometimes we can go through a difficult family situation and this can be very upsetting at times. In the "thick of it" the last thing we can feel like is praising the Lord. But another family member can give us that special "pearl of wisdom and comfort" when we most need it, and this can make all the difference. When the Lord answers prayer and gives us comfort and assurance, there doesn't need to be a flash of light and a dramatic revelation. Just a few comforting words from a son or daughter, no matter how young they might be, can very well be the voice of God speaking to our hearts giving us assurance and peace.

When I went through a similar situation, our Burmese cat, Reizo, came on to my lap, rested

his head on my stomach and purred. I said, “At least Reizo loves me!” You see, God answers us in ways that we may not expect, and those answers can come through the most ordinary ways and people. Insights can come from the most unexpected sources and people, and they show the love and grace of God toward us.

So, what we say to others in their distress, can have a dynamic impact on them if we are trusting for the Lord to speak through us words of comfort and assurance. Receiving answers from the Lord, takes away our fears for the future. We receive a settled peace, that no matter what happens, everything will turn out for the good.

But we must remember, the last part of the verse in Romans 8:28: “of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” So, the promise is not for anyone. It is reserved to those who love God and who have been called to make Christ their Saviour according to God’s purpose for them.

The bad news is that for those who do not love God, everything does not turn out for their good. There is no promise of joy and rejoicing at the end of their difficulty and suffering. A lot of

non-Christian people say, “Oh, well, it’s all for the good.” They are dreaming. If they don’t love God, and Jesus is not their Saviour, then they are separated from the Author of good. What they think of goodness, is just another level of badness.

For those who do not know Jesus as their Saviour, everything that I have said that would encourage Christian believers, the exact opposite applies to them. They do not bless the Lord at all times. God’s praise is not continually in their mouths. They do not make their boast in the Lord. They are not number among the humble. They don’t seek the Lord, and they don’t receive answers from Him. They live in fear and they will never escape the things they fear most.

Does that describe you? If so, what do you need to do about it? You need to start seeking the Lord while He may be found. If you seek Him with all your heart, you will find Him.

What are your first steps?

1. Acknowledge that you are a sinner without hope, and all you deserve is to be shut out

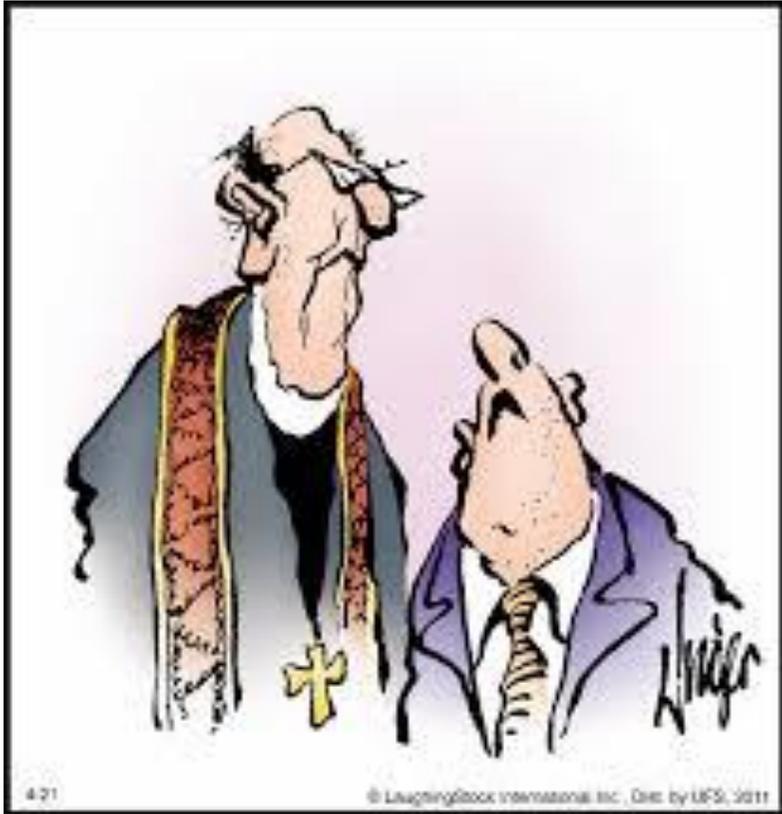
of God's heaven and condemned to an eternity of misery, separated from everything that is good and lovely.

2. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross, and that He rose again to show that he can take away your sin and make you totally acceptable to God, and to give you the assurance that when Jesus comes again, He will take you into His presence to live with joy and rejoicing for eternity.
3. Ask God to forgive you, and that Jesus Christ becomes your personal Saviour and Lord.
4. Determine that you are going to follow the instructions in the Bible to live a holy life, pleasing to God and as a testimony to others.

If you are able to follow these steps sincerely, this will show that you are prepared to turn yourself around and start loving the Lord. Then the blessings promises that are contained in the Bible will certainly apply to you.

Choose you this day whom you will serve. Today, if you hear His voice speaking to your heart about these things, don't harden your heart

toward the Lord. Who knows, this could be the first day of a whole new experience of life for you!



**"Sorry I left during your sermon.
I was sleepwalking."**

The Dead Church

A new Pastor in a small Oklahoma town spent the first four days making personal visits to each of the members, inviting them to come to his first services.

The following Sunday the church was all but empty. Accordingly, the Pastor placed a notice in the local newspapers, stating that, because the church was dead, it was everyone's duty to give it a decent Christian burial. The funeral would be held the following Sunday afternoon, the notice said.

Morbidly curious, a large crowd turned out for the "funeral." In front of the pulpit, they saw a closed coffin, smothered in flowers. After the Pastor delivered the eulogy, he opened the coffin and invited his congregation to come forward and pay their final respects to their dead church.

Filled with curiosity as to what would represent the corpse of a "dead church," all the people eagerly lined up to look in the coffin. Each

"mourner" peeped into the coffin then quickly turned away with a guilty, sheepish look.

In the coffin, tilted at the correct angle, was a large mirror.

THE HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM – WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

By Paul Christensen

For a long time, I have held to the doctrine that a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit as an event after conversion. This is mainly because it was the experience of most believers in that they were converted without any reference or knowledge that the Holy Spirit worked in any other way than to effect their understanding of the Gospel and their conversion to Christ.

This was the outcome of the majority of traditional evangelical Bible teachers believing and teaching that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit had ceased after the last Apostle died, and that the only contemporary function of the Holy Spirit was to make the Scriptures more understandable and, in a mysterious way, to bring about the born-again experience. Although there is no doubt that the believers converted this way were truly saved, that's about it as far as

they went in using the spiritual “tools” that were available to them from the Holy Spirit.

The “filling” of the Spirit was explained away by saying that the Holy Spirit entered the believer’s life at conversion, and was then helping them to achieve a holy life. Preaching the gospel was done by natural means, mainly through rhetoric and persuasion, hoping that somehow the Spirit would enlighten the non-believers and cause them to see their need for Christ. But the reality has always been that it is near to impossible to achieve spiritual discernment through natural means. Conviction of sin, the need for a Saviour, and conversion to Christ are supernatural events, and therefore need supernatural means to accomplish them.

We have seen a general decline in the Western traditional churches, and presently these churches do not have the same impact on society in the way they once had. The reason for this is that they have depended on natural wisdom, rhetoric, and persuasion to try and get converts. Also, many church members have been born into the church, satisfied to be “nominal” Christians with little personal experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in

their lives, and to just attend a weekly Sunday service, go through the ritual, and then go and live their normal lives for the rest of the week. This makes church for them little more than just a social club.

A new awareness of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit came with the rise of the Pentecostal movement at the turn of the 20th Century, believers discovered that the miracle working power of God and the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were present among groups of believers who decided to take the New Testament literally where it taught that the works that Jesus did, they could do as well, even greater works (John 14:12). They discovered that the gift of speaking in tongues that came to the disciples at the Day of Pentecost was also available to them, and this opened the way for the other supernatural gifts to flow.

But they were opposed by the traditional churches which maintained the belief that these supernatural gifts were not available in modern times, so Pentecostals had to leave their churches and form new denominations.

In the late 1950s, a new Charismatic

movement among the traditional churches started, and this made more traditional believers aware of the availability of God's supernatural "tools" for building up of the Church and for effective ministry to the lost.

As part of these movements, where the availability of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit was being restored to the Church, the concept of the "baptism with the Spirit" involved a "second work of grace" subsequent to conversion. This was started through the Wesleyan Holiness movements of the 19th Century, and involved the doctrine of "full sanctification", but did not include the operation of the gifts of the Spirit. It was the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements that extended the concept to include the receiving of the gift of tongues and the other supernatural gifts.

The mainline Pentecostal denominations still teach that the baptism with the Spirit is an event subsequent to conversion, and this is what I have believed and taught all these years. But now I have come to see that this doctrine has come about through ignorance of when the full power of the Holy Spirit and His gifts are made available to the believer.

Pentecostals and many Charismatics believe that the enduement of power has to come after conversion, but upon close examination of the New Testament, I cannot see any conclusive evidence that this should be so. The evidence that I see in Scripture is that everything happens at conversion. Now, most evangelical churches, such as the Baptist and Brethren churches believe that, but the problem is that many do not believe that the gifts are available to be used today, so they conduct themselves and minister as though they have the Holy Spirit in “theory” but not in practice. They seem to have the idea that the Holy Spirit works in some mysterious way without them actually experiencing anything that would show them that He is present and working among them. To me, this is like saying the Emperor has new clothes, when he is not wearing any clothes at all.

When we consider the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, we see that the Holy Spirit worked in ways that were clearly observable, to the extent that observers were amazed at what was happening. The vast numbers of new believers who joined the Early Church were not attracted by mere rhetoric. They saw the power of God in

action with their own eyes, and experienced healing, deliverance, the thoughts and intents of their hearts revealed to them, and they flocked to Christ in great numbers. This is because the Apostles were using the supernatural “tools” of the Spirit in the way they were designed to be used.

The evidence that I see in the scriptural text is that when a person was converted to Christ, they received the fullness of the Holy Spirit as well. Nowhere in Paul’s teaching does he say that a person is converted and then has to receive the baptism with the Spirit as a subsequent event. I believe that the doctrine was established in the Pentecostal church as the result of what they experienced. The reality for them was that people who were already believers received a new infilling of the Holy Spirit which gave them the ability to speak in tongues, minister healing, and operate the other gifts of the Spirit. There was no doubt that the Holy Spirit did work with them, as many have testified, and it was this validation by the Holy Spirit that reinforced the doctrine.

But what I have discovered that all the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit and His

gifts are available to the new believer at the point of conversion. He is able to speak in tongues right from that moment. He is able to lay hands on the sick and see them recover; is able to prophesy, give words of knowledge and wisdom, work miracles, exercise extraordinary faith. In fact, he can use any of the supernatural tools that are available to him, as the Holy Spirit directs in any given situation where they are needed.

So, I am going to change my approach in my encouragement for people to get themselves into the fullness of the working of the Holy Spirit. I am going to tell them that they already have this ability and it happened the moment they were converted. They don't need another infilling of the Spirit. They have Him already. They just need to know how to get going with the gifts. This is where good teaching in the prophetic is so valuable and necessary.

I believe that the traditional churches have short-changed their members. Too many good, sincere believers are sitting in churches believing that they have the Holy Spirit in their lives, but have no knowledge of what that means for their own upbuilding and ministry to others.

They are like people who are starving, not realising that the refrigerator in front of them is full of food, but they have never been told that all they need to do is to open the door and get the food. It is like that there is a padlock on the fridge door that was locked and the key thrown away when the last Apostle died, making the food in the fridge inaccessible to them. This is where I believe that the Church is its own worst enemy, and no-one else is to blame for its powerlessness and decline in these days.

We need to re-think our teaching and strategy for getting believers into the full flow of the power of the Holy Spirit in their churches and ministries. Instead of teaching that this is something they can receive, we need to tell them that this is something they have already received but needs to activate in them. It's like getting a new version of Microsoft Windows. We can download the program and it is fully functional, but in order to get the full benefits of it, we need to "activate" it.

The problem that Paul had with the Corinthian church was that they were Spirit-filled believers, but they did not conduct themselves as such. They had gone back to natural wisdom

(sophia), rather than the wisdom that involved the crucified Christ – “Spirit-people” (pneumata). Most traditional believers are the same. They are Spirit-people, and yet they are conducting themselves as if they are not.

The Corinthians had become arrogant in their use of the gift of tongues, believing that those who had the gift had a “deeper” wisdom in the things of God than ordinary believers. This is the same as those who are searching for, and those who think they are experiencing the “deeper life” in the Spirit – a cut above the ordinary “herd”. In fact, Paul recognised only two sets of people – unconverted pagans, and converted Spirit-filled believers. He believed that Spirit-filled believers had received “every spiritual blessing in heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3). He included every converted Christian. He did not recognise two castes of believers as some churches tend to do. As Christian believers, we are all “in the same boat”; we have been converted to the same Christ, received the same Holy Spirit, and have been inducted into the same Body of Christ (ecclesia).

There is no such person as the “deeper-life” believer. This is a fantasy brought about

by unreliable theology and doctrinal teaching. All it does is to make people proud and arrogant, and if these people persist in this attitude, they become liable to the judgment that comes upon the proud and arrogant. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). These “deeper-life” folks need to consider what James says about them. Those seeking the “deeper-life” need to realise that they are merely trying to seek the “holy grail”, which they will never find, because the legend is just a made-up fiction.

Also, there is no such person as a “carnal Christian”. A person is either carnal – a non believer living totally in the flesh (sarx) or a believer in the Spirit (pneuma). Paul never used the Greek word “sarx” (flesh) to describe the Corinthian believers who were not conducting themselves as Spirit-people. He told them that he spoke to them as if they were carnal (1 Corinthians 3:1), not that they actually were carnal. He used the word “sophia” (natural wisdom), to describe the basis on which they were operating. What this means is that to describe a person as a “carnal Christian” is actually to accuse them of being a pagan non-

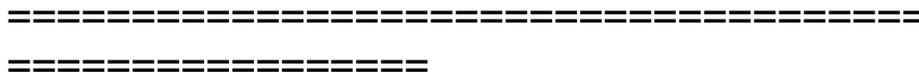
believer. It is better to refer to them in terms of “sophia” in that they are operating under natural wisdom rather than the “wisdom from above” (James 3:17), which is actually on the foundation of the crucified Christ.

So there is no difference between the traditional evangelical converted believer and the “Full Gospel, Spirit Filled” believer. According to the teaching of the New Testament they are one and the same. The difference is that the former does not know what is available to him or her, and the latter has been correctly taught to use the tools and abilities given.

But the “Spirit-filled” believer need not think that he or she is closer to God or is spiritually superior in any way to other believers who may not be using the tools that God has provided. The gracious and humble approach is to get alongside these ones and try to encourage them to believe that there is a more excellent way (Acts 18:24-28); 1 Corinthians 12:31).



"When I press this button, activating the trapdoor, this will conclude the exit interview."



HOLY SPIRIT ADVANTAGES

"But the manifestation ("a

making known; exhibition, i.e. expression. The act of demonstrating") ***of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit*** ("advantage; be better for") ***of all***" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

There are tremendous benefits when we will make good use of the gifts that God has given to every Holy Spirit-filled believer. God knows exactly what we need in order to fulfil His purposes here on earth; and He has given nine beautiful and powerful Spiritual Gifts to enable us to encourage and build up people wherever we go.

- **We cannot meet spiritual needs with natural remedies!**
- **The most effective way to**

minister to people is Spirit to spirit; allowing the Holy Spirit to give us the right words and actions when we minister to others.

Because these Spiritual Gifts are given to us by God they are therefore very important that we learn how to minister them effectively to others. They should not be for a selected few to function in; they are inside every Holy Spirit-filled believer in Jesus Christ. **They are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit ~ and HE LIVES INSIDE OF US!** That means wherever you and I go the Holy Spirit and His Gifts are available to us to minister in loving, beautiful and powerful ways. We ignore them to our loss. As the Scripture declares, they are given to each of us, so everyone can profit through their being

released out of us. They bring the God-factor into our ministry and witnessing for Jesus. So many more needs are met and answers given to people when we are functioning in the gifts that God has given to us.

My testimony is that the most signs, wonders, miracles and healings that I have seen in my ministry have been as a direct result of the Holy Spirit showing me what to say and do, and giving me the knowledge to set people free from whatever it is they are struggling with. Exercising Spiritual Gifts has opened up the world for me to minister. Why? People are hungry for reality. Most Christians do not need "another sermon"! They are often crying out for an answer to things they are going through. A word of knowledge,

wisdom, discerning of spirits, prophecy, faith, healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues are available to those who will listen to the Holy Spirit and follow His instructions. These nine Spiritual Gifts are the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and they have to be expressed ~ demonstrated ~ if they are to provide answers to people. Tragically so few are encouraged or taught to live and work in this dimension of the Holy Spirit. While they sit dormant inside of us they are actually quite useless. They have to be released, exercised, spoken-out, to get the benefits of why they were given in the first place. That is why we are exhorted in Scripture to "**earnestly desire**" these gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 12, 39 ~ please take time to read 1 Corinthians Chapters 12 to 14).

- **The fact is we need them activated and flowing out of us to get God-results.**

I call the nine Spiritual Gifts “the Christians tools of the trade.” They are an essential part of our walk with Jesus Christ. Remember, Spiritual Gifts are God’s idea, not mine.

- **He gave them because He knows they are essential if we want to be more fruitful in our Christian walk and service for God.**

I am so grateful to God that I learned early in my Christian walk to see the benefits of exercising

Spiritual Gifts, and I have been pursuing the voice of God so that I will hear Him as clearly as I can. My desire is to be obedient to God.

- **Every one of the Spiritual Gifts is a variation of the voice of God.**
- **I have learned to recognize the voice of God more clearly as a result of exercising Spiritual Gifts.**
- **So many things have happened, and so many more people have been blessed and had needs met as a result of my releasing Spiritual Gifts out of my life.**

Many ask, "How do they function?" The main motivation is love for God and people. I mean a love that

makes us sincerely desire to want to do the best we can for others. And the best way we can do that is for us to listen to the voice of God and be prepared to do whatever He tells us (John 2:5). My experience is that when God speaks I always have to do something practical. I have to exercise faith and demonstrate to God that I believe Him, and I have to step out and deliver the message, gift, deed, etc., to the person or people that He is asking me to. So often I have no natural knowledge as to whether people have a certain condition, cry, need, etc., but I have learned that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth; He is always right.

- **The more we co-operate with Him and obey what He asks, the more right we will get things too.** Praise the

Lord!

And when we are obedient to the Holy Spirit there is always a testimony on the other side of our obedience. Know this:

- **When we are genuinely motivated by love when ministering to others we are not going to make a serious mistake.**
- **We should always maintain a teachable spirit so that we continue to learn and grow in the things of the Holy Spirit.**

Let us not be guilty of ignoring or neglecting these wonderful Spiritual Gifts that God has given to us to

fulfil His purposes. You will be so glad you pressed through to prove the reality, blessing and fruit that come as a result of our working together with the Holy Spirit and His Gifts. Be released today to flow more in the Holy Spirit Ministry! God bless you ~ **Rodney W. Francis.**

Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Corinthians 14;

Prayer: “Dear Lord God, I come to You in the name of Jesus Christ Your Son, and I ask You to help me to break free from every doubt, circumstance, mind-set or wrong teaching that tries to rob me of the fulfilling of Your promises to me through the operation of Your Spiritual Gifts. I ask You to help me

to have a much bigger believing heart so that I can earnestly desire and persevere more, and demonstrate my faith and belief in You much more positively. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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Acting Up In Church



ne Sunday in a Midwest City, a young child was "acting up" during the morning worship hour. The parents did their best to maintain some sense of order in the pew but were losing the battle.

Finally, the father picked the little fellow up and walked sternly up the aisle on his way out.

Just before reaching the safety of the foyer, the little one called loudly to the congregation, "Pray for me! Pray for me!"

HAVING FUN AT CHURCH

(Part 2)

My daughter, at 15 years of age, was invited to attend a youth group at a traditional church that had a name for being "alive". When I collected her afterwards, she told me that all they seemed to want to do was to play games and she didn't want to go back there. She had a hunger to know more of Jesus and His Word,

and was disappointed that they were not interested in doing anything like serious discipleship.

A serious-minded young person, dressed in black, carrying a big black Bible under his arm, and with a somber expression on his face approached a wino on the street while on his way to church. Being a good soul winner, he invited the wino to come to the evangelistic service. The wino declined, saying that he had enough problems of his own!

Talking about serious church members going to a ritualized service, a few members of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club were outside a large traditional church in their city. They saw the church members going into the church and noticed that they all looked as though they were going to the dentist! After the church service was finished, the church members came out of the church looking as though they had been to the dentist!

What do you think if one of those church members came over to that group and invited them to a church service in the hope of leading them to Christ? Would they say yes or no? I

would say that it would be a resounding no. Their response would be, “You’re joking!”

But these church members would be puzzled about that. They would not have the insight to know that people are not attracted to something if they think it is going to be an unpleasant experience. The church members might have found their church service meaningful and uplifting in some ways, but they were not showing any pleasure or joy in it. When people of the world get more pleasure out of going to a bar with their friends for a night of drinking, or going to the movies, dances, fishing, hunting, or other activities related to their hobbies than attending church services, no way would a church where the members do not show pleasure and having fun at the services attract them.

There is nothing magic about the Gospel. The Gospel is all about a loving Saviour who has come to the world, shown His love, grace, and compassion in healing the sick, setting people free, and speaking uplifting words of eternal life. What was it that attracted crowds of people to Jesus when He was on earth? He showed that He could meet their deepest needs. When

people were around Jesus, their earthly pleasures faded into insignificance. There was something about Jesus that attracted people to Him. It was because He demonstrated a love and acceptance that these people had never experienced before.

Of course, the upright religious leaders hated Him, because He was able to attract people in a way that they could not. People followed their dictates out of duty. They did not enjoy having to keep all the rules that were imposed on them. They did not have the assurance that the Pharisees loved them or had compassion on them. They did not see that the orthodox, theologically correct Pharisees could meet their deepest needs. Then along came Jesus who showed these religious leaders up by reaching right into the hearts of the common people with a practical Gospel that not only met their physical needs, but also that hunger in their hearts that only the Messiah could satisfy.

Things are not much different today. We have churches that are based on theologically correct, orthodox religion and yet they are declining congregations as their faithful members get old and die off. The only way they can maintain their

numbers is through transfers from other churches. Maybe the orthodoxy of the church “down the road” is less dry and barren than the church these people are going to and so they shift, hoping that the new church is able to satisfy the hunger that is in their hearts. But they often arrive at the new church and find it much the same as the one they left.

What keeps members involved in a dry, ritualized church is a sense of loyalty and duty. They know that they are not being satisfied where they are, but are afraid to go and be involved in a more lively church because of the guilt feelings they have about not being loyal to their “church family”. Also, if their church experience has been only in a traditional, unemotional, and ritualistic setting, they may find the more free, emotional, noisy, expressive type of service in a growing church to be a “culture shock” to them. In most cases the difference between most churches are “cosmetic” in that how churches are governed, how services are conducted and how the people respond to the moving of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the central message that Jesus came to seek and save sinners, and that He died and rose again for their salvation, may be what is believed and

preached in both churches.

So, what is the answer to all this?

The reason why God created a race of human beings was that He wanted people with whom He could have close fellowship. When we understand this, we can sense the tragedy and distress that God felt when Adam and Eve disobeyed Him in the Garden of Eden. Love is God's primary attitude, and His disappointment was keenly felt when fellowship between Him and mankind was broken. Ever since that time, God has worked to restore that fellowship. When we realize that this is God's primary purpose, then we can see what is most important to us. We realize that God's most favoured way of fun is having fellowship with us.

The definition of "fun" is to be involved in activities that give us the most enjoyment and when given the choice would be the things we would rather do than anything else. Fun is not levity, where a person chooses pleasure over responsibility or respect. Fun includes

responsibility, respect, and a genuine love for others. Fun involves fellowship with others.

When Moses spent 40 days in Mount Sinai fellowshiping with the Lord, he came down with a face that shone with radiance¹. All the people knew that Moses had been with God and had enjoyed the experience. To them, God presented Himself as a thundering, fearful presence, because they were not having person to person fellowship with Him. But Moses talked with God face to face as friends, and the interaction was far from a fearful experience.

When a person has fellowship with God, it shows on his face. There is radiance, an appearance of joy and pleasure. In the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy.² This is a real joy, not something we talk about in theory but not have the experience of it. When we sense the presence of the Lord with us, we want to laugh and rejoice.³ We want to lift our hands and

¹ Exodus 33:18-23

² Psalm 16:11

³ 1 Peter 1:8

worship Him with songs and praise for His goodness and mercy, and His willingness to come and have fellowship with us.

I would be certain that if that group of Hell's Angels were outside of a church where believers truly fellowshiped with the Lord, they would notice people going into the building with an appearance of joyful expectancy; and when the people came out after the service and saw the radiance on their faces, they would be attracted, knowing that these people are different. They enjoy their Christianity. If one of those believers came over and spoke with them and invited them to the next church service, those Hell's Angels would be much more likely to want to go and see what this type of church is all about.

Fellowship with God involves knowing Him on a personal level: ***“This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”***.⁴ As I have said before, it is more than knowing about God. It is actually meeting Him, person to person.

⁴ John 17:3

The theology is that Jesus is actually in person at the right hand of the Father. What happens is that the Holy Spirit brings the reality of Jesus to the heart of the seeker. This is what it means when God says, “*If you seek Me with all your heart, you will find Me*”⁵ This is the role of the Holy Spirit - to make Jesus real to us. When that happens, we are not aware of meeting the Holy Spirit, but of meeting Jesus. The Holy Spirit is not in us to speak of Himself but to reveal Jesus to us.⁶ This is why we have the intense awareness of the presence of Jesus when the Holy Spirit reveals Him to our hearts.

That is what happened to me when I introduced myself to God in the middle of the golf course. My experience was that I met Jesus in person. It was not a physical meeting. When He spoke to me I did not hear an audible voice. But it was a real voice that spoke to my heart. It was a completely different voice to what I had ever heard before. It was distinctive and unique. It changed my whole perception of God and the

⁵ Jeremiah 29:13

⁶ John 16:13

Christian faith. It also gave me a new understanding of the Bible.

That presence and voice has been with me ever since, through thick and thin, through my good times, and my times of conflict and failure. The feature of His voice is that it has always come with kindness, gentleness and acceptance of me as someone He loves having fellowship with. Of course there have been times when He has had to discipline me. The first time was when I did something that He did not tell me to do, and He spoke definitely that I should never do that again. The second time was when He stopped everything because He wanted to speak with me about a choice I needed to make between two options, and in one of those options He was not going to be with me. He has always assured me of His support for me, even in situations where He has had to bail me out of sinful situations.

At no time has He expressed anger at me, nor has He condemned me in any way. In situations where I have been criticized by others, He has ensured that the criticism has not come from Him. There is a difference between godly correction and destructive criticism.

So, knowing Jesus on a personal level gives us real boldness to come to His throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in times of need.⁷ It gives us the confidence to freely discuss the struggles we have with sinful desires and bad habits that seem to be so hard to overcome. It seems that knowing Jesus gives us the sense that He is working with us to improve our holiness instead of standing back and demanding it of us with no effort on His part to help us. In fact, we know that He is working in us through His Word to make us into the persons He wants us to be.⁸

God is having fun, doing His work within us and seeing us grow in grace and the knowledge of Him. It is one of the things He enjoys the most.

Knowing Jesus then leads us to the next thing that gives God much pleasure and fun. This is having fellowship with Him. “*Truly our fellowship*

⁷ Hebrews 4:16

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:13

is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.⁹

The main hindrance to having fellowship with the Father is our sin. This was God's heartbreak with the nation of Israel. They walked away from Him and got involved with the worship of pagan gods and sinful practices, in spite of all His pleading and efforts to bring them back into fellowship with Him.

But for us, the sin problem has been well and truly dealt with through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If God has gone to all the trouble to send His own Son to be the substitute for our sin, then for any sin to remain and hinder the fellowship between us and Him would mean that Jesus was not the perfect substitute. But we know that Jesus was the perfect substitute, so now the Father is no longer concerned about our sin. He has given us 1 John 1:9: "*If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" This is not for God's benefit. It is for ours. When we feel that we have

⁹ 1 John 1:3

failed Him through something sinful that we have done, we lose our faith and draw back from having fellowship with Him. Therefore He has provided a facility for getting our sinful feelings on to Christ and to have the on-going assurance of His forgiveness and cleansing, which was effectively done through the Cross, but brought back to our consciousness through our confession and restored assurance of forgiveness.

As I said, our sinful nature is of little concern to Christ. He is not concerned about it at all. But what He is concerned about is our on-going fellowship with Him. He does not want that to be broken. He knows that without some way of applying His Word to deal with our sin consciousness, we will sink into despair and start to believe that He no longer accepts us. Therefore, the Holy Spirit will waste no time in bringing 1 John 1:9 back to our remembrance.

End of Part 2. Part 3 to come.



Thankful For Little Things



foursome of senior golfers hit the course with waning enthusiasm for the sport. "These fairways seem to be getting longer and longer," said one of the foursome.

"And these hills are getting steeper as the years go by," another complained.

"The sand traps seem to be bigger than I remember them, too," said the third senior.

After hearing enough from his buddies, the oldest, and the wisest of the four of them at 87 years old, piped up and said, "Oh my friends, just be thankful we're still on this side of the grass!"



Paul Christensen

This magazine's purpose is to build up the faith of believers.

I am an elder of St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in Conifer Grove, Auckland NZ. At present, I am assisting with the ministry of the church along with the other elders and very capable preachers as part of an elder-run church.

I am including articles from recognized, effective pastors and ministries that have proved themselves in having the Holy Spirit work with them in the conversion of

sinner, effective and powerful impact that they have on believers, and in the growth of their churches. I think that it is important for the members of the congregation to have a range of ministry outside of their usual one-person ministry that has been the norm for a number of years before our current minister recently resigned.

You will notice that I have included jokes and humorous pictures in this magazine. I am a strong believer in humour as a healing resource. I believe that the business of sharing the Gospel is serious, but some become so serious that they are dour and humourless. I don't think that these people are a good advertisement if we want our church to grow and be filled with believers who are passionate for Christ and who approach their faith with joy. "In His presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11), and good, clean humour is an important part of that.

All articles are printed with the kind

permission of the authors, who believe that it is important that the message of the Gospel gets out there, and the importance of walking with God in love and faith, along with unity among Christian believers.

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Once you have read this, pass it on to someone else who might be encouraged by reading it.