

# THE FAITH BUILDER

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

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## From The Editor

I am reading a book about growing a church from an author who grew his church from the basement of his home to a mega-church of over 4,000 people.<sup>1</sup> He examines some principles that I think that most of our churches seem to ignore these days. It seems that our churches seem to work towards the growth of their own congregations without any consideration for other Bible-based churches in their immediate region. In our city, we have many churches of all denominations full of members who faithfully attend and worship God Sunday after Sunday. Some of these churches are big, and others small. A small number of churches in the city are quite large with members over one thousand. For a New Zealand city, a church like that is a "mega-church" by our standards. In any provincial city, a church numbering around 400 members would be considered very successful.

It is also very interesting to note that regardless of the number of churches in my city, there seems to be very little impact on the "unchurched" community. It causes me to believe that the growth of the larger churches has involved the transfer of church members from other churches, rather than from the general community. I think that this was quite true of the large church I attended in a provincial city. The church had an 'evangelistic arm', but very few new members resulted from the work of it. Most of the increase came from other sources, most probably from other more traditional churches where members saw that the larger church tended to meet their social and spiritual needs better than their previous church. I know that there was some ill feeling from some of the traditional and smaller Charismatic churches because of the perceived "poaching" of their members by the larger church.

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Haggard's book, *Primary Purpose* was a major influence in this editorial.

I have come to the conclusion that the general community are just not interested in the work of the churches and attempts to attract them to services in order to hear the Gospel falls on deaf ears. Why is that so? One of the reasons is that many churches operate like Christian "clubs" where outsiders don't feel very welcome unless they "go through the hoops" of acceptance. For many years, my present church was made up of mainly white, middle class people. If we had any Maori or Pacific Island visitors, they came to one or two services and then we never saw them again. Could this be due to the sense that being culturally different made them feel that they could not be bonded into that fellowship?

### **A Rare Book**



collector of rare books ran into an acquaintance who told him he had just thrown away an old Bible that he found in a dusty, old box. He happened to mention that Guten-somebody-or-other had printed it.

"Not Gutenberg?" gasped the collector.

"Yes, that was it!"

"You idiot! You've thrown away one of the first books ever printed. A copy recently sold at auction for half a million dollars!"

"Oh, I don't think this book would have been worth anything close to that much," replied the man. "It was scribbled all over in the margins by some guy named Martin Luther."

When outsiders, who may not have the social graces that might be expected in a staid, white, middle class church, sense that the members are looking at them sideways and keeping their distance from them, their instinct is to "get out of there" as fast as they can. This comes to the attitude, usually unspoken, but quite distinct in their non-verbal body language, that this "rough" uncultured person would not fit into "our club".

Another reason is that those in the general community see churches in competition with one another, with some churches saying that they are "the true church" while others are not as close to "the cutting edge of what God is doing as we are." This causes confusion in unchurched people because even if they are interested in the Gospel and attending a church, they don't know which one to attend; so they keep away.

Also, many churches have internal conflicts with members criticising the pastor or minister; running each other down; being judgmental concerning faults and shortcomings, and members even leaving churches because the piano is shifted from one side of the church to the other! In my church, we had a senior member leave because we installed a data projector. I nearly was put off going to that church because I heard from other members of the community that they had treated one of their ministers very badly and caused him to resign. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to be associated with a church like that. This sort of thing happens in traditional churches when there is an innovative minister who wants to make important changes to make the church relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century community.

There are members in churches who do not want change. They want their church to continue in the same way that it has been running for the last 50 years. But society has changed and the issues are different. No longer is the church the centre of the community where most people attended every Sunday. We now have Sunday sport and shopping, and the churches are increasingly being seen as irrelevant to normal living. Some members don't

care, as long as they can have their three hymns and sermon, followed by tea and biscuits. Any change from that jolts them out of their comfort zone and they leave, or threaten to leave unless the leaders forget about any proposed changes.

So, if we want our churches to grow, we need to see our church as just one part of the body of Christ in our region. The reason why nothing happens after years of prayer for church growth is that God is not interested in one particular church that wants to grow, but ignores all the other churches. Where churches are in competition for members, the Holy Spirit withdraws. He is not going to bless one church at the expense of the others. When He says, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it", He is not talking about any single denomination or independent church. He is not talking about the traditional church, Charismatic, or Pentecostal church. He is talking about the total body of Christ. He doesn't care about the label your church has. He cares about all the people in your region who have given their lives to Christ. These people are distributed across all the different denominations.

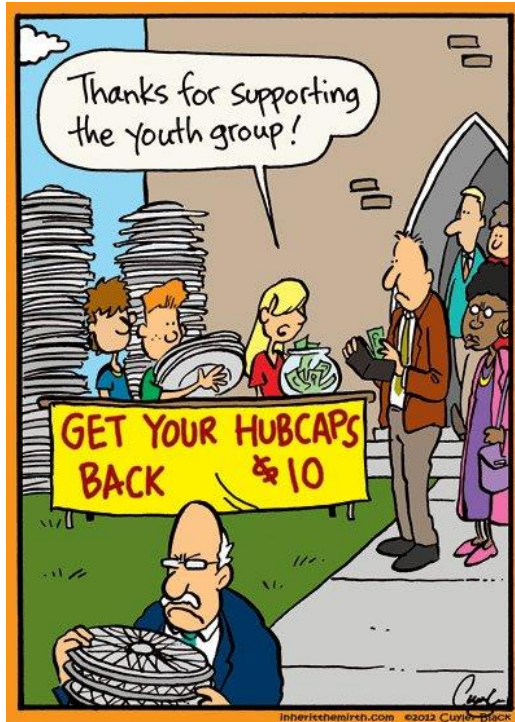
Therefore, if we want our church to grow, we need to work towards the growth of all the churches, whatever denomination or label, in our region (if in a large city), city or town. This means that we meet with all the leaders of the churches in the region to discuss and pray about how we are going to grow the body of Christ through outreach to the unchurched community, leading to conversions to Christ. There would have to be an agreement that we will not poach members from each other in order to achieve growth at the expense of the others.

Also, in the spirit of cooperation, we need to respect the culture and theology of the other churches and to concentrate on the "absolutes", that Jesus is the Son of God who died for us on the cross and rose again from the dead so that those who come to Christ may have eternal life. These absolutes must take prominence and the cultural and theological differences must be put on the "back burner". This is not church union, but church unity based on the absolutes of the Gospel of Christ. This respect means that churches do not "bad-mouth" each other, but allow prospective converts choose the church that suits them best in terms of culture and theology.

I became involved with Teen Challenge Palmerston North in 1970. Then, it was interdenominational with representatives from a number of different churches in the leadership and "badge-holders". It concentrated on the "absolutes", that it preached that Jesus died for us on the cross and that He rose again to give us eternal life. While it was truly representative of the majority of the churches in the region and continued to concentrate on the absolutes of the Gospel, it was very successful; but when it was taken over to be the "evangelistic arm" of a local Charismatic church and the leadership was then limited to members of that church, Teen Challenge Palmerston North stepped away from its original prophetic purpose and it started to fail in its outreach. It was not long before it died a natural death. Why did this happen? The Holy Spirit is interested in supporting only those churches and organisations that recognise that all churches in a region that preach the absolutes. When a church or organisation puts its cultural and theological basis before the absolutes and teaches that these make it superior and exclusive from the other members of the body of Christ in the region, then the Holy Spirit withdraws His support. I was in a large Charismatic church that had members refer to that church as THE body of Christ, as if other churches in the city were outside of the body of Christ. It is no surprise that the church ended up suffering a major division and passed into history as another monument for man's failure to stay on the prophetic foundation that caused the church to be born and to grow in its initial stages.

Also, we need to be tolerant of those within our congregations who may not abide by our cultural or moral standards. Jesus came to save sinners. He did not discriminate between less or great sinners. He is not willing that any should perish but that all may come to repentance. We need to put our cultural and moral standards aside in order to reach outsiders and get them saved.

Even our advertising can give the wrong message to the community. How many times have we seen churches advertising bright services with contemporary music, highly trained and effective ministers or pastors, and the place where they can truly find Christ and meaning for life?



This implies that this church has better services, pastors or ministers than the other churches, and that other churches may not be presenting Christ as well as they are. I call this competitive advertising. This may be appropriate in the world of business where there is strong competition for similar products, but it gives a wrong and negative impression to the community and would confuse them as to what church they would want to associate with if they became interested in the gospel and wanting to turn to Christ. It is therefore no wonder that the community in general are just not interested in our churches and turn a deaf ear to all our attempts to bring the Gospel to them. The things churches are doing to one another are hindering seeking people and drowning out what our churches are trying to share in order for them to accept the Gospel and to say "yes" to Jesus. The problem is that our churches, in general, are not preaching or presenting Jesus. They are preaching themselves, their particular theology and culture at the expense of other churches. We can see this when we see an advertisement

where we see a large photograph of the pastor and his dominating it.

Many people in our community are dissatisfied with life. They are seeking answers. If the Gospel of Christ can be presented clearly to them I am sure they will consider it seriously and many would accept Christ as their Saviour. But before that can happen, the churches have to stop putting their culture and theology in front of the Gospel. They need to be unified in the absolutes. If churches presented Christ crucified and that He rose again to give eternal life as the most important part of their message, and did not make such a big deal of their particular culture or theology, then unity would be achieved and the community will view the churches in relation to what Jesus did for us on the cross.



## A LIFTING UP IN CASE OF GREAT SINS<sup>2</sup>

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you troubled within me, &c". —Psalm 42:11.

The doctrine or observation that we are now extracting from these words, is this:

That the saints and people of God, have no reason for their discouragements, whatever their condition is and they have no just, true, scripture reason for their discouragements, no matter what their condition is.

It is clear by the words, and proved in the last sections by some general considerations.

Now, more specifically, to make it out by various instances. There are nine things which are usually the grounds and occasions of the discouragements of God's people.

I. Sometimes their discouragements are drawn from their greater and grosser sins.

II. Sometimes they arise from the weakness of grace.

III. Sometimes they are taken from their failing in and non-acceptance of duty.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an excerpt from William Bridge, *A Lifting Up of The Downcast*. I am reprinting this because it is still such an important message for the many depressed and discouraged believers still trying to serve God in our churches.



IV. Sometimes they are drawn from their lack of evidence for heaven, and non-assurance of the love of God.

V. Sometimes they come from their temptations.

VI. Sometimes from their desertions.

VII. Sometimes from their afflictions.

VIII. Sometimes from their unserviceableness.

IX. Sometimes from their condition itself.

Now if in all these respects, the saints and people of God have no reason to be discouraged, then we may safely conclude that a godly person shouldn't be discouraged whatever his condition is. I shall labour, therefore, through the grace of Christ, to make out this great truth to you in all these respects, and begin with the first at this time.

I. Sometimes the discouragements of the saints and people of God are drawn from their sins, their greater and grosser sins: the peace and quiet of the saints and people of God is many times interrupted by their sins.

"Oh", says one, "I am a man or woman of a rebellious heart, I have so slight a spirit, so unholy and uneven in my conduct, that when I reflect upon my heart and life, I cannot but be discouraged. I know, indeed, it is a great evil for a person to labour under a sore testing, or a sad desertion; but were my heart good, my life good, my conduct good, I shouldn't be discouraged; but as for me, I have committed and do commit such and such great sins, Haven't I reason, and just reason now to be discouraged?"

No, because discouragement itself is a sin, another sin, a gospel sin; now my sin against the law is no just cause why I should sin against the gospel.

I confess, indeed, there is much evil in every sin, the least sin is worse than the greatest affliction; afflictions, judgments and punishments are but the claws of this lion; it is more contrary to God than the misery of hell.

Chrysostom had so great a sense of the evil of it, that when the empress sent him a threatening message, "Go, tell her," he said, "I fear nothing but sin." And, in some respects, the sins of the godly are worse than the sins of others, for they grieve the Spirit more, they dishonour Christ more, they grieve the saints more, they wound the name of God more, they are more against the love, and grace, and favour of God than other men's sins are.

And the Lord sees the sins of his own people; yes, so far he sees sin in them, that he chastises and afflicts them for it; not only from their sin, but for their sin. Therefore, the apostle says in 1 Cor. 11:30, speaking of the unworthy receiving of the Lord's supper, "For this cause many are sick and weak among you." And he doesn't speak only of saints in appearance, and in church estate, but of such also as were saints indeed, and therefore he says, "We are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we shouldn't be condemned with the world."

He puts himself in. We are judged that we may not be condemned with the world. Our Saviour Christ says in Rev. 3:19, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent." It seems, then, it was for sin committed, else why should he say, "Repent; and, repent therefore"?

Repentance is for sin committed already, and these were such as he loved too, whom he threatens thus to rebuke and chastise; and does

any father rebuke, chastise, or correct his child only from sin, and not for sin?

Wasn't Moses a gracious and a holy man? Yet for his unbelief and sin he lost the land of Canaan. Wasn't Samson a good man? Yet by his sin he lost his eyes and his life too. Wasn't David a gracious and a holy man? Yet for his sin the Lord said, "The sword should never depart from his house;" and yet Christ had made satisfaction for his sin too, as well then, as for the saints now.

But now, though there is never so much evil in the sins of God's people, yet they have no reason, no just cause or scripture reason to cast down, and to be discouraged in that respect.

But how may this appear; that notwithstanding the sins of God's own people grieves the Spirit of God, are a dishonour to Jesus Christ, and do wound the name of God, and the profession of Christ so much; that yet the saints have no reason to be discouraged or cast down?

1. They know, or they may know, that they shall never be condemned for their sin, whatever it is. "There is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus" says the apostle. Christ was made sin for them; and if Christ is made sin for me, then my sin shall never hurt me.

Luther is bold here, for he says, "Christ is made sin-damning, our sin is sin-damned: I confess, indeed," he said, "that I have sinned, but sin-damning is stronger than sin-damned, and Christ was made sin-damning for me." The thing is true, though the expression is strange. Christ was made sin for saints, therefore their sin shall not hurt them. It stands not with the justice of God to exact the payment of one debt twice.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ hasn't only been arrested, but in gaol for the debt of the saints and people of God, and he has paid it to the utmost

cent; he has paid it better than they could have paid it themselves, if they had gone to hell: for if a godly man had gone to hell, and been damned for ever, he would have been always paying, but the debt would never have been paid: Christ paid it all down for the present.

And if you look into Scripture, you will find that the Lord doesn't condemn a man, no not a wicked man, barely for the act of his former sin, but because he will not turn from it. Psalm 7:11, "The Lord is angry with the wicked every day:" verse 12, "If he doesn't turn, he will sharpen his sword; he has bent his bow, and made it ready; he has prepared for him the instruments of death, he ordains his arrows against the persecutor."

The Lord has prepared instruments of death against every wicked man; but yet, notwithstanding, though a man is never so wicked, if he turn to the Lord, God will not discharge those instruments of death upon him, yes, though his sins have been never so great; however, says the text, "If he turn not," (not because he has sinned before, only, but because he turns not from his sin,) "he will sharpen his sword; he has bent his bow, and made it ready." Now there is, always, in the saints and people of God, a turning disposition, although they sin against God; there is always, I say, a turning disposition in them, and therefore the Lord will not discharge the instruments of death upon them: surely, then, they have no reason to be quite discouraged in this respect.

2. As godly men shall never be condemned for their sins, so their sins shall never separate God and them. What is the seeming reason why some are so discouraged about their sins? Because they think they shall not only lose the face and presence of God by their sins, but that they shall lose God himself.

But now, I say, the sins of the godly shall never separate God and them. Their sins may hide God's face; but as their sins did not hinder God and their coming together at first, so their sins shall never separate God

and them: their sins may cause a strangeness between God and them, but shall never cause an enmity. Their sins may hide God's face from them, but shall never turn God's back upon them. Those whom God loves, he loves to the end: "I am the Lord who changes not," he says.

### Three Hymns



One Sunday a pastor told his congregation that the church needed some extra money and asked the people to prayerfully consider giving a little extra in the offering plate. He said that whoever gave the most would be able to pick out three hymns.

After the offering plates were passed, the pastor glanced down and noticed that someone had placed a \$1,000 bill in offering. He was so excited that he immediately shared his joy with his congregation and said he'd like to personally thank the person who placed the money in the plate.

And there sat our Rosie all the way in the back shyly raised her hand. The pastor asked her to come to the front. Slowly she made her way to the pastor. He told her how wonderful it was that she gave so much and in thanksgiving asked her to pick out three hymns.

Her eyes brightened as she looked over the congregation, pointed to the three most handsome men in the building and said, "I'll take him and him and him!"

And as the prophet Isaiah speaks: "As the covenant that the Lord made with Noah, such is the covenant that he makes with his people." Now look into Genesis, chapter 8 and you shall see what the covenant is that the Lord made there with Noah, and with the world by Noah. When Noah came out of the ark, he built an altar, and sacrificed; verse 21, "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground for man's sake." Why? "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

You would think this was a reason why God should curse the ground again; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; man is wicked, therefore, surely God will curse the ground again: "No", says the Lord, "though you who are poor creatures think so, yet I, who am the God of all grace, I make this covenant with the world by Noah, that I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake; because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth continually."

I confess indeed, the Hebrew may be so translated; "Although the imagination of man's heart is evil," &c. yet the Chaldee paraphrase, Septuagint, Hierorn and Montanus render it, "because" the imagination, etc.

But though it is so translated, yet that is enough to make good the truth and doctrine which I urge from this scripture. The covenant that the Lord makes with his people, is such a covenant as the Lord made with Noah; so says the prophet Isaiah. What then?

Therefore if God is in covenant with a man, he shall never lie under wrath again; for though the world sin, the world shall never be drowned again; and so, though he do sin, he shall never lie under wrath again. Now as for the people of God, they are all in covenant with God, they are under this gracious covenant, and therefore, though the mountains may be removed, God's mercy shall never be removed from them; and though the great hills may be thrown into the sea, the

people of God, once in covenant with God, shall never be thrown into hell: and tell me then, have you, who are the people of God, any just cause or reason to be cast down, or to be discouraged?

3. If the very sins of God's people, through the overruling hand of grace, shall be an occasion of more grace and comfort to them than ever they had in all their lives before; then surely they have no reason to be discouraged in this respect.

Now mark it, and you shall find, that God never allows his people to fall into any sin, except that he intends to make that sin an entrance to further grace and comfort to them.

You see this in the first great sin that ever was committed by the children of men, the fall of Adam, the Lord himself came and preached the gospel, preached Christ to fallen man; and surely when God himself preached the gospel, we are to think the man was converted.

Now the greatest blessing that ever the world saw, was the righteousness of Jesus Christ; but how came that about? God allows man to fall, and man's unrighteousness must usher in Christ's righteousness.

The Scripture tells us that the Lord allowed Hezekiah to fall, that Hezekiah might know all that was in his heart; he did not know his own heart previously, and therefore the Lord let him fall that he might know his own heart.

But if you look into the Romans, chapter 11, you shall find in so many words what I am now speaking; verse 32, "For God has concluded them all in unbelief." Why? "That he might have mercy upon all." Oh, what a blessed design upon unbelief is here!

Therefore God concludes all under unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all: Sin doesn't win, but is a loser by every fall of the godly. And if you look into the Scripture, you will observe, that when the people of God fall, usually they fail in that grace in the area where they do most excel; and where they did most excel, there they did most miscarry.

Abraham did most excel in faith, and there he did most miscarry: Moses did most excel in meekness, and there he did most miscarry; we read of no other sin concerning Moses but his anger: Job did most excel in patience, and therein he did most miscarry: Peter did most excel in zeal and resolution for Christ —" Though all the world forsake you, yet will not I "— and therein he did most miscarry, denying Christ at the voice of a young woman.

I say, you shall observe this, the saints fell and failed in that grace wherein they did most excel; and they did most excel wherein they did most miscarry: what is the reason of this? but because the Lord, by the over-ruling hand of his grace, made their very miscarriages, entrances and occasions to their further grace and holiness.

God has great revenue from the very infirmities of his people. He never allows any of his people to fall into any sin, except that he has a design by that fall, to break the back of that sin they all into. Now, then, have the saints and people of God any reason to be discouraged in this respect?

By their sin they may be, and are often suspended from their comforts and use of their privileges; but by their sin they don't lose their right to them.

You know how it was with the leper in the times of the Old Testament, among the Jews; when he was carried out of the city or town, from his own house, by reason of his uncleanness: or now, if a man that has the plague, and is carried from his own house by reason of it; the leper



then, and the man that has the plague or the disease now, may say, Though I am removed from my own house, and haven't the use of my house, yet I still have a right to my house; and though I cannot make use of my land, yet I still have a right to my land.

So a godly man may say concerning his sin, This sin of mine, indeed, it is a pest, and the plague of my soul, and a leprosy; but though, by this leprosy of mine, I am now suspended from the use of my comforts, yes, from the full use of my interest in Jesus Christ; yet, notwithstanding, I have an interest in Christ still, I haven't lost my interest, still I have right to Christ; although I cannot come to the use of him as I did before, yet I have right to Jesus Christ now, as I had before: and if all these things be so, why should a godly man be cast down or discouraged in this respect? Surely he ought not to be so.

But suppose a man's sins be such as never were pardoned previously; and truly that is my case, for I have sinned a great sin, and I don't read in all the word of God, any example that ever such a sin as my was pardoned; Haven't I reason now to be quite discouraged and cast down?

I answer, No; because, I ask, what do you think of Adam? Adam sinned a great sin in our first fall. The Lord himself came and preached the gospel to him, "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head." Should Adam have said, Oh, but there is no hope for me, for I have no example or precedent of pardon?

Adam could have no example of any that was pardoned before him, because he was the first man., and the first that sinned. Should he have sat down and been discouraged, because he could not find any example for the pardon of the like sin that he had committed?

You know what our Saviour Christ said, "Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven, unless it is the sin against the Holy Ghost, every sin,

though it is boiled up to blasphemy. You say, you have no example for the pardon of such a sin as yours is; but doesn't your sin come within the compass of these words, "Every sin and blasphemy?" Surely it does. Have you any reason then to be discouraged under the power of this objection?

But suppose that a man have sinned greatly against his conscience, or against his light, against his knowledge, has he not just cause or reason then to be cast down, and to be quite discouraged?

No; for if there is a sacrifice for such a sin as this is, then a man has no reason to be quite discouraged; cause to be humbled, as you shall hear afterward, but no reason to be discouraged.

Now in the times of the Old Testament, in times of the law among the Jews, there was a sacrifice, not only for sin committed ignorantly, but also for sin committed against light and against conscience: and I appeal to you, whoever you are that make this objection, don't you think that Peter, when he denied his Lord and Master, sinned against his conscience, against his light, and against his knowledge? Surely then there is no reason that a man should be quite discouraged, no not in this respect.

But suppose that a man's sins be exceeding great, gross, and heinous; for I confess that possibly a godly man may sin some sin against his light, and against his conscience sometimes; but as for me, my sin is exceeding great, gross and heinous, and haven't I just cause and reason now to be discouraged?

No, not yet, for though your sin is great, isn't God's mercy great, exceeding great? Isn't the satisfaction of Christ great? Are the merits of Christ's blood small? Isn't God, the great God of heaven and earth, able to do great things?

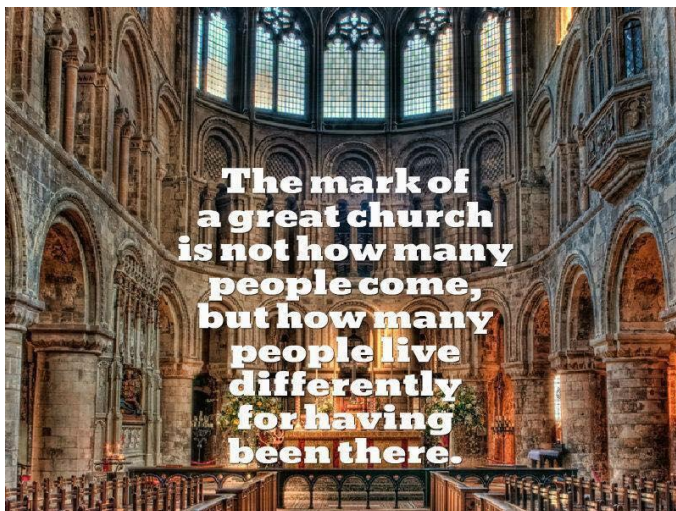
You agree that God is almighty in providing for you; and is he not almighty also in pardoning: will you spoil God of his almightiness in pardoning? You say your sin is great, but is it infinite; is there any more infinities than one, and that is God?

Is your sin as big as God, as big as Christ; is Jesus Christ only a Mediator for small sins; will you bring down the satisfaction of Christ, and the mercy of God, to your own model? Hasn't the Lord said concerning pardoning mercy, that his "thoughts are not as our thoughts, but as the heavens are greater than the earth, so are his thoughts (in this respect) beyond our thoughts."

Hasn't the Lord said, in Isaiah 43, to the people of the Jews, at verse 22, "But you haven't called upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel." Verse 23, "you haven't brought me the small cattle of your burnt offering, neither have you honoured me with your sacrifices." Verse 24, "You have bought me no sweet cane with money, neither have you filled me with the fat of your sacrifice; but you have made me to serve with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquity." yet, verse 25, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgression for my own sake, and will not remember your sins."

Here are sins, and great sins; and if the Lord will therefore pardon sin because it is great, to his people; then surely they have no reason to be quite discouraged in this respect.

Now look what David says in Psalm 25:11, "For your name sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity for it is great." Mark his argument, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is great." If David uses this reason, then may you also; and if this is a reason why God should pardon sin, because it is great; then this cannot be a reason, a just reason, why you should be discouraged.



But suppose that a man's sin is the sin of rebellion, backsliding; for this is my case, will some say: I have striven, and striven against my sin a long while, and I return to it again. In previous times, I have been exceedingly forward and ready to what is good; but now I am much backslidden, abated, and even gone backward with rebelling, and deep rebelling, and I have lain long so, even for many years . Haven't I reason, and just reason now to be discouraged and cast down within myself?

I answer, No, not yet; for though this is a sufficient cause of great humiliation (for. backsliding in scripture phrase is called rebellion, and rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft), yet a good man has no reason to be discouraged in this regard; for thus says the Lord, Jer. 3:1, "They say, if a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return to her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me, says the Lord." And, verse 12, "Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." And again, verse 14, "Turn O backsliding children, for I am married to you."

And if ever the Lord Jesus Christ did betroth himself to any soul, he will never put that soul away again: "I hate putting away," says God. Men put away their wives among the Jews, but says the Lord, "I hate putting away." And Isa. 1:1, Thus says the Lord, "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away, or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?"

Among the Jews, the husband did put away his wife upon small occasions. As for adultery, you know that was death; he did not put away his wife upon adultery, she was to die for it: but the husbands put away their wives upon other occasions, and when they put away their wives, they gave the wife a bill of divorce, that so upon all occasions the woman might show by it that she was free from such a man.

Now, says the Lord, you that charge me, and complain that I have put you away, come and show me the bill of divorce: "Thus says the Lord, where is the bill," &c. Poor soul, you complain that I have put you away, come then and show me the bill of divorce: let anyone who complains that I have put him away and cast him off, come and bring out his bill of divorce; you cannot do this: men indeed put away, but if ever the Lord Christ matches himself to you, he will never put you away again.

And whereas you say, that you are backslidden, and have much rebelled, and so have continued even many years, consider whether you not be mistaken; every abatement in affection isn't a declining in grace. Possibly we may not grieve for sin afterward so much as at our first conversion, yet we may hate it more. At first you may pray more against it, yet afterward watch more against it. We never see the face of sin so ugly, as in the glass of God's free love, and don't you see the free love of God more?

Possibly your affections might be higher at the first, but isn't conviction more clear and full? As affections dry up, so we grow more settled in

our judgment; and if your judgment is more settled, you are not backslidden, though your affections be somewhat abated.

And whereas you say that you have returned to your sin again and again, and have continued in rebellion for many years; I shall only tell you what Mr. Bilney, a blessed martyr once said. Hearing a minister preach very terribly against sin, and saying thus, Look, you old sinner, you have lain rotting in the grave of your sin these threescore years, and do you now think to go to heaven in one year? Do you think to go forward to heaven more in one year, than you have gone backward to hell these threescore years? Ah, said Mr. Bilney, here is goodly preaching of repentance in the name of Christ! Had I heard such doctrine preached previously, my poor soul had despaired for ever; but, he says, the Lord Christ died for sinners, young sinners and old sinners, for one as well as the other; such as have lain long in sin, as well as those that have lain but a little while in sin, if they will come home to Christ. And you know what our Saviour says, "If your brother transgress against you, forgive him."

But, Lord, he has transgressed against me once, and I have forgiven him: yet, says our Saviour, forgive him again. Oh but, Lord, I have forgiven him again and again, and yet he returns to his fault again: then forgive him again, says Christ. But, Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother? Says our Saviour, If he sin against you seventy-seven times, and says that he repents, do you forgive so often.

And now shall the Lord Jesus Christ instruct us to forgive our brother, if he sin against us seventy-seven times; and won't the Lord Christ forgive much more, if a poor soul do turn to him and say, Lord, I repent that I have sinned against you. Will the Lord Christ command me a poor sinner to forgive so many times; how often will the great God forgive? what, seventy-seven times! No, seven hundred times seven hundred. And have you any reason then to be discouraged in this respect? Surely you haven't.

But suppose that a man has sinned foully, greatly, and he cannot repent, or be humbled enough: for that is my case; I have sinned, I have sinned greatly, and now after all, my heart is hard, and I cannot be humbled enough, oh, I cannot repent enough: has he not just cause and reason for his discouragement now, yes now to be quite discouraged?

No, not yet, for what if the Lord will have your humiliation from you by degrees? Should you be so, or so much humbled for the present, it may be it would be with you as it has been with others, you would never think of your sins afterward; but may be the Lord will have this work of humiliation to stay long upon your soul, and he will not give it you all at once.

Some are there, that when they come into a house, they pay a great pre-payment and little weekly rent, others pay a little pre-payment and a great weekly rent. So it is with souls that come to Christ; some at the first lay down a great humiliation, and they have lesser of it afterward; some have less at the first, and have more afterwards by continuance in it: and what now if the Lord will lead your soul in this latter way? This latter way may be the better way if the Lord think fit.

Again: it may be, that if you had so much, or so much humiliation now at the first, you would think, that in, and by, and for your humiliation you should have acceptance with God, and the remission of your sin; if you are kept off from this rock and danger, by your lack of that degree of humiliation, which you would have, and so be trained up to prize the Lord's free grace in giving you humiliation, have you any cause to complain?

Again: if you had so much, or so much humiliation for the present, it may be then, you would have the less humility; a little humility, is as good as a great deal of humiliation, as good being humble, as being humbled. Now because you are not humbled, therefore your soul is

kept humble; had you many tears, and abundance of tears, maybe then you would be proud, but the Lord does deny you tears, and you are not humbled to the degrees of your own desires, and so the Lord keeps you humble by the lack of your humiliation.

Again: it may be, that if you were humbled so, or so much at the present, or at the first, you would have the less fear of your own heart. The more humbled, it may be, the less after-fear, and the less humbled, the more after-fear, the less humbled, sometimes, the more a man fears his own heart and his own condition.

Gracious fear is as good as humiliation, and if that which you lack in humiliation you have it made up in fear, have you any reason to be discouraged?

I know it is usual with Satan, to say to the people of God at their first coming on to Christ, that they are not humbled enough, and so keeps them away from mercy and grace. But, I pray, tell me, can you ever be humbled enough? Can there be any proportion between your sins and your humiliation? The truth is, we should labour that our humiliation is answerable to our sin; but God isn't pleased with grief for grief, God isn't pleased with sorrow for sorrow; the end of all our sorrow and grief is, to embitter our sin to us, to make us to prize Jesus Christ, to wean us from the delights and pleasures of the creature, to discover the deceitfulness and naughtiness of our own hearts.

In scripture phrase, and language of the New Testament, repentance is called an after-wisdom, an after-mind, a bethinking of one's self, it is called a conviction; now though you not be humbled to the degree which you do desire, yet notwithstanding, don't you bethink yourself, are you not convinced of the evil of your former way? hasn't the Lord now given you an after-wisdom? and don't you say concerning your sin, Oh, if it were to do again, I would not do it for all the world?



Thus it is with the servants and people of God, though they cannot be humbled so much as they would be, yet notwithstanding, they are thus far humbled, thus far grieved, that their sins are embittered, and themselves thereby weaned from the delights and pleasures of the world, convinced of the evil of their sin, and what they lack in humiliation they have it in humility, the less humbled, the more they are kept humble, and what they do lack at the first, they have it afterwards by degrees, soaking into their souls. Have they then any reason to be discouraged in these respects? surely, not.

But shouldn't a godly, gracious man be fully grieved and humbled for his sin?

Grieved, humbled for his sin? Yes, surely: though the Lord, through the over-ruling hand of his grace, do work never so much good out of my sin to me, yet I am to be humbled for it, and the rather to be humbled for it, because he works good out of it.

I have read indeed of the mother of those three learned men, Lombard, Gratian, and Comaestor, the three great pillars of the Roman Church, for Lombard wrote the Sentences, and Gratian the Popish Decretals, and Comaestor, *Historiam Scholasticam*, that when she lay on her death-bed, and the priest came to her, and called upon her for repentance of her immorality, for these three, Lombard, Gratian and Comaestor, were her illegitimate children, as the Roman Catholic writers record it, and he, telling her that she must be greatly afflicted, grieved and humbled for her uncleanness, or else she could not be saved, why, said she, I confess, indeed, that whoredom and uncleanness is a great sin, but considering what a great deal of good has come to the church of God by my sin, that three such great lights have been brought forth into the world by my sin, I cannot, I will not repent.

And thus it is with many poor ignorant souls, when they see, how the Lord by his over-ruling hand does work good to them out of their sin, as some outward blessings and mercies, they don't repent of their sin, but rather justify themselves in their sins; but now take a godly man, a gracious soul, and the more that he sees the Lord working good out of his sin, the more he is humbled for it; and upon that very ground, because God works good of it therefore he is humbled the more.

Yet further; it is observed, that though the Lord did ordinarily call David his servant, yet when David had sinned that great sin, he sent the prophet to him, saying, Go, say to David; he had lost the title of servant, now bare David, now single David, now David without the title my servant.

And so, though God ordinarily called the people of Israel his people, yet when they had committed that great sin of idolatry, in the matter of the golden calf, the Lord doesn't call them his people, but he says to Moses, "The people, not My people, but The people, and your people, Moses"; now they had lost their old title.

Thus, I say, the sins of God's own people do deprive them, and divest them of their spiritual privileges, and can a gracious heart look upon this, and consider how he is divested and disrobed of his spiritual privileges, and not mourn under it?

Can one friend grieve another friend, and not be grieved himself? The saints by their sins, they grieve God, who is their best friend, and therefore certainly they must needs be grieved, they must needs be humbled, or there is no grace; not grieved, not humbled, not gracious.

But now because they are grieved, and humbled for sin committed, therefore they are not discouraged; I say, because they are grieved, and because they are humbled for sin committed, therefore they are not discouraged, for discouragement is a hindrance to humiliation, and

the more truly a man is humbled for sin committed, the less he is discouraged, and the more a man is discouraged, the less he is truly humbled.

You will say, then, but what is the difference between these? a man is to be humbled, and not discouraged, not discouraged and yet to be humbled, what is the difference between these two, being humbled and being discouraged?

It is a profitable question and worth our time: by way of answer, therefore, thus,

When a man is humbled, truly humbled, the object of his grief, sorrow or trouble, is sin itself, as a dishonour done to God: the object of discouragement is a man's own condition, or sin in order to his own condition, the ultimate object of discouragement being a man's own condition.

When a man is discouraged, you shall find still, that his trouble runs all out upon his own condition. Oh, says a discouraged person, I have sinned; I have thus sinned, and therefore my condition is naught, and if my condition be naught now, it will never be better; Lord, what will become of my soul?

Still his trouble is about his own condition. But when a man is grieved and truly humbled for sin, his trouble is about sin itself, as a dishonour done to God. To clear this by Scripture: you know Cain was discouraged, but Cain wasn't humbled; how may that appear? Cain was troubled about his condition. "Ah", he says, "my punishment is greater than I can bear."

On the other side, the poor prodigal was humbled, but not discouraged: how may that appear? His trouble was about his sin, and not about his condition: "I will return to my Father (he says), and I will

say to him, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no more worthy to be called your son, make me as one of your hired servants."

**It was Palm Sunday** but because of a sore throat, 5-year-old Johnny stayed home from church with a sitter. When the family returned home, they were carrying several palm fronds. Johnny asked them what they were for.

"People held them over Jesus' head as he walked by," his father told him.

"Wouldn't you know it," Johnny fumed, "the one Sunday I don't go and he shows up."

David was sometimes both discouraged and humbled, and then you find his repentance and humiliation to be very brackish (a mixture of fresh and salty[water]); but if you look into the list Psalm, you shall find David humbled but not discouraged, for it is a penitential Psalm, therefore humbled but not discouraged, because he still kept his assurance; verse 14, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, you God of my salvation." But what was his repentance, his trouble about? It was about his sin, and not about his condition, read verse 23, and so on: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me;

against you, you only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight: behold I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Still, you see, his eye is upon his sin, and not upon his condition only. So that I say, when a man is truly humbled and grieved for sin, the object of his grief is sin, as a dishonour done to God: when a man is discouraged and not humbled, then his trouble is all about his condition, and what will become of him.

True humiliation, it is no enemy, but a real friend to spiritual joy, to our rejoicing in God. The more a man is humbled for sin committed, the more he will rejoice in God, and rejoice that he can grieve for sin. He grieves, and rejoices that he can grieve for sin, therefore humiliation, by our Saviour Christ, is made an effect of the Comforter: "I will send the Comforter, and he shall convince the world of sin."

Because there is comfort always going along with true humiliation, it isn't an enemy but a friend to our spiritual rejoicing; but discouragement is an enemy to spiritual joy. A man that is discouraged is grieved, and he is sad upon his grief, and if you tell him that he must rejoice in God, and call upon him to rejoice in God, Oh no, he says, it isn't for me to rejoice, I am a man of another disposition, joy doesn't belong to me, or to one in my condition: but now, when a man is truly humbled, the more he is humbled for sin, the more he can rejoice in God; but the more a man is discouraged, the less he rejoices in God.

The more a man is humbled, truly humbled for sin, the more he is found in duty; the more a man is discouraged, the more his hands are weakened to duty: as it is with the water, if the water continues in its true stream, it doesn't overflow the banks, it doesn't break down the dam: sometimes you have a great fall of water, a great and mighty flood, and then the river overflows the banks, and the water bears down the dam.

So here, duty is the bank of sorrow, grief and humiliation for sin; I say, your duties are the banks of all your godly sorrow, and when a man's sorrow or grief does arise to such an height, that it swells over duty, and a man says, I will pray no more, it is to no purpose; and I will hear no more, for there is no hope for my soul; and I will examine my own heart no more: when thus sorrow swells over duty, and breaks down the dam of duty, then it is discouragement, it isn't humiliation. Don't be mistaken, this isn't humiliation, this is a plain discouragement.

There is a great difference then, between discouragement and humiliation. Many people indeed do call their discouragements, humiliation; but the Lord knows, there isn't a drop of humiliation in a flood of discouragement. Would you therefore be humbled? Oh, then, not be discouraged; for the more you are discouraged, the less you will be humbled; and the more humbled you are, the less discouraged you will be.

But if there is such a great difference between these, and if it is our duty, to be humbled for sin, but not to be discouraged. What should a man do to bear up his heart to the work of humiliation, and yet bear up against all discouragement? How shall I be so humbled, as I may not be discouraged? or what shall a man do that he may be humbled, and yet not be discouraged in his humiliation?

Let Christians carry this rule always up and down with them, namely, that a man is to be humbled for his sin, although it be never so small, but he isn't to be discouraged for his sin, though it is never so great.

Both these parts are true; a man isn't to be discouraged under his sin, although it is never so great; because discouragement itself is a sin, and that cannot help against sin, sin cannot help against sin.

A man is to be humbled for his sin, although it is never so small, for it is a dishonour to God, and little sins make way to great sins. So, then, if

you would be humbled, and not discouraged, carry this rule up and down with you, and always remember it upon all occasions: It is my duty, and I have reason to be humbled for my sin, although it is never so small; but I have no reason to be discouraged under my sin, though it is never so great.

In all your humiliation, be sure that you never part or separate those things that God has joined together: God has joined commandment and promise together, the promise and the commandment are born twins; there is never a commandment that you read of, but has a promise annexed to it, a promise of assistance, a promise of acceptance, and a promise of reward.

If you look upon the commandment itself without the promise, then you will despair; if you look upon the promise without the commandment, then you will presume: but look upon promise and commandment, commandment and promise together, then you will be humbled, in case you have sinned, but you will not be discouraged.

The Lord, you know, has given two eyes to man, and if a man should put out one, and say, I can see well enough with the other, what need I have two? He should sin greatly. So for the soul, the Lord has given two eyes, as I may so speak; the eye of conscience, which is to look upon God's commandment; and the eye of faith, which is to look upon God's promise: and if any man will say, I will put out the eye of faith, I can see well enough with the eye of conscience upon God's commandment, he shall do ill, and very ill: and if a man shall say, I will put out the eye of conscience, for I can see well enough with the eye of faith, he shall do very ill.

But whenever you find you have sinned against any commandment, presently say, "Where is the promise?" I may not look upon the commandment without the promise, nor the promise without the

commandment. Thus join both together, and you shall not be discouraged, yet be humbled.

In all your humiliation, take heed that you don't mourn for your sin only in order to your condition, but rather mourn over your condition in order to your sin. Humiliation, you have heard, has its object upon sin itself, as a dishonour to God; the object of our humiliation is sin itself, as a dishonour done to God: but now the object of our discouragement, you have heard, is our condition, only our condition.

Well, then, would you be humbled so as you may not be discouraged? take heed that you don't stand poring only upon your condition, but rather say thus to your own soul; "Oh, my soul, you have been much mistaken, the Lord pardon it, for all this questioning has been about your condition, and what will become of you; and if at any time you have grieved for sin, it has been in order to your condition, because your condition is naught, and because you did not know what should become of you." But now, if you would be truly humbled, and not be discouraged, then lay aside a little the thoughts of your own condition, and pitch upon sin as a breach of God's law, a transgression of the law of God, a dishonour done to God, and as a breach of the law of love between Christ and you. Thus, I say, if you would be humbled, and not discouraged, rather mourn over your condition in order to your sin, than for your sin in order to your condition.

In your humiliation, take heed that you don't meddle too much with God's prerogative and with God's peculiar.

In humiliation, a man is to meddle with that which belongs to man: some things are there that are peculiar to God and are his prerogative. You see how it is with the birds of the air; as long as the birds fly up and down here in the air, they live comfortably; but if the birds fly up to the element of fire, it will burn their wings, and they will fall down headlong.



So here, so long as a man in his humiliation keeps within his own compass and element, he may walk comfortably there; but if a man in humiliation, will soar up to God's prerogative, certainly his soul will fall down upon the earth and be much discouraged.

Now, I pray, what is more the prerogative and peculiar of God than this: to know who is a reprobate and who isn't? When a man is humbled and grieved about his sin, and he finds that he has sinned much against God, and thereupon he concludes himself to be a reprobate, isn't this to come upon God's prerogative?

The Scripture tells a man, indeed, what he is for the present: That a man for the present is a drunkard, or a swearer, or a sabbath-breaker, or an adulterer; therefore the Scripture tells him for the present, that he is in the state of nature, and under the wrath of God: but does the Scripture tell him that he is a reprobate, that he can never be converted and turned to God?

Surely this is God's great prerogative to know, his secret which he reserves to himself; therefore when a man goes to be humbled before God, and concludes, Oh, I am a reprobate, and there is no hope for me, and I shall never be converted; this is to soar too high into God's prerogative, and he will burn his wings, and he will fall down into great discouragement. Therefore, in all your humiliation, take heed that you don't fall upon any thing that is the peculiar and prerogative of God, for then you will not be humbled but discouraged.

The more you are humbled and grieved by the sight of God's free love and grace, the more you will be humbled and the less discouraged.

When you come to humiliation, you are humbled, because you have sinned against God; but how do you present this God to your own soul: do you present him as a Judge only, or as a Father also: do you present

the Lord to your soul only under the notion or attribute of his greatness, or under the notion and attribute of his goodness also?

Luther said thus: “When my heart is brisk and jolly, I present God to myself under the notion of his greatness; but when my heart is low and fearing, then I present God to me under the notion of his goodness: one while I consider Christ as my example, another while as my gift: when my heart is too high, then I consider Christ as my example; when my spirit is too low, I consider Christ as my gift.”

So do you also. I know you will say, “I cannot sometimes present the Lord to my soul under the notion of a Father, because I have no assurance of his love.” Yet you may consider the Lord as gracious in himself, as good in himself, and loving in himself, and say, “I have thus and thus sinned against a gracious God”, and although you have no assurance of God's love to you in particular, yet if you can present God to your soul, under the notion of his general goodness, as good in himself, you will never be discouraged, but be humbled.

If you would be truly humbled, and not be discouraged; not discouraged, and yet humbled; then beat and drive up all your sins to your unbelief, and lay the stress and weight of all your sorrow upon that sin.

As in matter of thankfulness, if a man runs up every mercy, to the mercy fountain, the blood of Jesus Christ, he will be most thankful. So in the matter of humiliation, if a man runs up every sin to the fountain, the head sin, he will be most humbled.

Now what is the great sin, the fountain sin, the head sin of all your sins, but unbelief; and believe it, he is never far from faith, who is humbled for his unbelief, and he will never be discouraged who isn't far from faith.

Now therefore, if at any time you find your soul in any sin, then say, "This is what my unbelief has done, I did not think that I had had such an unbelieving heart; oh, what an unbelieving heart I have! This, even all this sin has my unbelief brought forth. Now the Lord heal my unbelieving heart."

A soul grieved for unbelief will never be discouraged too much, nor be humbled too little: he will be humbled in truth for sin, because he is humbled for his unbelief, which is the mother sin; yet he will not be discouraged, because he is humbled for that which does cause all discouragements.

Lay therefore the weight of your sorrow upon this sin, and you shall be truly humbled without unjust discouragement.

And, in this way, I have despatched the first particular: by all which you see, that a gracious, godly man, though he has just cause for humiliation, yet he has no just and scripture reason to be discouraged for his sin; though he have sinned, and sinned greatly, yet no discouragement is to grow upon this condition.

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**The Sunday School teacher** was describing that when Lot's wife looked back at Sodom she turned into a pillar of salt, when Bobby interrupted. "My mommy looked back once while she was driving," he announced, "and she turned into a telephone pole."



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# The Gospel Faith Messenger

Equipping for Leadership in the Nations through the Power of the Holy Spirit



## To contact The Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry

Head Office:

P. O. Box 57  
PARAPARAUMU 5254  
New Zealand.

Rodney & Jean Francis  
Telephone: (00 64) 4 904 0727  
E-Mail: [gfm@gospel.org.nz](mailto:gfm@gospel.org.nz)  
Website: [www.gospel.org.nz](http://www.gospel.org.nz)

Bible Course Office:

P. O. Box 5601  
FRANKTON, Hamilton 3242  
New Zealand.

Mrs Jackie Hodges  
Telephone: (0064) 7 846 0684  
E-Mail: [gfm.biblecourses@gospel.org.nz](mailto:gfm.biblecourses@gospel.org.nz)  
Website: [www.gospel.org.nz](http://www.gospel.org.nz)



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 sinners, 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.

Email: [paul90@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:paul90@slingshot.co.nz)

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