

The Faith of



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THE FAITH OF GOD

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Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)

Everything that does not come from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)

INTRODUCTION

The title of this book might seem strange. The Bible tells us to have faith in God but what is this faith God is asking of us? God does not ask us to do anything that He has not taught us to do by example so we thought it would be a good study to see exactly what God demonstrates for us to copy. This has been a very interesting study so we hope that you as reader might also enjoy this topic.

Many people talk about faith as a belief system, but this is not what Christian faith is about. God really wants to have a personal connection with all the humans that He has made, LOVE to love, like a family is supposed to be. This was impossible with a holy God who is a "consuming fire", but Jesus paid the price for sin to make a way for us to be accounted righteous in God's sight so that we will not be burned up, but instead come boldly into His presence.

God talks about oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of His splendour. (Isaiah 61:3) He wants us to demonstrate His glory, His generosity, His power to ennoble our lives as we continue the works of Jesus. We become kings and priests to our God as we walk in faith with our God. Like Adam and Eve before they sinned, we can walk with God in the "cool of the day", and enjoy His company and learn from Him the secrets that He will share with those who love Him.

CHAPTER 1 IN HIMSELF (WITHIN HIMSELF)

God created the world and everything in it. "And God saw that it was good." (Genesis 1)

Wouldn't it be wonderful to do everything to our absolute satisfaction? The whole of creation is described in glowing detail, every little bit, and as we read we get the feeling that God loves every minute of His work. When we do creative things, writing books, sewing and knitting, crafts, gardening, decorating, our sports, even

cleaning, gardening or whatever activity we decide to do for pleasure, we look at the completed work and feel good. Creativity is in our makeup because we are created in the image of God.

When God created His final masterpiece, man, He was very well satisfied. "It is very good". He had the most wonderful dream for His creation. It was that He had a family. He had prepared everything so that this family would thrive, be blessed and would grow.

Before all this happened there was just God, His Son, who came to earth as Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the angels in Heaven. Jesus was with God in the creation. (Colossians 1:15-17) But one angel, the morning star, rebelled and was cast out. (Isaiah 14:12-14) Jesus told His disciples He actually saw the event. (Luke 10:18) Satan wanted to be greater than God so he could rule. He came to the earth God had created and took the form of a serpent, to await his opportunity. It is an interesting question to ask why God did not stop him, but we need to remember that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

When Satan saw that God had given His authority to rule the earth to His human creation he conceived his own plan and put it into action by coming and tempting Eve. We have said so many times that if we obey God without questioning His instructions we are always in His care. Stepping outside these guidelines and into our own way will always leave us vulnerable to the devil's strategies to have control. But **God is also always faithful (faith-full)**. What He has done and said He will always stand by, even if His "children" make a mess. We can read that as soon as Adam and Eve lost their stewardship of the

Garden, God made a plan to get the control back, (Genesis 3:15) although it took many years of preparation. This is the first powerful demonstration of God's faith in Himself. He decided He would do it. He knew He could do it! Predestination versus freewill but God always wins!

How do parents feel when their beloved children become wilful and disobedient, taking absolutely no notice of them? Is our faith in being a parent shaken to the core? God's was when He saw how wickedness was increasing. (Genesis 6:5&6) Because of His great faith He looked for a righteous man and found Noah. Faith always looks in hope. God asked Noah to do something which would seem quite ridiculous – to build an enormous boat, and Noah obeyed. "The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." (2 Chronicles 16:9) When we obey what God has asked us to do He speaks into our hearts so that we know His "Well done". This peace and confidence helps us to withstand mockers who would try to undermine and persecute us.

This act of obedience enabled God to give Noah and any who believed from that time to eternity a wonderful promise. God seems to be thankful towards someone who believes and trusts Him and pours out rewards. He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6) Even though the flood had destroyed the known world, God promised, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." (Genesis 8:22) In spite of those "scientists" who tell us the earth is heating up or we are going to run out of food or space or any of the other faithless

propositions, it is not possible while the earth remains because **God is faithful** and we who are His children have faith in Him. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, (2 Thessalonians 2:1-7) "do not become alarmed...do not be deceived...for the Day will not come until the man of lawlessness is revealed...and you know who is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the One who holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way." "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word". (Hebrews 1:3)

What is this "secret power of lawlessness"? It relates to the original sin – rebelling against God's will. Everyone who rebels against God's will in any way whatever has stepped into the minefield that gives Satan his power to have his way on the earth. We call it a minefield because things can blow up at any time, quite unexpectedly.

The only problem God has is our self-will. He is not caught short, ever. He has a strategy for every occasion, and because He knows the end from the beginning He is ready for every plan that Satan has made. **God is the Creator** and **Satan is the destroyer**. This dominance that Satan craves will continue to be thwarted by God until the end when Satan finally goes into the lake of fire. This is why God wants His children to be overcomers. Jesus obeyed His Father and crushed the head of the enemy but Satan is still snapping at our heels, trying to cripple us so that we do what he wants instead of what God has planned. This is why it is so good that God has such faith in

Himself and it is amazing that He also has faith that His own children, born by the Spirit of God, will do His will too.

God can and will do what is quite impossible to us with our puny strength. Jesus said several times that with God all things are possible. (Mark 10:27) However He wants us to cooperate with Him, because He has chosen that everything on this earth must be done through an earthly body. Jesus had to become flesh to die on the Cross in our place. The first man Adam became a living being, the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. (1 Corinthians 15:45) Jesus told His disciples to have faith in God, or "have the faith of God". (Mark 11:22) We need to understand exactly what the faith of God is so that we can learn to emulate it.

We desperately need God's faithfulness to have a good life and He knows it well. Paul wrote to Timothy "a trustworthy saying" (2 Timothy 2:11-13). "If we died with Him (Christ Jesus) we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him, if we disown Him, He will also disown us; if we are faithless, **He will remain faithful**, for He cannot disown Himself." However lack of faith in us will never nullify God's faithfulness. "Let God be true and every man a liar". (Romans 3:3&4)

CHAPTER 2 IN JESUS

There they were in Heaven at the very beginning, God, the Aleph (**Α**) / Taw (**Τ**) (Greek - Alpha and Omega) and the Holy Spirit. (Genesis

1:1) [1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
פָּרָאֲשִׁית, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ. — (from parshah
bereishit)] (underlining ours)

They created everything together and everything was good. Then Adam and Eve disobeyed and God's beautiful plan was spoiled. What could be done to fix the problem? A new man, a new Adam was needed. One who would do exactly what God wanted to be done in true and absolute obedience. From the very beginning the relationship of Elohim (the plural Hebrew word for the Supreme Deity) was in total sync. They loved each other, worked in total harmony, in fact as **ONE**. When someone is so trustworthy it is easy to have faith that they will do what is required, no matter how hard the job. So God prophesies to Adam and Eve and all who come after. "I will put enmity between you (the serpent – Satan) and the woman, and between your seed (offspring) and hers..." (Genesis 3:15) How this would happen was not prophesied for a long time. Eventually God revealed to Isaiah, and he spoke out to Ahaz. "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

The context was about encouraging Ahaz, because he was afraid of his enemies and he had forgotten that God is always faithful. Isaiah had already given Ahaz the warning, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all". (Isaiah 7:9b) We cannot help wondering what it must have been like for Isaiah to hear himself say these words. What am I saying God?

Stepping up in faith, proclaiming God's words, pleases God and gives way for more revelation. God has always asked for **faith steps – take this one and I will give you the next**. So Isaiah received his next revelation. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...(Isaiah 9:6&7) The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this". Already the plan of God to redeem the world was being prepared but the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plans to His servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7) Everything that God does is spoken into being, the pattern He set from the Garden of Eden. Jesus could not come in the flesh if it was not spoken into being. Jesus had a long time to consider coming as Saviour of the world. We sometimes complain if God is too slow to answer our prayers but it was 4000 years before Jesus came in the flesh to save us from our sins. During all that time God waited for those who would listen to Him and speak out His plans in great detail so that He could act. These little jewels of wisdom are scattered throughout the Old Testament – little pictures so that when Jesus did come everyone would be able to recognise Him. This was why Jesus was so amazed and rather scathing of the Jews. "...nor does His word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one He sent. You study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life." (John 5:38-40)

Jesus knew all the Scriptures concerning Himself. This was why He amazed the teachers in the Temple (Luke 2:46&47) and defeated the devil when He was tempted. (Luke 4:1-12)

There is a rather wordy definition of faith at the beginning of the list of faith references in Cruden's Concordance (page 199) "(Biblical) Faith is the acceptance by the intellect, affection and will of God's favour extended to man through Christ (the anointing of God). This faith produces a sincere obedience in the life and conversation. The firm foundation of faith is the essential supreme perfection of God; His unerring knowledge, immutable truth, infinite goodness and almighty power." We can see though that Jesus, as a man, fulfilled every word of this definition.

One of the very interesting things about God's faith in His "firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15) is that this "firstborn" came as the Angel of the Lord to some in the Old Testament. "He came as His personal agent and spokesman and is virtually identified with God as an extension of the Divine personality. He speaks not merely in the Name of God but as God Himself." (The New Bible Dictionary page 38) He is just called LORD when He comes to Abraham. (Genesis 18) When He comes to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-14), Abraham when he is about to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:11-18), Moses (Exodus 3:2), Gideon (Judges 6:11-24) and Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:3-22) there is extraordinary revelation of God given to each.

- to Hagar, the God who **Sees**
- to Abraham, God is Jehovah Jireh, The LORD **Will Provide**.

- to Moses, **I AM** the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Further on He tells Moses '**I AM**' is My Name. (Exodus 3:14)
- to Gideon, The LORD Is **Peace**.
- to Manoah and his wife, My Name is **Wonderful** (Beyond Understanding).

Maybe we might think that Abraham and Moses are 'giants' of faith but certainly Manoah and his wife and Hagar seem like insignificant people in the Bible and Gideon spoke of himself as the least in his family. (Judges 6:15) Such is the faith of God in His Son that He would "revive the spirit of the lowly and revive the heart of the contrite". (Isaiah 57:15) This truly is a God who is faithful. He always seeks out the one who is longing to do His will, whether great or small.

When Jesus finally came in the flesh He just continued the work that He had begun, saying and doing the same things and then more. (Acts 10:38) Even though He had laid aside His status as God's first-born Son to work only in the strength of the Holy Spirit as all men are supposed to do, He never sinned, that is He never went His own way but **always** did the Father's will. This is certainly being faithful and so God could also put His faith and trust in Jesus. Jesus had the responsibility to reveal the Father, His love and His heart and to do the works the Father longed to do through Man. Jesus even called Himself the Son of Man so that this would speak into being what could happen when "man" surrendered his will to the power of God.

CHAPTER 3 IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit also had His specific role from the beginning, hovering over the waters. (Genesis 1:2) Noah sent a dove to find out whether the flood was over. (Genesis 8:8-12) In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is sometimes seen as a dove. (Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32) We have an expression 'gentle as a dove'. Is the Holy Spirit gentle?

God showed His mighty power to Elijah when Elijah needed comfort. (1 Kings 19:11&12) Then after all this glorious and somewhat frightening display came a **gentle whisper**. Ah! The wisdom of God! Elijah came out of his cave and was spoken to very sternly by God. The Holy Spirit is definitely a wooer. Jesus says He convicts in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8) **The devil is an accuser** but **the Holy Spirit is a wooer**. Love pours forth, sorrow at the ungodly behaviour pours out, and Godly grief overwhelms so that the one convicted wants to repent. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret." (2 Corinthians 7:10) Accusation, on the other hand, leads to self-justification and blaming whoever, just to offload the pain. It can never bring about a positive change because it causes offence which also causes a rift from God. Offence builds a fence.

There are not many references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament yet He is active all the time. Saul received the Spirit of the LORD in power and he was changed into a different person. (1 Samuel 10:6) David knew His presence and power because he begged God not to take His Holy Spirit from him. (Psalms 51:11) They were both

anointed by Samuel at God's command. (1 Samuel 10:1 and 16:13) Solomon was anointed by Zadok but there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. (1 Kings 1:39) He did ask God for the gifts of wisdom and discernment, only two of the gifts of the Holy Spirit out of at least nine (1 Corinthians 12). Later God's own people grieved His Holy Spirit so God turned and became their enemy. (Isaiah 63:10) Jesus said that the only unforgivable sin is against the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 12:31&32, Mark 3:28&29, Luke 12:10) God's Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God. (1 Corinthians 2:11) He conveys the love of God to people. (Romans 5:5) God longs to give His Holy Spirit to people, just for the asking. (Luke 11:13) Jesus said, "No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." (John 3:5) Jesus Himself was born of the Spirit when He came into the world.

Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, "When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known to you." (John 16:13-15) The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each submit, one to the other. Submission takes real humility, so the Holy Spirit is very humble. Then again this also demonstrates faith and faithfulness.

God has appointed that the Holy Spirit indwell His elect so that their inheritance is guaranteed. (Ephesians 1:13&14) Even after being born again we make mistakes and we need His gentle conviction that we

have messed up so that we can confess our sin and be cleansed of all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) This is essential if we are to be God's ambassadors, God making His appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20) God has said, "Be holy, because I am Holy". (Leviticus 11:45; 1 Peter 1:16)

God has placed great faith in the Holy Spirit doing His work, just as He did Jesus, dying on the Cross for the sins of the world. All these wonderful plans are only possible because of the unity of Elohim and this is why God wants His family to have unity of purpose as Paul advises. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ (the anointed One and His anointing), if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit...be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." (Philippians 2:1&2) This is the greatest challenge for the Church. As we understand this kind of faith-fullness we can submit to the prompting of this faithful Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can be grieved. (Ephesians 4:30) He is so faithful to His role of transforming us into the likeness of the Lord, with ever-increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) and when we revert to old worldly ways, especially in our attitudes to others or in unwholesome speech we have rejected His gentle work. Refusing to love unconditionally is also grieving the Holy Spirit. Loving the "unlovely" is always a test as to whether we want to obey this command of Jesus. This might take supernatural help, but God honours those who want to obey Him and will always help us. When we find that someone irritates us this is actually a challenge from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can also be quenched. (1 Thessalonians 5:19) His fire can be put out. When He trusts some with His gifts He does not appreciate when others, especially if they call themselves believers, scorn and mock or straight out do not believe. We need to be very careful when we are judging what the Holy Spirit is doing through another believer. We are all on a journey of faith and are called to love each other. We do not want to be found guilty of discouraging those who are just trying to obey the Holy Spirit, just because we do not agree. The Holy Spirit manifests His gifts "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7) therefore it is not up to us to dispute Him. Instead we should affirm each other and honour what the Holy Spirit is doing in and through another Christian, so building each other up, spurring each other to love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)

Luke has written on the works of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. Every good work that honours God is an act of the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer. Jesus said that no branch can "bear fruit" by itself; it must remain in the vine, but it is to the Father's glory that we bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be disciples of Jesus. (John 15:4&8) The Holy Spirit is the power source for the acts of God through us. What a privilege God has given that the Godhead desires to work in and through human beings to accomplish His work in the world.

CHAPTER 4 IN HIS SERVANTS

God's ways are so amazing. His first servants were the angels. "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14) "He (Jesus) became as much superior to the angels as the Name He has inherited is superior to theirs." "Let all God's angels worship Him (Jesus)." (Hebrews 14&6) "In speaking of angels He says, 'He makes His angels winds, His servants flames of fire.'" (Hebrews 1:7)

Angels came and ministered to Jesus after the time of His temptations in the wilderness. (Matthew 4:11) An angel from heaven appeared to Him to strengthen Him on the Mount of Olives. (Luke 22:43) Angels announced His Resurrection. (Matthew 28:5&6)

Primarily, angels are God's messengers. There are more than 200 references to angels in the Bible. They were all to serve Him but Satan took many with him when he was cast out of Heaven. (Matthew 25:41) The rest of the angels that remained faithful to God will look forward to returning with Jesus because they will have the job of separating the people who love Him and the people who do not. (Matthew 25:31-46) We have already written about the Angel of the LORD who was also a servant of the Father and when He came as Jesus, He "made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant." (Philippians 2:7)

There is a very interesting verse about the ambiguity of God's servants. We are warned, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some people have entertained angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2) Maybe the writer was thinking about God's visit to

Abraham to prophesy the birth of Isaac. (Genesis 18) Jesus taught a lot about receiving God's servants and not receiving God's servants. Those who do are rewarded. We might not know the significance of the encounter but God has warned us. "Anyone who receives a prophet...will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man...will receive a righteous man's reward." (Matthew 10:41) These encounters have continued to this present day and those who have had them have found that their lives are changed and enriched.

Great men of the Old Testament considered it to be an honour and privilege to be a servant, of God and of each other. Faithfulness has its own reward. Moses is called the servant of the LORD (Deuteronomy 34:5 and Joshua 1:2) yet he "was also a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth". (Numbers 12:3) Isaiah writes about the servant of the LORD. (Isaiah 42:1-7) When God chooses His servants, His messengers, He delights in them just as He delighted in Jesus, His very special messenger. God upholds him, gives His Spirit to him so that He can be gentle with people yet powerful to bring justice. Isaiah describes a bruised reed and a smouldering wick. Perhaps these describe one who was very fragile and could no longer stand up straight or one whose fire (zeal for life) was nearly gone. This servant will be a light for those outside of relationship with God, to open their eyes, free them from captivity (of sin) and release those who sit in darkness, perhaps through the prevailing spirits of their culture in which they were born. This is the prototype for all human servants of the LORD because the angels cannot do this work. Peter writes that angels longed to see these things. (1 Peter 1:12) No wonder

they never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." They are so awed by God's brilliant plans to rescue His man. He uses Man to rescue man. God wants co-workers, but they cannot be co-workers if they are not empowered and anointed to do "the works that God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) These works are not to earn merit from God but are the outworking of His life and power in us. Because this power was not available until Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to live within us it is important to receive Him willingly and by faith.

Jesus, when talking to His disciples said, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business". (John 15:15) He also warned them, "No servant is greater than his master." (John 15:20) Jesus foreshadowed the plan of God for even greater honour and privilege but this came when the Holy Spirit filled them and clothed them with power from on high. (Acts 2:4 and Luke 24:49) They had entered into a new covenant, a new life and Jesus called them His friends, "for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter (of the law) but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6)

Jesus came that we might have life – not just exist, but be fulfilled and productive and satisfied. This is His intention when He says He is the Light of the world. Whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life. (John 8:12) Serving Him is walking in that light and the closer we keep to Him the more glorious is that light. We should shine like stars in the universe, as we hold out the word of

life to a crooked and depraved generation. (Philippians 2:15&16) They should witness our blamelessness and purity. A servant should bring honour to his/her master.

CHAPTER 5 IN HIS CHILDREN

Who are God's children, into whom He should put so much faith? In the general sense all humanity are God's children, but this term is really for those in Covenant relationship with Him by His own initiative. We are adopted into His personal family by agreement with His conditions, set down in the Bible. "He (Jesus) came to His own (the Jewish people that the Father had chosen from early times), but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right (the power and the authority) to become children of God." (John 1:12) The Bible goes on: "... children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will." (John 1:13) **"...but born of God"**.

Jesus says that no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again. The first birth is the flesh, natural descent and/or human decision and/or a husband's will. Jesus explains, "No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of **water and the Spirit**". (John 3:3-5) "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." John the Baptist has preached washing in water as a sign of repentance and Jesus is ratifying what John proclaimed. "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will

baptise with the Holy Spirit." (John 1:33) Becoming a true child of the Heavenly Father is a finely defined process in which we imitate our older brother. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit, baptised in water to "fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15) and baptised by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:16) The testimony God has given about His Son is threefold and to be believed for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. The testimonies are the Spirit (the power and the breath of God), the water (of washing for repentance to fulfil all righteousness) and the blood (of Calvary, the punishment for sin is paid). (1 John 5:6-12)

God is able to trust those who have submitted to the pattern that Jesus set. Many prefer to choose their own way of relating to God. We meet many people who think it is OK to be a good person and that makes us OK with God, but the Bible says plainly that there is none good except God. (Romans 3:12) The rich man who came to Jesus (Matthew 19:16ff) thought he was good enough because he had obeyed some of the commandments. We always find it interesting that Jesus only quoted the commandments that the man did obey, all of the ones towards other people. The man went away sadly because he could not give his all to follow Jesus. **This is the pattern – to follow Jesus**. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers (and sisters) (Hebrews 2:11) Jesus says, "I will declare Your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises." "I will put my trust in Him." (Hebrews 2:12&13) Jesus was very open in His love and respect for His Father. "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me." (John 6:38) There is no room

for a private "faith". Keeping our belief private indicates that we are ashamed of it, (if in actual fact we have any faith at all,) and if this is directed towards God then by inference, we are ashamed of being in His family or even of who He is. Paul boldly proclaimed, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes". (Romans 1:16) Jesus also says, "If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words...the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38) This seems to indicate that if a supposed believer will not confess Christ publicly before it is too late, that person will not be considered to be a member of the family of God. God's children should be shouting from the rooftops that they are in His family. It is a great privilege to be "blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ; to be holy and blameless in His sight, to be adopted as His sons (and daughters), to be redeemed (from the kingdom of darkness) through the blood of Jesus, to have all our sins forgiven, to experience the riches of His grace (unmerited favour), to have revealed to us the mystery of His will, to be chosen, to be guaranteed eternal life." (Ephesians 1:3-14)

When we realise all these privileges it becomes our true desire to follow the example of our big brother, Jesus. He has demonstrated to us such a good way to live, and then He has sent His Holy Spirit to indwell us so that we are able to do what we desire to do in order to follow Him. As we practise His ways we find that we do not need to go our own way any more because His way is SO much better. When we first became a child of God, by receiving the Holy Spirit,

God made us a promise. "He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) God looks at us as a finished product, by His faith. He actually sees us as He planned us to become. This is indeed faith towards His children! LOVE always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:7)

Children of God, though, are expected to reflect His likeness. "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." (1 John 3:10) This perhaps is why Jesus said, "Anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Matthew 10:15) There are many servants of God, even human ones, but some of these are not childlike in their relationship with Him and with their fellow believers.

CHAPTER 6 IN HIS FRIENDS

Jesus said to His disciples, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) He also said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." This makes Jesus the best friend to all. Our challenge is whether we also want to be His friend. Are we ready to lay down our life to be a friend to Him? Becoming a friend of Jesus means we are covered by the blood of

Jesus and He purifies us from every sin that we have ever committed.

(1 John 1:7)

Why is it good to be a friend of Jesus? We can be a child of God, a servant of God, a believer in God, a worshipper of God, but all these put God in an exalted and somewhat remote position. This is quite comfortable for some people because they are not challenged to put away a life-style that is not pleasing to God. A child can defer to the father, a servant can do his best to please but he is subject to the master, a believer does not necessarily have a relationship but just knows some of the truth and a worshipper just puts God (whoever He is) on a higher place.

A friend of Jesus receives personal revelation of the heart of God. "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) "I have revealed You to those whom You gave Me out of this world...I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You." (John 17:6&8) A friend stands alongside. Paul wrote that we are seated with Christ in heavenly realms. (Ephesians 2:6) Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart". (Matthew 11:29) In this picture we are walking side by side with Jesus pulling the weight. "Let (My) love and faithfulness never leave you...trust in the LORD with all your heart." (Proverbs 3:3&5)

Proverbs has interesting things to say about friends.

- The rich have many friends but the poor are shunned. (14:20)
- Gossip separates close friends. (16:28)

- A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (17:17)
- There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (18:24)
- Wealth brings many friends. (19:4)
- Everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts. (19:6)
- He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend. (22:11)
- Wounds from a friend can be trusted. (27:6)
- Pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. (27:9)
- Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father. (27:10)

These are sayings of Solomon, one of the richest people ever, to whom God gave these blessings. He found by experience that riches gave great power. This does not apply only to money and possessions but actually any blessing from God, because the Bible says that it is God who gives us the ability to produce wealth to confirm His Covenant. (Deuteronomy 8:18). It seems that it is a responsibility of a friend of Jesus to be wealthy, not for their own benefit but for His. This enables us to be generous which expresses the heart of God. It also generates confidence in God's ability to supply all our needs in ourselves and in others to whom we have been generous.

Anyone can call on a friend for advice, prayer, support and even warnings. Real friends forgive each other (as God has forgiven us) and bear with one another, just as God does with us. (Colossians 3:13) Real friends stand by each other, trust each other and refuse to listen

to gossip about the other. When one friend has to say something about a problem, love will carry them through and even if wounded by the other there should be healing eventually.

Being a friend of Jesus is prophesied in Proverbs. He is so generous and loving and prayer to Him will always be heard. He really does stick closer than a brother to His friends. God has put His faith in Jesus but He is also putting His faith in those who are friends of Jesus and thus of Himself. Jesus said, "When a man believes in Me, he does not believe in Me only, but in the One who sent Me." (John 12:44)

Because friends of Jesus are filled with the Holy Spirit continuously they are able to call on any gift which the Holy Spirit confers. God has such faith in His friends that He can trust them with His mighty power. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed. (1 Corinthians 12:7-10) Jesus manifested all these gifts according to the occasion. He said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12) The better we know the heart of God and His purposes and use His faith in us, the more God can trust us so that we become not only His ambassadors but His channels to a hurting and broken world. Truly God's friends represent their "big brother", Jesus. They are able to exercise the faith of God.

It is a most extraordinary privilege to be a friend of Jesus. He has made extraordinary promises to them. Here are a few.

- I will do whatever you ask in My Name. (John 14:13)

- Anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these. (John 14:12)
- Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (John 15:7)
- Your Father in Heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. (Luke 11:13)
- Seek the Kingdom of God and He will supply everything you need. (Luke 12:31)
- If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done by My Father. (Matthew 18:19)
- He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us. (Ephesians 3:20)

Being a friend of Jesus means submitting to His superior knowledge and experience but He is very generous and really wants us to know the Father's will as He does so that these promises become a reality for us.

CHAPTER 7 IN HIS OVERCOMERS

Jesus commended some people for great faith. The centurion (Matthew 8:10, Luke 7:9) was commended because he was a man with authority but also under authority. He recognised in Jesus great authority and knew absolutely that when Jesus spoke, whatever He said would be done. The Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28) was commended for her great faith because she would not take "no" for an answer. She was absolutely convinced that Jesus had the power to

deliver her daughter from demons and did not take offence when told she was a dog, but turned the insult into a positive statement of hope.

Jesus said on another occasion that it would be done according to our faith. (Matthew 9:29) Everything is possible for him who believes. (Mark 9:23)

It seems that it is necessary to rise to the level of great faith to become an overcomer. "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4) But what does overcoming the world look like?

"The cravings of the sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – come not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16) So many times in Paul's letters he writes about living by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, Romans 8:8b), putting to death what belongs to our earthly nature (Colossians 3:5, Galatians 5:24), and demonstrating the unconditional love of God. (Romans 5:5) John's writings major on unconditional love. (1 John 3:14)

Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians is that they were worldly. (1 Corinthians 3:1) There was jealousy and quarrelling among them. But has the 21st century Christian fellowship improved? In the Corinthian church there were divisions and they quarrelled about who they followed, who was their leader and about baptisms. (1 Corinthians 1:10-15) It is still the same and some leaders suspect visitors who are already Christians that they have come to "steal their sheep". Maybe this has happened. But how does one steal sheep? They will always go where the pasture is best. Being "locked in" to the denomination and its distinctive is like being corralled in the fold all the time, when there

could be lovely food in another place. Maybe this is why the 100th sheep got lost but the Shepherd will always send out to find it again and when it is found it is far less likely to stray far from the Shepherd because it is so grateful to be forgiven, healed and back safe. Each church fellowship should be consciously working for the Kingdom of God and freeing their people to explore all avenues to find what is right for them.

The unconditional love of God always protects, but it also always trusts. It always hopes and it always perseveres. If there is no discernment by the Spirit of God this could be very difficult. A Christian leader has a responsibility to hear God's voice and know His heart. Then he/she has also a responsibility to teach those in their care to grow up to maturity so that they will not be tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching...and by the craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (Ephesians 4:14) Every child of God needs to grow up, and the Holy Spirit is a faithful teacher, through the written word and obedience to it, wherein they receive God's "well done" and peace in their hearts. This growth in our faith walk is absolutely essential to be an overcomer.

Someone said once that exercising faith is **R I S K**. If faith is the assurance of things hoped for, we have to conceive, believe, ask and wait, unwavering, undoubting and thus demonstrating that our faith is indeed in God who is **faithful**. Every precedent that has been set in the Bible is available to be claimed, just as in civil law. The greatest joy in reading God's word is the adventure of finding promises that

can be claimed as "yes" in Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:20) Then we can believe that God is faithful to His promises and will answer our request in His time. If we are indeed "speaking spirits" we speak out what we are believing for, so that the prayer will come to pass.

The Apostle John writes a great deal about overcoming, especially in Revelation. The Accuser must be overcome. The reason God did not annihilate Satan from the beginning is that He wants us to complete the work that Jesus did when He triumphed over him on the cross. (Colossians 2:15) Jesus disarmed his powers and authorities so that they can only bluff us and try to intimidate us, followers of Jesus. The battle is won but the skirmishes go on until the Last Day. This is why Jesus expects us to do even greater things. (John 14:12) John writes that they overcame him (the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (personal experiences); and they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11) This is not necessarily martyrdom, but certainly "losing one's life for Jesus and the gospel". (Mark 8:35) Paul puts it well. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed...a righteousness by faith". (Romans 1:16-17)

We cannot earn our right standing before a holy God but if He is giving it as a gift we would be very ungrateful and even stupid to refuse. From this standpoint, conscious of the armour we have been equipped with, (Ephesians 6:10-20) we are in a very good position to overcome. First we have Truth on our side, holding us up; our heart is protected by His righteousness which we have received as His gift;

our feet can walk on the rockiest path because He is our peace. We have the faith of God as our shield, knowing He backs us all the way; we have our minds protected by the fact that no matter what comes we are always in His presence and eternal life; we have God's word to use as our weapon of attack, just as Jesus did in the wilderness, and also our comfort if we get wounded. Also we can talk to God at any time for comfort, instruction, guidance and reminder of His presence with us. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us to persevere in the race marked out for us. (12:1)

John also writes of the rewards for the overcomer. (Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21) Paul testifies that he forgets what is behind (the failures, difficulties, mistakes, hurts and persecutions) and strains towards what is ahead. (Philippians 3:13)

Our overcoming then has a twofold thrust – becoming more Christlike in our personal life and enforcing the victory of the Cross in our world. Jesus has made a prophetic decree that the Kingdom of God is advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. (Matthew 11:12) The original command in the Garden of Eden was to be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. (Genesis 1:28) God has never repealed this command. Jesus said it is to My Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples. (John 15:8) This is not only the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 6:22&23) but we are also chosen and appointed to go and bear fruit that will last. (John 15:16) Exercising our faith through intercession and testimony of what God has done for us will influence others to join God's family.

These wonderful things are all God's plans for His chosen people. He has exercised His faith in order that they may come to pass. He has spoken these plans into our world and He has faith that we will respond. He is ready to pour His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit so that we will long to respond. All that is required is that we come to Him...take His yoke upon us and learn from Him and we will find rest (fulfilment) for our souls. (Matthew 11:28)

At the beginning of this chapter we asked a question. What does overcoming the world look like?

Imagine a soccer match between 5 year olds and the over-sixteens. They look like grasshoppers against giants. (Numbers 13:33) Overcomers are so confident that God is with them that they march out onto that field with the goal in sight and go for it. This is a game of sock-it! Of course they take a few minor knocks but...God is with them and He always wins! The goal is scored and there is a roar from the crowd. When there is opportunity to look there are angels everywhere and they have been helping because God promises to strengthen the weak who put their trust in Him. WE WIN! HALLELUJAH!