

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD CANADA - ÉGLISE UNIVERSELLE DE DIEU, CANADA

NORTHERN LIGHT

SHARING OUR STORY

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2008

Qui a peur du Dieu schizophrène?

Who's Afraid Of The Schizophrenic God?

Hope Future, Hope Now

Director's Annual Letter
Lettre annuelle du directeur

Hope

OUR FRENCH AFRICAN WCG FAMILY



Members posing in front of our church owned building in Yaoundé Cameroon.



Worship service in Douala, Cameroon.



Outside church service in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Our members in waving to their Canadian brethren (Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo).

Despite the many challenges of the day to day life in these countries of Africa, I am happy to report that our congregations in Cameroon and DRC are in good spiritual condition and quite stable. This is due in large part to our very qualified and devoted national and local leaders. I've found that God called many well educated people, with good jobs, to look after our congregations.

It had been three years since our congregations were visited by a representative of the WCG. As a result, they were very happy to see us and receive updates on the Church and our theology. They feel somewhat isolated and it was great to make all the contacts. We'll be able not only to maintain close and regular contact, but also find ways of supporting the leaders and members in their ministries in their respective countries.

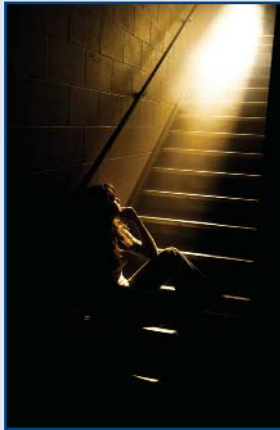
Our leaders lack French Bible study and theology material. I was able to carry in my luggage three used laptop computers and French Bible Online software that will be of great help in sermon and Bible Study preparation. I was also able to bring about 60 French Bibles and children's Bible books. All this was donated by members of our Quebec congregations.

I was so glad to meet with these warm, devoted and loving brethren. It was a wonderful experience, and I hope this will lead to a long and fruitful association and relationship.

Blessings, Roger Labelle.

Who's Afraid Of The Schizophrenic God? 2

Imagine a courtroom scene. It's you who are convicted, facing charges. Problem is, you know you are guilty. But as you walk in, you notice the judge gives you a reassuring nod of recognition, as if he had known you all your life.



Qui a peur du Dieu schizophrène ? 4

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I imagine most Christians dream of being asked to "give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15), but how can anyone have hope in a depressing world like this one?

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FRONT COVER: For Christians, the hope offered by the Gospel enables them to function in a difficult world.
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Northern Light magazine is the official magazine of the Worldwide Church of God, Canada. It exists to share the stories of our members and congregations on their Christian journey. Northern Light does this by featuring articles that encourage, nurture and inform.

Le magazine Northern Light est le magazine officiel de l'Église universelle de Dieu, au Canada. Il sert à raconter les histoires de nos membres et de nos assemblées tout le long de leur voyage chrétien, au moyen d'articles qui encouragent, nourrissent et informent.

Hope

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Earlier this year, I was corresponding with Jonathan Buck regarding one of his articles and in his reply, he suggested that *Northern Light* cover the topic of Hope. Without critiquing other religions, the offer of hope in the future is probably one of the greatest strengths of our Christian beliefs.

Recently, this again came to mind. For the last few weeks I have become a part of a grief recovery support group which follows the Grief Share series of videos (www.griefshare.org). Although it is designed to help all who are dealing with grief as a result of a death of someone who is close, it does have a distinctly Christian flavor. It so happens that all of the participants are followers of Jesus, which in itself provides a frame of reference to deal with death. This was confirmed by one of the participants the other evening when at the close of our session, she expressed the sentiment, "I wonder what it must be like to deal with the loss of a loved one without knowing what God has planned for us?"

Such a comment reminded me of the forward to the book *Night* by Elie Wiesel, which is his personal account of a young Jewish boy who survived the terrors of the concentration and extermination camps during the Holocaust. In it Francois Mauriac writes his reflections after meeting Elie Wiesel and discovering how Elie lost his belief in a God in his Holocaust experience:

"And I, who believe that God is love, what answer was there to give my young interlocutor whose dark eyes still held the reflection of the angelic sadness that had appeared one day on the face of a hanged child? What did I say to him? Did I speak to him of that other Jew, this crucified brother who perhaps resembled him and whose cross conquered the world? Did I explain to him that what had been a stumbling block for his faith had become a cornerstone for mine? And that the connection between the cross and human suffering remains, in my view, the key to the unfathomable mystery in which the faith of his childhood was lost? And yet, Zion has risen up again out of the crematoria and the slaughterhouses. The Jewish nation has been resurrected from among its thousands of dead. It is they who have given it new life. We do not know the worth of one single drop of blood, one single tear. All is grace. If the Almighty is the Almighty, the last word for each of us belongs to Him. That is what I should have said to the Jewish child. But all I could do was embrace him and weep."

May we all rejoice in the gift of Hope that we have been given and may we also learn to embrace those who don't yet have that gift.**NL**

Bill Hall

By Neil Earle

*Pastor, Glendora, California
congregation*

Imagine a courtroom scene. It's you who are convicted, facing charges. Problem is, you know you are guilty. But as you walk in, you notice the judge gives you a reassuring nod of recognition, as if he had known you all your life.

He summons you to the bench. "Don't worry about a thing," he tells you with a warm fatherly smile. "I know all about this case. In fact, I'm going to be your defense attorney." The late theologian Shirley C. Guthrie would explain that this is the way we should picture what the Bible calls the Judgment. "Must we talk about the wrath of God?" Guthrie asked. "Yes," he answers. "But God's wrath is not like that of the gods. It is the wrath of the God who was in Christ reconciling the world to God's self" (Christian Doctrine, pages 261-262).

Theological strait-jackets

Unfortunately, instead of allowing Jesus' love, compassion and kindness to shape their understanding of God, many Christians gravitate toward what we might call a "forensic" model of salvation. The word "forensic" seems like a penal or legal term, which it is. This forensic model sees God the Father as stern and vengeful, a frightening God from whom we need Jesus to save us. It assumes that the starting place for understanding God is not Jesus Christ, but "the law," by which is meant the Old Testament legal system. This model sees the law as so important that even God is subject to it. Since God is concerned first about the penalty demands of his law and only secondly about the well-being of humans, he will punish them for lawbreaking in the same way that the State and human courts and legal systems do—through a straightforward proving of guilt followed by a guilty verdict.

Front and center in the forensic model is God's anger against sinning humanity. God is offended, and someone must pay. Jesus steps forward and takes the

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full force of God's wrath against human sin. That means we have had our penalty paid for us, but it does nothing for a restored relationship of love and trust. This "offended deity" picture forgets that first and foremost, God is love (1 John 4:16), that God is joyously working to bring "many sons to glory," and that our salvation was in his mind "before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8, King James Version).

This forensic model also forgets something even more basic—that Jesus Christ and the Father along with the Holy Spirit are the three Persons of the one God, and that the Son or Word made Incarnate in Jesus was the perfect revelation of the Father in human form. The Father is not some angry, vengeful deity that we need protection from; he is just like Jesus. Jesus, remember, is "the

exact representation" of the being of God (Hebrews 1:3). The Father is full of compassion and mercy, a God who "desires mercy and not sacrifice," just like Jesus. Jesus is the starting place for understanding God; the law is not.

God is not schizophrenic. He does not have a split personality. There is not one "good God," Jesus, and one "bad God," the Father. There is one God—Father, Son and Spirit—who loves us unconditionally and has in Jesus made full provision not only for our sins to be forgiven and removed, but also for our full inclusion in the love relationship that the Son has shared with the Father from eternity.

Adoption

God is not in the business of training obedient valets, but in building a family.



The apostle Paul used the word “adoption” in describing the kind of relationship that God has created for humanity in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4-5). Through the Incarnation of the Son—by Jesus becoming one of us and taking up

Christianity have charged. It was a divine rescue springing from God’s love for us (John 3:16), an intervention designed to restore a purpose of which we were oblivious in our ignorance and darkness (verses 19-20).

The Father is not some angry, vengeful deity that we need protection from; he is just like Jesus. Jesus, remember, is “the exact representation” of the being of God (Hebrews 1:3). The Father is full of compassion and mercy, a God who “desires mercy and not sacrifice,” just like Jesus. Jesus is the starting place for understanding God; the law is not.

our cause as his own—God has drawn us into and made us part of the intimate relationship that Jesus has with the Father.

We see the power of this intimate love that God has for humanity in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The repentant son is welcomed home by the Father and restored to full rights of sonship (Luke 15:11-24). This depicts the God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). The death of Christ was not a vindictive act of divine child abuse, as some hostile critics of

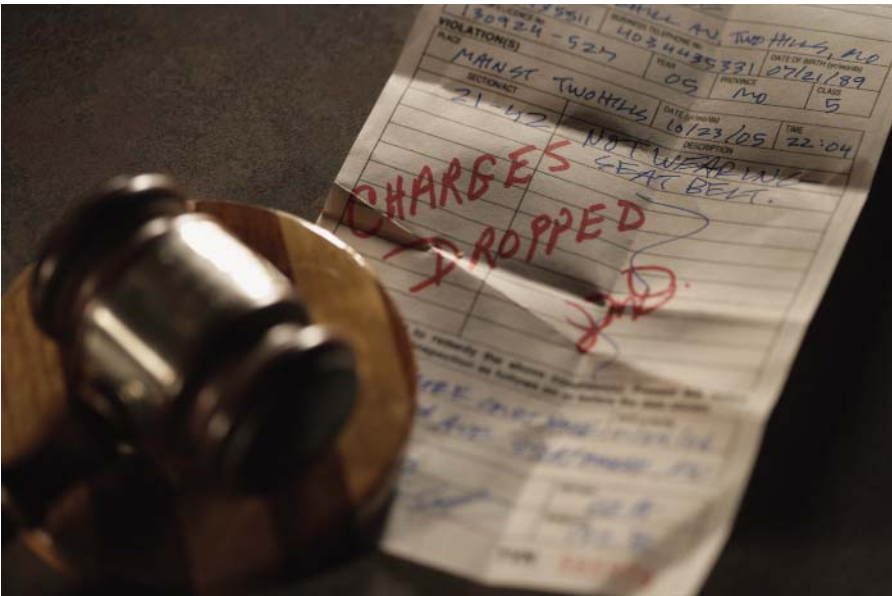
Set against this majestic purpose, God’s wrath can be seen for what it is—his anger—not at the humanity he sent Jesus to save, but at sin, that which destroys the relationship he has always intended for us in Christ. God is not some resentful, selfish parent in an emotional stew because we have not played by his rules. God is Father, Son and Spirit, loving, faithful and unconditionally committed to bringing humanity into the joy of knowing him for who he really is.

Mercy vs. judgment

God, however, will never be at peace with sin. The great human tragedy is that we have been totally unaware of the pardon and reconciliation the Father has brought about through Jesus Christ. We have loved darkness rather than light and have chosen to ignore what the Father offers us through the Son.

Through Christ, the disconnect between the world and God has been removed once and for all. The great majority of unbelievers are simply those who through weakness or ignorance are resisting the influence of the life-giving Holy Spirit of Christ, the Person of the Godhead who beckons to us to abandon our addiction to darkness and sin—who testifies in our hearts to God’s saving, atoning and reconciling work in Jesus on our behalf (John 14:25-27; 15:26).

Jesus did not just bring good news, he was good news. The overwhelming emphasis of his teaching was mercy, not vengeance. His hallmark sayings reflect the God who is love, in whose mind mercy rejoices against judgment (James 2:13). Thus, what was hinted at in parts of the Old Testament becomes the major theme in the Gospels—“I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” Jesus’ word pictures show us a forgiving father, a Good Samaritan, seeking shepherds and splendidly generous employers, healings, exorcisms, a Great Physician who pleaded “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). **NL**



de Neil Earle

Qui a peur du Dieu schizophrène ?

Imaginez une scène dans une salle de tribunal. Vous êtes l'inculpé, et vous faites face à des chefs d'accusation. Le problème est que vous savez que vous êtes coupable. Mais en entrant dans la salle, vous remarquez que le juge vous fait un signe de la tête rassurant, comme s'il vous avait connu toute votre vie.

Il vous appelle à comparaître devant le tribunal et vous dit avec un sourire chaleureux et paternel : « Ne vous inquiétez de rien. Je sais tout sur cette affaire. En fait, je serai votre avocat. » Le regretté théologien Shirley C. Guthrie expliquait que c'est ainsi que nous devrions imaginer ce que la Bible appelle le jugement. « Devons-nous parler de la colère de Dieu ? », demandait Guthrie. « Oui, répond-il. Mais la colère de Dieu ne ressemble pas à celle des dieux. C'est la colère du Dieu qui était en Christ, réconciliant le monde avec lui-même » (*Christian Doctrine*, page 261, 262).

Camisoles de force théologiques

Malheureusement, plutôt que de laisser l'amour, la compassion et la bonté de Jésus façonner leur compréhension de Dieu, beaucoup de chrétiens sont attirés vers ce que nous pourrions appeler un modèle de salut « légaliste ». Le mot « légaliste » ressemble à un terme pénal ou juridique, ce qu'il est en effet. Ce modèle légaliste voit Dieu le Père comme sévère et vengeur, un Dieu effrayant de qui Jésus doit nous sauver. Il présume que le point de départ pour comprendre Dieu n'est pas Jésus-Christ, mais « la loi », c'est-à-dire le système juridique de l'Ancien Testament. Ce modèle considère la loi comme si importante que même Dieu y est soumis. Puisque Dieu se préoccupe d'abord du châtement exigé par sa loi et, ensuite seulement, du bien-être des êtres humains, il les punira pour avoir brisé la loi de la même façon que l'État, les cours humaines et les systèmes juridiques le font : par une simple preuve de culpabilité suivie d'un verdict de culpabilité.

À l'avant et au centre du modèle légaliste se trouve la colère de Dieu contre l'humanité pécheresse. Dieu est offensé, et quelqu'un doit payer. Jésus s'avance et prend sur lui toute la colère de Dieu contre le péché humain. Cela veut dire que notre peine a été subie, mais cela ne contribue en rien à rétablir une relation d'amour et de confiance. Cette image de « divinité offensée » oublie d'abord et avant tout que Dieu est amour (1 Jean 4.16), qu'il s'emploie joyeusement à « conduire beaucoup de fils à participer à sa gloire »

(Hébreux 2.10), et que notre salut faisait partie de son plan « depuis l'origine du monde » (Apocalypse 13.8).

Ce modèle légaliste oublie également quelque chose d'encore plus fondamentale : que Jésus-Christ, le Père et le Saint-Esprit sont les trois personnes du Dieu unique, et que le Fils, ou la Parole faite chair en Jésus, était la révélation parfaite du Père sous forme humaine. Le Père n'est pas une divinité fâchée et vengeresse de qui nous devons nous protéger ; il est tout à fait comme Jésus.



Rappelez-vous que Jésus est « l'expression parfaite » de Dieu (Hébreux 1.3). Le Père est plein de compassion et de miséricorde, un Dieu qui prend « plaisir à l'amour bien plus qu'aux sacrifices » (Osée 6.6), tout comme Jésus. Jésus, et non la loi, est le point de départ pour comprendre Dieu.

Père et est rétabli comme fils avec tous ses droits (Luc 15.11-24). Cela dépeint le Dieu qui est en Christ, réconciliant le monde avec lui-même (2 Corinthiens 5.19). La mort de Christ n'était pas un acte vindicatif de violence divine contre son enfant, comme certains critiques hostiles au christianisme l'ont prétendu,

réconciliation que le Père nous a accordés par Jésus-Christ. Nous avons préféré les ténèbres à la lumière et nous avons choisi d'ignorer ce que le Père nous offre par le Fils.

Par Christ, la séparation entre le monde et Dieu est terminée une fois pour toutes. La grande majorité des incroyants sont simplement ceux qui, par faiblesse ou ignorance, résistent à l'influence du Saint-Esprit de Christ qui donne la vie, la personne de la Trinité qui nous invite à abandonner notre dépendance aux ténèbres et au péché et qui témoigne à notre cœur l'œuvre du salut, de l'expiation et de la réconciliation de Dieu en Jésus pour nous (Jean 14.25-27 ; 15.26).

Jésus n'a pas seulement annoncé une bonne nouvelle, mais il était la Bonne Nouvelle. L'insistance dominante de son enseignement était sur la miséricorde, et non sur la vengeance. Ses paroles puissantes reflètent le Dieu qui est amour, et dont « la pitié triomphe du jugement » (Jacques 2.13). Ce qui était en partie suggéré dans l'Ancien Testament devient alors le thème principal des Évangiles : « Je prends plaisir à l'amour bien plus qu'aux sacrifices. » Les paroles imagées de Jésus nous montrent un père miséricordieux, un bon samaritain, des bergers qui cherchent et des employeurs magnifiquement généreux, des guérisons, des délivrances, un Grand Médecin qui a plaidé : « Venez à moi, vous tous qui êtes accablés sous le poids d'un lourd fardeau, et je vous donnerai du repos » (Matthieu 11.28). **NL**

Le Père n'est pas une divinité fâchée et vengeresse de qui nous devons nous protéger ; il est tout à fait comme Jésus. Rappelez-vous que Jésus est « l'expression parfaite » de Dieu (Hébreux 1.3). Le Père est plein de compassion et de miséricorde, un Dieu qui prend « plaisir à l'amour bien plus qu'aux sacrifices » (Osée 6.6), tout comme Jésus. Jésus, et non la loi, est le point de départ pour comprendre Dieu.

Dieu n'est pas schizophrène et n'a pas une double personnalité. Il n'y a pas un « bon Dieu », Jésus, et un « méchant Dieu », le Père, mais un seul Dieu – Père, Fils et Esprit – qui nous aime inconditionnellement et qui a, en Jésus, tout prévu non seulement pour que nos péchés soient pardonnés et effacés, mais aussi pour nous inclure pleinement dans la relation d'amour que le Fils a avec le Père de toute éternité.

Adoption

Dieu n'est pas intéressé à former des valets obéissants, mais à bâtir une famille. L'apôtre Paul utilise le mot « adoption » pour décrire le genre de relation que Dieu a prévue pour l'humanité en Jésus-Christ (Éphésiens 1.4,5). Par l'incarnation du Fils – Jésus devenant l'un de nous et se chargeant de notre cause –, Dieu nous a attirés et fait entrer dans la relation étroite que Jésus a avec le Père.

Nous voyons la puissance de cet amour personnel que Dieu a pour l'humanité dans la parabole du Fils prodigue. Le fils repentant est accueilli à la maison par le

mais un secours divin jaillissant de l'amour de Dieu pour nous (Jean 3.16), une intervention destinée à rétablir un but dont nous étions inconscients dans notre ignorance et notre méchanceté (v. 19,20).

En fonction de ce but majestueux, la colère de Dieu peut être considérée pour ce qu'elle est : une colère dirigée non contre l'humanité vers qui il a envoyé Jésus pour la sauver, mais contre le péché qui détruit la relation qu'il a toujours voulue pour elle en Christ. Dieu n'est pas un parent rancunier et égoïste pris dans un pétrin émotionnel parce que nous n'avons pas joué selon ses règles. Dieu est Père, Fils et Esprit, aimant, fidèle et engagé inconditionnellement à ramener l'humanité dans la joie de le connaître pour qui il est réellement.

La miséricorde par rapport au jugement

Cependant, Dieu ne sera jamais en paix avec le péché. La grande tragédie humaine est que nous avons été totalement inconscients du pardon et de la

By Gary Moore
National Director

Why Hope?

Ive always thought of despair as the opposite of hope. To hope is to believe that despite your situation in life, problems will be eventually solved, circumstances can and will get better, and the future will be better than the past or present. Despair on the other hand is the belief that things won't get better, that circumstances may remain the same or even deteriorate, and the future will likely get worse.

Living in despair—without hope—is a terrible place to be. It drains us of energy, and robs us of the will to keep on going, and to keep on trying.

At the deepest level, it is only our belief in God and his goodness that gives us reason, regardless of our circumstances, to hope. If there is no God, and therefore no real purpose to our lives, and no benefit to be gained from anything we may learn from living, then despair seems to be the only viable response. If our lives end in the icy cold silence of eternal oblivion, then it would seem that despair is a reasonable response.

On the other hand, if there is a God—which I strongly believe to be true—then regardless of our circumstances, there is no reason for despair, since that God loves us and is there for us (Romans 8:28-39). Rather, we have hope as a deep anchor for our souls, regardless of the situation which we may be in (Hebrews 6:16-20). Our hope is in Jesus Christ, through whom our Triune God offers us the gift of salvation and adopts us as his children. This gives us hope in this life, and most of all, hope for eternal life when this life passes—as it most surely will (Titus 1:2: 3:7).

Even as we hope for eternal life, our lives today take on tremendous meaning as we see God working out his purpose in us and for us (Romans 8:28). We are invited to participate in the life of God now—even as we hope for the fullness of our salvation to come. This gives us



This is the season of the year in which Christians remember the Incarnation. Jesus Christ, member of the triune Godhead, took upon himself human flesh and blood and became one of us. He did this to redeem us, and draw us into relationship with God as adopted children. He made us coheirs with him.

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hope both in this life, and in the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8).

As human beings, we can be susceptible to many difficult circumstances. We make mistakes, and the mistakes of others affect us—just as our weaknesses and sins affect them. People are fragile, and natural or man-made disasters can snuff out lives in the blink of an eye. Many things are just out of our control. Economic forces can level a business, or shut down our employer and leave us and our families with dismal prospects.

Even in such bleak circumstances the Apostle Paul tells us to come before God and to make our needs known—reminding us even as we express those genuine needs to be thankful for the rich and abundant blessings we have in Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7). So even in challenging times, we can trust that God sees and knows all. He will guide us along the way, and hear our prayers. We are not walking through this life alone, but he is gently leading and directing each of us, just as a parent would a child they love.

All this has already been accomplished, and was planned from the very creation of the world (Revelation 13:8). He accomplished the salvation of the world, though so many don't see it yet, and haven't accepted by faith what has been given to them by God's graciousness.

This truth—who we are in Christ—is the greatest good news imaginable. It gives reason for hope in the life of every human being who lives, will live, or has lived on this earth. God is indeed a God of hope. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

At this season of the year—and throughout all the seasons of the year—let's give God thanks for the hope he has given to each and every human being!**NL**

de Gary Moore
directeur national

Pourquoi espérer ?

J'ai toujours cru que le désespoir était le contraire de l'espérance. Espérer c'est croire que, malgré votre situation actuelle, vos problèmes seront un jour réglés, que vos circonstances peuvent s'améliorer et s'amélioreront, et que l'avenir sera meilleur que le passé ou le présent. Par ailleurs, désespérer c'est croire que les choses ne s'amélioreront pas, que les circonstances ne changeront pas ou même se détérioreront, et que l'avenir empirera probablement.

Vivre dans le désespoir est quelque chose de terrible, qui nous draine de notre énergie et nous empêche de continuer et de persévérer.

Dans les plus profondes vallées, c'est seulement notre foi en Dieu et en sa bonté qui nous donne raison d'espérer, indépendamment de nos circonstances. Si Dieu n'existe pas et que, par conséquent, notre vie n'a aucun but et qu'il n'y a aucun avantage à profiter de ce que nous pouvons apprendre de la vie, alors le désespoir semble la seule réponse viable. Si notre vie se termine dans le silence glacial de l'oubli éternel, alors il semblerait que le désespoir est une réponse raisonnable.

Par ailleurs, si Dieu existe – ce que je crois fermement –, il n'y a donc aucune raison de désespérer, peu importe nos circonstances, puisque Dieu nous aime et qu'il est là pour nous (Romains 8.28-39). Nous espérons plutôt, et notre espoir est comme une ancre profonde pour notre âme, peu importe la situation dans laquelle nous nous trouvons (Hébreux 6.16-20). Notre espoir est en Jésus-Christ, par qui notre Dieu trinitaire nous offre le don du salut et nous adopte comme ses enfants. Cela nous donne de l'espérance pour cette vie, et surtout de l'espérance pour la vie éternelle quand la vie terrestre passera – et elle passera sûrement (Tite 1.2 ; 3.7).

Même si nous espérons en la vie éternelle, notre vie aujourd'hui prend une



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signification incroyable quand nous voyons Dieu accomplir son plan en nous et pour nous (Romains 8.28). Nous sommes invités à participer maintenant à la vie de Dieu, même si nous espérons en la plénitude de notre salut à venir. Cela nous donne de l'espérance, à la fois pour le présent et pour l'avenir (1 Timothée 4.8).

Comme êtres humains, nous pouvons être sensibles à de nombreuses circonstances difficiles. Nous commettons des erreurs, et les erreurs des autres ont un effet sur nous, tout comme nos faiblesses et nos péchés les affectent. Les gens sont fragiles, et des désastres naturels ou humains peuvent mettre fin à des vies en un clin d'œil. Beaucoup de choses sont tout simplement indépendantes de notre volonté. Les forces économiques peuvent redresser une entreprise ou la fermer, nous laissant, nous et nos familles, avec de sombres perspectives d'avenir.

Même dans des circonstances désolantes, l'apôtre Paul nous dit d'aller vers Dieu et de lui faire connaître nos besoins, nous rappelant, même en lui exprimant ces besoins réels, d'être reconnaissants pour les bénédictions riches et abondantes que nous avons en Jésus (Philippiens 4.4-7). Dans les moments difficiles, nous pouvons donc

avoir confiance que Dieu voit et connaît tout. Il nous guidera le long du chemin et entendra nos prières. Nous ne marchons pas seuls dans la vie, mais il guide et dirige gentiment chacun de ses enfants, tout comme un parent le ferait pour un enfant qu'il aime.

C'est la période de l'année où les chrétiens se rappellent l'Incarnation. Jésus-Christ, la 2^e personne de la Trinité, est venu en chair et en os et s'est fait comme l'un de nous pour nous racheter. Il nous invite à entrer en relation avec Dieu, comme des enfants adoptés. Il a fait de nous des cohéritiers avec lui. Tout cela a déjà été accompli et avait été prévu depuis l'origine du monde (Apocalypse 13.8). Il a assuré le salut du monde, même si tant de gens ne le reconnaissent pas encore et n'ont pas accepté par la foi ce qui leur a été donné par la grâce de Dieu.

Cette vérité – notre identité en Christ – est la meilleure nouvelle imaginable. Elle donne une raison d'espérer à chaque être humain qui vit, qui vivra ou qui a vécu sur cette terre. Dieu est vraiment un Dieu d'espérance. Comme l'apôtre Paul l'a écrit aux chrétiens de Rome : « Que Dieu, qui est l'auteur de l'espérance, vous comble de toute joie et de sa paix par votre confiance en lui. Ainsi votre cœur débordera d'espérance par la puissance du Saint-Esprit » (Romains 15.13).

En cette période de Noël – et durant toute l'année –, remercions Dieu pour l'espérance qu'il a donné à chaque être humain !NL

By Neil Earle

Pastor, Glendora, California
congregation

Mr. Jones...Meet The Holy Spirit

Many may have read the Christian classic, “Mr. Jones, Meet the Master,” a summary of the sermons of Peter Marshall, a Scots immigrant who rose to become Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. Let’s substitute the Holy Spirit for “Mr. Jones”—the Christian Everyman—in this informal study of the personality and activity of the Holy Spirit. We want to show that it’s worth every effort to know more about the third member of the Godhead, as Christian doctrine describes him.

Few teachings evoke more controversy. Many agree with J.I. Packer that the Trinity is often considered “a useless piece of theological lumber” that is hardly used. The threefold Nature of God is a mystery of the Bible but one capable of being understood. Eloquent advocates of the faith insist that this teaching is essential to any sound teaching on salvation (1 Timothy 3:16).

The mission and ministry of the Holy Spirit—an essential offshoot of trinitarian teaching—has become lost and clouded for many. “The average Christian,” adds Packer, “is in a complete fog as to what work the Holy Spirit does.” He adds: “It is often assumed that the doctrine of the Trinity...is [one] we can get on very happily without.” Not so, argues Packer. “One wonders what the apostle John would say [for] according to him the doctrine of the Trinity is an essential part of the Christian gospel” (*Knowing God*, pages 65-68). It represents strict line of demarcation between the other “Abrahamic” religions—Judaism and Islam.

Piercing the Fog

The Holy Spirit is fundamental to our understanding of God and the working out of our salvation. Why? “It is the Holy Spirit that takes up His abode in the hearts of believers, that separates them unto God, and that cleanses them from

sin,” writes Louis Berkhof (*Systematic Theology*, page 95).

Is anything more important on the personal level? Berkhof here approaches the subject “from below” rather than from the rarefied perspective of “theology from above.” It was a great pulpit preacher after all, C.H. Spurgeon, who advertised: “The most excellent study is the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.”

Nevertheless, Christian theologians can be a great help along the way. Packer’s insights, added to those of German theologian Jurgen Moltmann and popular Christian writer C.S. Lewis, can guide us to a deeper comprehension.

Moltmann clearly grasps why the third member of the Godhead remains a sometimes shadowy figure in Christian experience. “We know so little about the Holy Spirit because he is *too close*, not because he is so far away from us,”



writes Moltmann. This important insight comes close to piercing the fog almost immediately. As Moltmann explains in *The Spirit of Life*: To a certain extent, the Father and the Son can be visualized as being “out there,” almost as objective presences away from us. For example, even Scripture pictures the Father as sitting on a throne, with the Son at his right hand (Revelation 4:1-7; Acts 7:56).

But the Holy Spirit? The favorite biblical symbols for the Holy Spirit—wind, water, fire—are elemental forces, not personal examples. This fact has misled many across the centuries to construe the Holy Spirit as a force, not a person. But, as we shall see, that is not the full story, not by a long-shot.

“In the Spirit”

A further complication is the wonderful truth that the Holy Spirit does his work from inside, within us. Also, we are “in the Spirit” as well as having *the Spirit in us*, as many texts explain (Romans 8:9).

Let’s explain that. In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is equated many times with intellectual or mental traits. Thus we read of converted individuals “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Stephen’s opponents “could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6:10). Paul wrote: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit” (Romans 8:16). Romans 8:27 speaks plainly of the “mind of the Spirit.” These statements line up with some of the Old Testament revelation as well: “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2).

The important point here is that mental or intellectual traits are not easily sketched or described or explained. This has often placed preachers and teachers at a slight disadvantage in picturing the Holy Spirit and perhaps why Christian artists have preferred the symbol of the dove from Matthew 3:16 or fire from Acts 2. This symbolic description at

The mission and ministry of the Holy Spirit—an essential offshoot of trinitarian teaching—has become lost and clouded for many. “The average Christian,” adds Packer, “is in a complete fog as to what work the Holy Spirit does.” He adds: “It is often assumed that the doctrine of the Trinity...is [one] we can get on very happily without.” Not so, argues Packer. “One wonders what the apostle John would say [for] according to him the doctrine of the Trinity is an essential part of the Christian gospel” (*Knowing God*, pages 65-68).

least gave artists and writers and speakers something “concrete” with which to depict God, the Holy Spirit. And as human beings, as Luther and Calvin would say, we seem to need these pictorial expressions as “aids to faith” (John 3:12). It is when the picture gets mixed up with the reality that problems occur in Christian thinking.

Teaching from Inside

The Spirit as Teacher, as Jesus described Him (John 16:13), is vitally concerned with enlightening our minds about the things of God, about expanding our minds, about “sending our thoughts God-ward” as the old Puritans might put it. Moltmann explained that all Christian speech about the Spirit is in fact speaking “out of the Spirit.” That is, in all meaningful Christian communion we speak under the prompting of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is why our unity with other believers whether near or far away is in and through the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

Thus God’s Spirit, adds Moltmann, is “*closer to our inner being than we ourselves.*” This is a key insight. It helps explain why the Holy Spirit has often been a difficult subject for Christians which has led—alas—to some of the abuses we see around us today. To boil it down to an oversimplified statement: It is hard to see someone who is inside you. C.S. Lewis made much the same point in *Mere Christianity*:

“If you think of the Father as something ‘out there,’ in front of you, and of the Son as someone standing at your side, helping you to pray...[then] you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you...In the Christian life you are not usually looking at him. He is always acting through you” (page 149).

We can see already how contemplation upon the Holy Spirit opens up many wonderful truths about God to our comprehension. In a rich nugget of inspiration, from his unsurpassed letter to the Ephesians, Paul reveals a marvelous three-fold working of the Godhead. “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17). This verse, and other like it, helps us in our quest (**See box p.10**).

Divine Energy

Another difficulty many Christians have in imagining and appreciating the Third Person of the Godhead stems from the very dynamic nature of the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is a dramatic, activist presence, difficult to pin down or describe because of His creative activist presence. Just thinking of the words usually associated with Him in the New

Testament makes us aware of His robust, active, restless, unrelenting nature. The Greek words transliterated into English are *dunamis*, *charisma* and *energeia*. From these we get such powerhouse expressions as “dynamic,” “charisma” and “energy.” One reason many groups down through the ages confuse the Holy Spirit with a force is precisely because men and women engage with the Holy Spirit in dynamic *activity* (2 Peter 1:21). It is important to note that in discussing the Holy Spirit human beings in both testaments have usually met Him at the *operational* level. Notice:

“...and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2).

“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur...and I have filled him with the Spirit of God with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (Exodus 31:2-3).

“Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Israelites to follow him” (Judges 6:34).

“The Spirit of the Lord came upon him (Samson) in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax...Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men” (Judges 15:14-15).

When the Holy Spirit shows up—look out! Great things can occur. Over and over again in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is equated with power, insight, ability and capability. This prepares us for an even more divinely inspired activity in the New Testament. We can understand this from the events of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4, “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sit-

In the Old Testament?

The prophet Isaiah came closest to revealing the full personality of the Holy Spirit:

“Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit...Then his people recalled the days of old...Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses’ right hand...Who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name...You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us, you, O Lord are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name” (Isaiah 63:10-16).

Note how Isaiah references God as Father and God as Redeemer—a title usually reserved for Jesus in the New Testament—showing the closest possible relationship inside the Godhead. As theologians have commented, such passages do not teach a full-blown Trinity doctrine as Athanasius and others came to know it, but...the material is indeed there for such a teaching. Especially is that true in the book of John and other New Testament texts.

ting...All of them were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

The Spirit is never stagnant. It is the Spirit of New Life. Every new life wants to grow, to develop. Thus the Holy Spirit creatively distributes the gifts of the Spirit across the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Those gifts propel the church forward. As individual Christians we move forward in the power of the Spirit. The task is never finished just as life in the Spirit is never an experience that is finished and done with. Spirit activity is

relentlessly, enthusiastically outward bound. After all, the Spirit as the spirit of new creation, allows Christians to see new possibilities in life’s situations, even in those that appear to be setbacks and disappointments.

The Spirit calls us to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). Those led by the Spirit believe God and his plans for the future. The life-giving “fired up” Holy Spirit inside us gives assurance that the church can never be ultimately defeated. Conversely, the Spirit also acts very gently and calmly, quietly transforming rough and ready individuals (James and John, “the sons of thunder”—see Mark 3:17) into apostles of love. This transforming work makes up the very stuff of our Christian walk, of our daily Christian experience. Indeed, it *calls into being* our Christian walk. That is why almost the very worst thing you can say to a Christian is: “You haven’t changed a bit.”

An Inner Fire

The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of evangelism, an inner prompting of the divine love of God springing up inside us (John 4:14). The Spirit is too active to be bottled up inside us. Like Jeremiah’s “fire in the bones” (Jeremiah 20:9), the

Spirit will be quenched rather than lie stagnant, a most sobering truth (1 Thessalonians 5:19). In beckoning Christians on to new activity, to new beginnings, God the Holy Spirit does four things for us:

First, the Holy Spirit as Teacher *guides the church into new truth* (1 Corinthians 2:13). In the First Century, Jewish Christians finally began to see that Gentiles were to be given full equality alongside Jewish believers. This shocking new revelation they described with the phrase “it seemed good to the Holy

Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). Oh, yes, those early believers knew the Holy Spirit as an intimate guide and acquaintance.

Second, the Holy Spirit actively *leads the church*. Seven times in Revelation it says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7). This tactical leadership is most emphatically revealed in the book of Acts, a book some have nicknamed “the Acts of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit told Philip what to do (Acts 8:29). The Holy Spirit ferried Philip away (Acts 8:39). The Spirit actively chose Paul and Barnabas for a special mission (Acts 13:2-3). The Holy Spirit kept Paul from working in Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). The Holy Spirit appointed overseers and elders (Acts 20:28). That is a lot of direct involvement but consistent with the same Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness while he was physical flesh and blood (Matthew 4:1). There, incidentally, is a key text for establishing the full equality of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.

Third, and most crucially, the Holy Spirit is *the Agent directly responsible for our day-to-day salvation*. Paul taught that Christians have been saved “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). In Paul’s teaching the Spirit brings renewal and restoration to the human mind but it also *leads that renewal* as a personal, uplifting presence. Active Christians know this from daily experience (Romans 12:2). In our best moments of prayer and communion with God there is a sense of some extra presence, something above and beyond, a “rejoicing in the Spirit.” Author Tony Evans calls this “the Holy Spirit Advantage.”

Fourth, a marvelous truth—the Father and the Son *take up residence inside Christians* through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is one reason the Spirit is also called the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). The love of the Godhead is dispersed through our hearts by the

The Triads of the New Testament

There at least fifty texts revealing a threefold work of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—scattered across the New Testament. Here are just ten of these “triads,” or groupings of three, that helped the early Church establish the Trinity as a scriptural teaching:

John 15:26, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father....”

John 16:15, “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.”

Romans 8:11, “And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you....”

Romans 15:30, “I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggles by praying to God for me.”

1 Corinthians 12:3, “No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 13:14, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Galatians 4:6, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts....”

Ephesians 1:17, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom....”

Ephesians 2:18, “For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit....”

Hebrews 9:14, “How much more, then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences....”

Holy Spirit and God is love (Romans 5:5; John 4:16). Berkhof adds: “Just as he Himself is the person who completes the Trinity, so His work is the completion of God’s contact with His creatures and the consummation of the work of God in every sphere.”

so sadly misunderstood today. But we can begin to understand. We must, for there is simply no hope of salvation without the Holy Spirit inside us. Is He in you? **NL**

That’s a good thought to end with, but not the end of the subject. No, for this is truly a subject without end since the Spirit ever guides the church into fuller understanding. The activity of the Holy Spirit in furthering the threefold work of God is a most wonderful truth and one

By David Sheridan

Pastor, Grace & Truth Fellowship,
Red Deer, and Lethbridge
congregations

The Holy Spirit

Source Of Transformation

A common expression when I was growing up to describe a seemingly impossible situation was “You’ve got two hopes—Bob Hope and no hope!” The American comedian died in 2003 at the age of 100. He maintained his self-deprecating sense of humour to the end quipping, “It’s hopeless—I’m so old they’ve cancelled my blood type!” And now he is gone so there is absolutely no hope! The ultimate quest of true Christian life is to become like Jesus yet that seems like a hopeless task! How could so very “human” humans ever become Christ-like?

Each year, Grade 3 students at the school where I teach, carry out an exciting experiment as part of the Science curriculum—observing caterpillars becoming butterflies! Multi-legged caterpillars in their larval form with tubular segmented bodies are voracious eaters sometimes called “eating machines” and spend practically all of their time searching for food! They have 4,000 muscles compared to humans with 629. These earthy caterpillars move through contractions of the muscles in the rear segment pushing blood forward into the front segment elongating the torso. Exhorting dawdling students to speed up with “*don’t be as slow as a caterpillar*” gets the point over.

Metamorphosis is a biological process involving a conspicuous and abrupt change in form or structure through cell growth. Following an inactive pupal stage, the caterpillar is ready for a spectacular transformation into a beautiful butterfly. On the day of release of the butterflies, these 8- and 9-year-old students cannot contain their excitement and the butterflies are in real danger of being trampled on when trying to make their first attempts to fly! A newly-emerged butterfly needs to spend time inflating its wings with blood which may take up to three hours.

The diverse patterns formed on bright-coloured wings along with their erratic

yet graceful flight makes butterflies a popular motif in the visual and literary arts. There are some 15,000-20,000 species with names such as *Monarch*, *Painted Lady*, *Common Jezebel* and *Plain Judy*! Some butterflies travel 5,000 kilometres from Mexico to Canada. Saying to a beloved wife “*you are as beautiful as a butterfly*” also gets the point over.

The ancient Greek word for butterfly is *psyche* which primarily means *soul* or *mind*. In some cultures butterflies sym-

transformed by Jesus, producing in them love, joy, peace, faithfulness, meekness, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, righteousness and truth.

The apostle Paul encourages significant, meaningful change from the inside out; from dragging along at a low level of immaturity to a well-formed maturity—a brighter and more beautiful you.

“But there’s far more to life for us. We’re citizens of high heaven! We’re waiting
t h e

The Christian, just like the butterfly, experiences a new birth through this regeneration of the Holy Spirit. The new life is a change of mind and attitude prompted by the Spirit—a new life sanctified through trust in Christ.

bolize new birth. In China, two butterflies flying together are a symbol of love. Muhammed Ali, the former three-time World Heavy Weight Boxing Champion, would “float like a butterfly, sting like a bee!” Fans of Olympic swimmer and eight-time gold medalist Michael Phelps had “butterflies in their stomach” as he barely won the 200 metres butterfly race by one hundredth of a second!

The Holy Spirit transforms believers into the image of Christ through regeneration, sanctification and renewal. Sin-laden humanity living in stubborn rebellion against the Creator spreads sin and death all around the world. Like the caterpillar with its insatiable appetite, humans are consumed with self and self-interests leading to pride, greed, sexual immorality, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, envy and drunkenness. However, God is creating the new humanity over which sin and death have no power. The Christian, just like the butterfly, experiences a new birth through this regeneration of the Holy Spirit. The new life is a change of mind and attitude prompted by the Spirit—a new life sanctified through trust in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, the hearts of believers are

arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He’ll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him” (Philippians 3:21, *The Message*). Be inspired by visualizing your future glorious and glorified body along with eternal life—now that’s a hope that doesn’t die at 100 years of age without any blood type!

From caterpillar to butterfly; from human nature to divine nature—that’s creative transformation! Through God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, there is hope in a seemingly hopeless task—becoming like Jesus, thinking like Jesus, saying the words that Jesus would say and doing the things that Jesus would do. The creeping, crawling caterpillar moves in the dirt of the earth; the glorious, delicate butterfly soars above in the sky. Humanity is transformed from minds on earthly things to a citizenship in heaven and a never-ending life of joy in the age to come! Find a green caterpillar; observe a yellow butterfly—and never give up hope!**NL**

Hope

By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria congregation

Anticipation With Confidence

Recently, I started looking for a larger apartment as my needs have changed, and my small accommodation is no longer sufficient. In my part of the world, this is the time students are coming to town to attend university, so there's a lot of competition for apartments and condos.

After searching fruitlessly for over a month, I found an adorable suite, in an almost new house, in a much-sought-after area, and at a price I could afford. "This is it," I thought, and put in the required application. This particular ground floor suite would suit my needs perfectly, and being in a rural location would be better than the city I had been used to.

The agent took almost a week to decide whom, out of the approximately six applicants, would be the lucky person. My application was good, my references were impeccable, and I was readying for a move to my new home. But, when I eventually spoke to the agent, I was told the suite had been offered to another party. Disappointment!

My hopes of a quick move into the perfect home and location had been dashed, and I was left feeling and thinking rather negatively about the whole episode. Why didn't I get it? I was obviously the best candidate, with the best references, and my needs must have been more important than all the other souls who had similarly applied for the domicile (I jest, of course).

I'm sure you've had your hopes dashed in a similar way. Perhaps it was a job interview, or a university application, maybe a promotion or bonus you were hoping to get. It's never pleasant to face disappointment and have our hopes for a better future spoiled.

In October I'm planning to travel to the UK. It'll be my first visit since I left to be in Canada in 1994. I'm going to see my aging parents and a few other family

members. In the last few weeks, I've learned that my father is not well, and I sincerely hope he can hang on until I arrive in mid-October. My hope in this situation, however, unlike the first one related above, is that I have a sure hope of seeing my father again, even if not in this earthly realm. I wrote and told him that fact, in a way he could understand. I look forward to seeing many of my deceased relatives and friends again, at some point in the future.

Paul goes on from verse 20: "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he had promised He was also able to perform. 'And it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (verses 20-24).

For me, that is a sure hope, totally unlike the situation of hoping for a new apartment or job, which is never guaranteed in this life. Seeing loved ones, and being in the presence of the Triune God, is a sure hope that will never leave me.

For me, that is a sure hope, totally unlike the situation of hoping for a new apartment or job, which is never guaranteed in this life. Seeing loved ones, and being in the presence of the Triune God, is a sure hope that will never leave me.

The word hope is used 58 times in the New Testament, at least 39 times by the Apostle Paul. In each case, the original word from the Greek is *elpis* or *elpos*, meaning "anticipation with confidence". It is a sure hope – something that will never disappoint.

In the book of Romans, Paul is talking about the Patriarch Abraham, and how he was blessed. "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'so shall your descendants be.'" (Romans 4:16-18, NKJ). The hope spoken here is a sure hope, that Abraham believed what God told him, and acted accordingly.

Hope in this world is totally different from the hope described in our Bible, especially in light of the words of the Apostle Paul. Abraham knew all about hope; it was a hope in a new city whose maker was God (Hebrews 11:10).

If you're hoping for a new job, a better home, or a brighter future, we can remember that our real hope is in that of our forefather Abraham, in which we see a brilliant Kingdom, with all the wonderful blessings and surprises our Father-God has in store for us. **NL**

P.S. Less than a week after my apartment disappointment, I found another, which in many ways is better than the first. Thank you, my Father-God.

From The Asian Plain Truth*www.wcg-klang.net*

Whenever we go around shopping complexes our eyes can never miss the vast number of discount offers that are made available to customers. Some claim to give as much as seventy percent discount on their products though no one seems to know what the original prices were. However, this gimmick always works as people are automatically attracted to the products and many end up buying them, thinking that if they miss the chance then they are losing a golden opportunity.

It seems that people today are always attracted to offers. With the rise in the cost of living today, any offer seems attractive. In most cases, business offers are designed to make people part with their money and therefore the 'offers' are in most cases actually a subtle way to trick us into buying something that we may not really need. However, people are not always looking for offers in products only. Many often ask what life has to offer them.

In Asian culture, religion plays an important role in the lives of people. In Malaysia, for example, the various religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism have a large number of followers who take pride in following the teachings and practices of their religions. Often, any insensitive statements made about any particular religion arouse feelings of anger and resentment towards any individual making them. As such people are careful not to hurt the sensitivities of anyone, particularly in matters related to religion. However, that doesn't mean that one cannot ask questions regarding religious matters to gain a better understanding of a particular religion.

When it comes to Christianity, an oft-asked question is "Why are there so many denominations among Christians?" Some ask why Catholics are different from Protestants, or why Churches are called by different names.

The Offer



Our best efforts can only lead to eternal death. Now, that surely is the worst offer anyone can receive!

However, the Bible tells us that the love of God for humanity is so unfathomable that despite our sin He decided to rescue us from eternal death by sending us a divine Saviour. This Saviour or Messiah is the one known as Jesus Christ. God calls this Messiah His Son. Jesus Christ being divine took upon Himself all our sins and paid the penalty incurred by sin through His death on the cross. But that is not all. God also raised Jesus Christ from death to eternal life again. In other words, Jesus Christ is alive today!

Christianity offers a Saviour who is real! Christianity tells us about this Saviour who sacrificed Himself for all human beings and through that sacrifice, humans can again have a real relationship with God.

Many ask what is so unique about Christianity. What does Christianity have to offer? These are questions worth answering.

To begin with anyone can start a religion. One just has to put forward a few tenets or doctrines and proclaim that it brings peace and a link to God. Some are just content to bring a sense of meditative peace to themselves. In time, the adherents to the faith may associate supernatural phenomena to their faith and thereby proclaim the greatness of their beliefs.

Christianity however begins with the proclamation that all have sinned and the prize of sin is eternal death! Mankind as a whole has displeased God and therefore our disobedience has alienated us from God. This actually means that we of ourselves cannot please God no matter how religious we can be.

To answer the question 'What does Christianity have to offer?' we need to forget about denominations, or what names churches choose to call themselves. Christianity offers a Saviour who is real! Christianity tells us about this Saviour who sacrificed Himself for all human beings and through that sacrifice; humans can again have a real relationship with God. Christianity which is about God's revelation to mankind culminates in the greatest offer that we can ever receive.

This offer does not deceive us in any way. This offer is given out of infinite love. It is the offer of guaranteed eternal life when we accept Jesus as personal Saviour in our lives. Nowhere else on Earth is such an offer available.

But to you who are reading this, God is lovingly providing you this same offer. His love for you has no bounds. Would you care to take this offer and see what a change it makes in your life?**NL**

Foundations...Of Hope

By Camay Achtemichuk

Member, Yorkton congregation

I was just a little girl. Daddy was going somewhere for the day on business and I wanted to go with him. He gave me an adamant “no,” and I cried. I recall sitting on the tall, wide front steps as his car pulled away, and “deciding” I would cry until he got home. I had no thought of “punishing” my dad, but I had the childish thought, if I did that, he would wish he had taken me with him. My “hopes” had been very real, and had been dashed. Of course I was playing happily and peacefully before long, and all was well.

Dad, a brother, and two other men had a Gospel quartet for several years, called the Mountain State Sacred Singers. As younger preteens, Janet, the daughter of the brother (my first cousin), and I would go with them at times, to singing conventions and homecomings. I always hoped Dad would include us in the program, and we could sing a song. Almost every time we were able to go the hope was realized—Janet and I got to sing. We felt fulfilled and acknowledged, even if we didn’t know those words.

A couple of years later I developed a “crush” on a (very) young man. I prayed with fervent hope, this boy would like me. Quite selfish of course, but God knew I hadn’t yet learned much about praying. (I still have much to learn about it.) The boy did like me—for awhile. When that shy, magic time of smiles ended I decided I was heart-broken for a month or two.

A few weeks ago, I received a memo about this summer’s family reunion. The plan was to honour the children of my grandparents beginning this year with the oldest—my mom. The reunion was to be held at the “old home place” where my three sisters and I were all born. I had applied for my Permanent Resident Card to get me back *into* Canada (a card a friend told me she didn’t receive for months). Much as I wanted to be there to honor Mom with our memories at the home place and to see my new great-

granddaughter, the hopes of doing so seemed slim to none because I had little hope of getting the card in time. Since I needed to buy my ticket two weeks’ early for an affordable return airfare, the countdown was crucial. I’d already phoned my family not to expect me. Less than three weeks before I actually left I got a call from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, to come to Regina and pick up my card! I did so the very next day. Then came the task of coordinating the ticket with a ride to Regina, and someone to pick me up at the Charleston, West Virginia airport—plus a suitable date for the reversal of the plan in August. I purchased the ticket with only three days to spare. Although I very much wanted to go, I’d about given up any *hope* of going.

There is HOPE, only with Christ as our foundation—our ROCK. Everything else is impermanent, subject to death and decay. All else, is shifting, sinking, sand.

So, what do these four disjointed memories have in common? Sometimes hopes are built on wishes, and sometimes only on dreams. Each of these were built on something “I” wanted and they all depended on *someone else*—on imperfect, fragile, fallible human beings, just like me. They were built as it were, on “sand.” Oftentimes, we place our hope in someone and so many times we feel hurt, bewildered, and devastated, because we have not realized that even the most dependable, loving person we know cannot truly be a “rock” (Matthew 7:24-27). No matter how much she wants to be, or how much she tries to be, she is severely limited—by her very humanity.

Then there are the “hopes” built on false premises. Most religions are based on a perceived “deity” of some sort. The followers of these religions can be sincere in their beliefs, and many are quite will-

ing to die to adhere to those beliefs. Other religions may believe in the one true God, but the people are still looking for a messiah. They don’t recognize that their “hope” or messiah was Jesus, who was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, crucified for the sins of the world, then was resurrected and ascended to heaven.

When I’m contemplating the subject of hope, I immediately hear some lines from the following hymn:

“(Our) hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace. Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless, to stand before the throne.”

And the chorus:

“On Christ, the solid rock, I stand. All other ground is sinking sand.” (1976, Paragon Associates, Inc. Words and Music by Edward Mote and William Bradbury)

There is HOPE, only with Christ as our foundation—our ROCK. Everything else is impermanent, subject to death and decay. All else, is shifting, sinking, sand. **NL**

By Colleen Briault

Member: Ottawa Congregation

Our Hope Is In Him

Paul wrote in Romans 7:22-23: “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (King James Version). These words, written centuries ago, are so true, even today.

Who will deliver us from this body of death? Today we are surrounded, submerged and bombarded by a world of gadgetry, merchandise of every description, and the high powered advertising that goes with it. When you add to this the difficulty many of us have just to keep up with the everyday expenses and problems of life, we feel overwhelmed. Everywhere you look we are in crisis, whether it be in the break up of families, financial difficulties, serious illness, the loss of loved ones or the threat of terrorist attacks. The whole world is in turmoil.

These circumstances of our modern world remind me of the scripture: “For we know that the whole creation groans and travails together in pain until now” (Romans 8:22 King James Version). The passage continues on to tell us in verse 23 that although we have the Holy Spirit within us, we too groan to be released from pain and suffering. We too wait anxiously for the day when Christ will return, for he is our Hope.

Paul tells us that elsewhere that from the beginning God had a plan for each of our lives. “Long ago even before He made the world God chose us to be His very own, through what Christ would do for us. He decided then to make us holy in His eyes, without a single fault – we stand before Him covered with His love. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us. And He did this because He wanted to” (Ephesians 1:4-5 The Living Bible).



Each day I am learning the lesson of taking courage in our God. I realize that many of the problems I face in my life are too great for me to solve on my own, but for our Holy God in all of his power they are as nothing.

I can't help but be filled with awe each time that I read this passage. What an amazing love our Holy God has for us. What an amazing hope we have because of him. To think that the Great Omnipotent God of the universe created me with the purpose of our being adopted into his own family. Add to that the fact that Jesus Christ had to give up his life to accomplish this is truly incredible. For me, the magnitude of this sacrifice is almost too difficult to comprehend. Such an all-encompassing love and benevolent attitude leave me with feelings of deep humility and profound gratitude.

I'm sure that many of you, just like myself, find that life can be very difficult. But, we can draw strength from Christ's

words such as those to Jairus, whose young daughter had just died: “Don't be afraid. Just trust me.” Regardless of the problems in our lives he is our hope and our strength in time of need.

I would be remiss to write about hope and not include Lamentations 3:21-26, which very aptly summarizes the hope that we have in him: “Yet there is one ray of hope, His compassion never ends. It is only the Lord's mercies that have kept us from complete destruction. Great is His faithfulness; His loving kindness begins afresh each day. My soul claims the Lord as my inheritance; therefore I will hope in Him.

The Lord is wonderfully good to those who wait for Him, to those who seek for Him. It is good both to hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

Each day I am learning the lesson of taking courage in our God. I realize that many of the problems I face in my life are too great for me to solve on my own, but for our Holy God in all of his power they are as nothing.

If I've learned nothing else, it is to trust in him as a small child because he has complete and total love for me and you. He alone can deliver us from this body of death.

Our hope is in him. [NL](#)

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD CANADA

JOSEPH TKACH
PASTOR GENERAL

GARY MOORE
NATIONAL DIRECTOR

Dear Members and Coworkers in Christ:

It's been some time since I last wrote to you as a supporter of the work God is doing through the Worldwide Church of God here in Canada. I sincerely hope the year has brought you good things, and that it has been both productive and healthy for you and your loved ones.

As I sit to write this letter, the news has been filled with both hurricane devastation and stock market gyrations. It is a turbulent world we live in, and one in which we are reminded on a regular basis that the things that we human beings all too often cling to for security and comfort may not be as stable as we thought.

All of this underlines the need to be anchored to that which can give us stability in the worst of storms. That anchor is the relationship to our great God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) made possible through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. It is only there where we can find the security and peace that can keep us going no matter what this life may throw our way. Even death itself cannot pry us loose from the grip of the love of God for his children.

The church is really the community of believers. The Worldwide Church of God is a community – or fellowship – of men and women who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, and as a result who are maturing in their relationship with God. The God given responsibility Jesus gave to his followers was to both live and share the gospel – and do it in both word and deed.

The Northern Light magazine is certainly one vehicle by which the church in Canada makes available the gospel of Jesus Christ, and nurtures the faith those who have responded to that gospel. We sincerely hope that the magazine is encouraging to you in your own daily life, as you endeavour to live a life of faith in a very secular and materialistic culture.

The church also provides pastors and congregations in various cities across the country. Most of these congregations are involved in serving their communities in some way, as a demonstration of the love of God in action. Of course, many members individually set examples of faith and service in their own families, workplaces, schools and communities. Most of us realize that young people today face very intense pressures and challenges. The Worldwide Church of God sponsors two very successful youth camps – one in eastern Ontario (with both a French and English session), and one in Alberta not far from the city of Edmonton. These settings are crafted to provide a very positive atmosphere where young peo-



ple can come to appreciate what God has done for them, and to encourage them to follow God and his ways in our trouble and confused world.

The denomination is not just present in Canada, but has members in over 90 countries worldwide. To facilitate mission outreach, our denominational world headquarters has asked Canada to partner with our churches in Africa. Though Africa and Canada are, a long way apart, both have significant French speaking populations. Articles in French from our Northern Light magazine have been circulated for many years amongst francophone Africans. One of our Quebec ministers was able to travel to the Cameroon and the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) to help provide leadership training to Christian leaders in the French language. He took dozens of French Bibles, and three used laptop computers with French Bible software – very rare and expensive in Africa. WCG Canada was able to help fund that training trip, which was greatly appreciated.



This past year we sponsored a two week youth camp in Malawi, and assisted needy youth to attend a church camp in South Africa, funded a Christian leadership training seminar in Malawi, and a Christian women’s retreat in the very troubled nation of Zimbabwe. Our national women’s ministry leader was able to fly down and attend this conference, representing our fellowship in Canada. She greatly encouraged those she spoke to, and was greatly inspired herself by those she met.

My wife Wendy and I were able to travel down to help host a major African leadership conference held near Johannesburg in March, and serve in other ways for the month we were there.

There is a great deal of good happening that is furthering the gospel – way too much to mention in a short letter. But I did want to give you a few examples as a way of both informing and thanking you for what your support is helping accomplish. We are called to reflect the light of the Kingdom of God in a darkened world, and your support in helping us do so is greatly appreciated.

May God’s richest blessings be poured out on each of you, as we come to the end of another year. Thanks for being supporters of the work God has laid out before us!

In Christian service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Moore".

Gary Moore
National Director
Worldwide Church of God Canada

ÉGLISE UNIVERSELLE DE DIEU

JOSEPH TKACH
PASTEUR GÉNÉRAL

GARY MOORE
DIRECTEUR NATIONAL

Chers membres et collègues en Christ,

Pas mal de temps s'est écoulé depuis la dernière fois où je vous ai écrit, à vous qui nous soutenez dans l'œuvre que Dieu accomplit par l'Église universelle de Dieu au Canada. J'espère sincèrement que l'année 2008 vous a apporté de bonnes choses et qu'elle a été à la fois productive et prospère pour vous et vos proches.

En écrivant cette lettre, les bulletins de nouvelles parlent amplement de dévastation par des ouragans et de fluctuations du marché boursier. Nous vivons dans un monde agité qui nous rappelle régulièrement que les choses auxquelles nous nous attachons trop souvent pour nous sécuriser et nous reconforter ne sont peut-être pas aussi stables que nous le pensons.

Tout cela souligne notre besoin d'être ancrés à ce qui peut nous donner une stabilité dans les pires tempêtes. Cette ancre est notre relation avec notre grand Dieu (Père, Fils et Saint-Esprit), rendue possible par l'œuvre de réconciliation de Jésus-Christ. C'est seulement dans cette relation que nous pouvons trouver la sécurité et la paix qui nous permet de continuer, peu importe ce que la vie nous réserve. Même la mort ne peut nous séparer de l'amour de Dieu pour ses enfants.

L'Église est vraiment la communauté des croyants. L'Église universelle de Dieu est une communauté – ou assemblée – d'hommes et de femmes qui ont cru en Jésus-Christ et qui, par la suite, développent une relation plus étroite avec Dieu. La responsabilité divine que Jésus a donnée à ses disciples était de vivre et d'annoncer l'Évangile en paroles et en actions.

Le magazine *Northern Light* est certainement un véhicule au Canada par lequel l'Église partage l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ et nourrit la foi de ceux qui ont répondu à cet Évangile. Nous espérons sincèrement que le magazine vous encourage dans votre vie quotidienne, alors que vous vous efforcez de mener une vie de foi dans une culture très séculière et très matérialiste.

L'Église a aussi des pasteurs et des assemblées dans diverses villes partout au pays. La plupart de ces assemblées sont engagées d'une façon ou d'une autre à servir leur communauté, afin d'exprimer l'amour de Dieu en action. Bien sûr, beaucoup de membres sont, sur une base individuelle, des exemples de foi et de service dans leur propre famille, leur lieu de travail, leur école et leur communauté. La plupart d'entre nous réalisent que les jeunes aujourd'hui font face à des pressions et à des défis immenses. L'Église universelle de Dieu parraine deux camps pour jeunes qui ont beaucoup de succès : un dans l'est de l'Ontario (bilingue) et un en Alberta, près de la ville d'Edmonton. Ces installations sont



conçues pour offrir aux jeunes une atmosphère très positive où ils peuvent apprécier ce que Dieu a fait pour eux, et pour les encourager à suivre Dieu et ses voies dans un monde troublé et confus.

Notre dénomination n'est pas seulement présente au Canada, mais elle compte des membres dans 90 pays. Pour faciliter le travail missionnaire, le bureau central de notre dénomination a demandé au Canada d'être partenaire avec nos Églises en Afrique. Même si l'Afrique et le Canada sont très éloignés l'un de l'autre, les deux comptent des populations francophones importantes. Les articles en français de notre magazine *Northern Light* circulent depuis plusieurs années parmi les Africains francophones. Un de nos pasteurs au Québec s'est rendu au Cameroun et en République démocratique du Congo pour offrir des cours de formation aux dirigeants chrétiens de langue française. Il a apporté avec lui des dizaines de bibles en français, ainsi que trois ordinateurs portables usagés dotés d'un logiciel



biblique en français, ce qui est très rare et coûteux en Afrique. L'Église universelle de Dieu au Canada a pu contribuer financièrement à ce voyage de formation qui a été grandement apprécié.

L'an dernier, nous avons parrainé un camp pour jeunes de deux semaines au Malawi et aidé des enfants dans le besoin à participer à un camp d'Église en Afrique du Sud. Nous avons de plus subventionné un séminaire de formation pour dirigeants chrétiens au Malawi, ainsi qu'une retraite pour femmes chrétiennes dans le pays très perturbé du Zimbabwe. Notre responsable du ministère pour les femmes s'y est rendue et a assisté à cette retraite pour représenter notre dénomination au Canada. Elle a beaucoup encouragé ses auditrices, et elle a aussi été très inspirée par toutes les personnes qu'elle a rencontrées.

En mars dernier, ma femme, Wendy, et moi-même sommes allés en Afrique pour animer une importante conférence de formation, près de Johannesburg, et nous avons pu servir d'autres manières pendant notre séjour d'un mois.

Il y a énormément de bonnes choses qui arrivent pour favoriser l'Évangile – beaucoup trop pour les mentionner dans une courte lettre. Mais je voulais vous donner quelques exemples pour vous informer et vous remercier de votre contribution au ministère. Nous sommes appelés à refléter la lumière du royaume de Dieu dans un monde de ténèbres, et nous apprécions grandement votre appui à accomplir cette mission.

En cette fin d'année qui approche, je souhaite que Dieu vous bénisse abondamment ! Je vous remercie de soutenir l'œuvre que Dieu nous a confiée !

Au service de Jésus-Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Moore".

Gary Moore
Directeur national
Église universelle de Dieu au Canada

Hope Future, Hope Now

By Jonathan Buck

*Pastor, Barrie, Huntsville,
North Bay, Peterborough, and
Sudbury congregations*

Imagine most Christians dream of being asked to “give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15), but how can anyone have hope in a depressing world like this one?

I thought back, then, to what gave me my first hope. It came from hearing the gospel (Colossians 1:5), and especially verses 19-20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

“Hope” began for me when I grasped what God the Father is up to, that he’s restoring the entire cosmos back into total harmony with himself, having given the power to Jesus Christ to make it happen. There is hope, therefore, of a better world coming. This depressing world and all its injustice, greed, uncertainty and exploitation of the poor won’t be around forever.

My hope didn’t stop there, though. It grew on discovering when this process of restoration got started. According to the Gospels, it began with the ministry of Jesus and as Paul explained, ultimately with his death on the cross, “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he (Jesus) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15). Because of the cross, the forces of evil—that caused all the disharmony in the Universe in the first place—were completely and thoroughly defeated. And to prove it, Jesus came back from the dead, ascended to the Father to become the all-conquering Lord of the Universe, and on Pentecost that year he gave the world its first public taste of his power and what that power was for.

Well, it was clear what his power was for because, suddenly, thousands of people realized who Jesus was and why God had sent him. He’d been sent to bless people by turning them from their wicked ways (Acts 3:26), and that’s exactly what

began to happen as people responded and repented, demonstrating to all present that the reconciliation of this Earth back to God had begun. And from that time on, millions of people have realized what happened at the Cross and Pentecost, that this was the moment that the prayer “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven,” became real. What Jesus had prayed for was actually happening.

But what gave them, and me too, even more reason for hope was the startling realization that Jesus was bringing his Kingdom to life on this planet through very ordinary people. Isn’t that what Jesus had promised, though, that he would give power to his disciples to be living witnesses to what he was doing (Acts 1:8)?

“Hope” began for me when I grasped what God the Father is up to, that he’s restoring the entire cosmos back into total harmony with himself, having given the power to Jesus Christ to make it happen.

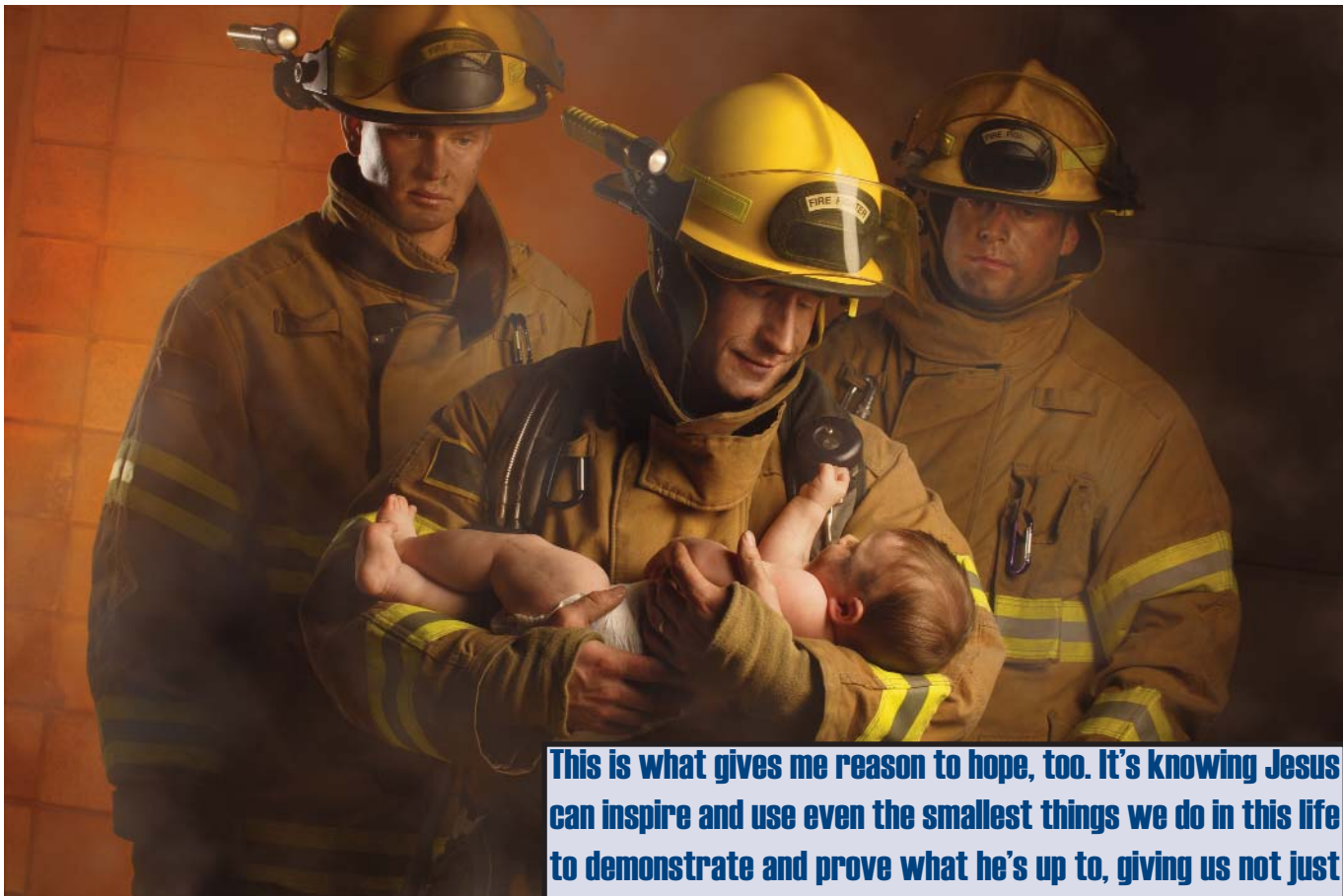
Well, that’s been happening too, because it’s remarkable what Christians have accomplished. Wherever humans have needed help or a better quality of life, Jesus has always been in the thick of the action, stirring Christians to create universities, colleges, hospitals, orphanages and thousands of ministries to the poor and weak. Christians have also created works of beauty in architecture, music and art, and worked their hearts out to improve things like housing, transportation, health care, landscaping, sewage systems and energy use. And think of all that lovely Kingdom stuff like justice, peace, fairness and caring that Jesus has brought to this world through his Church. Jesus is clearly giving his Church the power he promised, not only to provide a clear witness through Christians that Jesus is on the job reconciling all things back to God, but also

to give hope to us Christians that any of us, and all of us, can be part of it.

And that’s what gives me hope, too. Only I wish I’d known this at age 18. There I was, at the pinnacle of youth, with all the energy of a nuclear reactor and the imagination of a dozen movie directors, looking out on life ahead, wondering where it would take me. What if someone at that point had told me, “You know what, my boy? Jesus is already at work in this world, bringing his Kingdom to life through people like you. So, what are you interested in? Physics? Engineering? City design? Alternative energy? Caring for the sick? Caring for animals? Being another Richard Attenborough? Counseling young people? Helping the poor? Then go to it, my boy, because anything done well to

make this Earth a better place is perfect witness to what Jesus is doing, so he’s right behind you all the way.” Imagine how my life would have turned out knowing that as a youngster.

But nothing I do now is wasted, either, because in 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul writes, “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.” And what is “the work of the Lord”? To do things on Earth as they’re done in Heaven. And how do we do that? Well, think of the obvious things that would make a Heaven out of this Earth, and do them—or imagine what would make this Earth a wonderful place to live in, and try doing it, because all of it contributes to, and becomes a living witness to, what Christ is doing.



This is what gives me reason to hope, too. It's knowing Jesus can inspire and use even the smallest things we do in this life to demonstrate and prove what he's up to, giving us not just hope in the future but hope in the now, as well.

For one man I know it's picking up cigarette butts around his apartment block. Now what on earth would motivate him to do that? Because he hopes someone asks him why he's doing it, and then he can explain why, that it's an attempt to picture and make real what Christ is doing. It's only a tiny witness to Christ's massive and total reconciliation of the entire Universe back to God, but none of our labours, says Paul, is in vain. Jesus appreciates—and can use—all of them.

For an elderly lady in a retirement home, it's trying to make people smile, because she knows there are no tears in God's Kingdom (Revelation 21:4). But she's not waiting for Christ's return to get that world started, she knows she can start now because Jesus is already bringing his Kingdom to life through the Church. It gives her great pleasure, then,

especially in her suffocating, restricted world, to be able to bring a taste of that Kingdom to people by putting smiles on their faces now.

It's all she can do, but even the most mundane of actions in the most restricted of circumstances carries with it a witness to what Christ is up to, and the hope that one day, because of him, everything on this Earth will be done as it is in Heaven. But the way people can see that is through what the Spirit inspires and works in us today. And it doesn't matter how small it is, it all counts. None of it, Paul says, is in vain.

This is what gives me reason to hope, too. It's knowing Jesus can inspire and use even the smallest things we do in

this life to demonstrate and prove what he's up to, giving us not just hope in the future but hope in the now, as well.

That's why the article is entitled, "Hope Future, Hope Now," because as Christians we have reason for both. We know the future, but we also know Jesus is bringing that future to life now through what he does in us today, which in turn, hopefully, stirs someone to ask why we are the way we are, or why we do what we do, or how we can have hope in such a depressing world?

We would then have the chance to tell them, and give them all kinds of reasons for hope, too. **NL**

Dorothy Wolfe--102

Thrives On Hope

By Todd Martin

*Pastor, Harvest Christian Fellowship,
Abbotsford BC*

Dorothy Wolfe of Aldergrove, B.C., is still going strong at 102 years of age. Dorothy regularly attends Harvest Christian Fellowship, and her ultimate hope is in Jesus Christ. I recently sat down with Dorothy and chatted with her about what keeps her going in this life and was so impressed with her answer that I felt inspired to share it. A bit of background will help you put her answer in proper context.

Dorothy Wolfe was born July 1st, 1906, in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and now lives in Aldergrove, B.C.—in a suite in her son's house. She grew up on a homestead that had no electricity and no running water. She tied up her horse outside the one-room schoolhouse she went to in eastern Saskatchewan. With no modern conveniences, the house was heated by the wood stove and if the stove wasn't stocked at night, the milk, water or anything else left out would freeze solid in the midst of winter. To her it was a wonderful home. Her early years were filled with a variety of farm chores, household responsibilities and some very simple toys. She made it very clear that if she and her brother didn't put their wooden blocks away after playing with them, they would be used as firewood!

If you asked Dorothy what she had to show for her 102 years on Earth, she would direct her thoughts and comments to her 3 sons and 3 daughters, 12 grandchildren (2 deceased), 14 great grandchildren (2 deceased), and 2 great great grandchildren.

I kept asking Dorothy what she hoped for—what she hoped to do with her life when she was young, what she hoped for her children as they grew up, what she hoped for each day when she got up, and ultimately what she hoped heaven would be like.

Although she hoped to be a nurse when she was young, she wasn't able to finish school because of her mother's ill

health. She sacrificed her goal for the benefit of her family. That was okay though, because she eventually raised six children and considered that to be her prime responsibility and ultimate blessing.

She looked at me with a mischievous grin to indicate that I should know the answer to that already. "I have to be there for my grandchildren (now in their 50s and 60s)." I wisely stopped that line of questions at the grandchildren.

It didn't seem to matter what I asked, she always seemed positive and grateful. She appreciated life and valued the people close to her. It came as no surprise to me that when I asked her what she hoped heaven would be like, she simply replied that she hoped "it would be a happy place, where things go smoothly, everybody gets along and we can spend time with each other."



If you asked Dorothy what she had to show for her 102 years on Earth, she would direct her thoughts and comments to her 3 sons and 3 daughters, 12 grandchildren (2 deceased), 14 great grandchildren (2 deceased), and 2 great great grandchildren.

Virtually all of her answers to my questions came around to her children and the time and energy she put into them.

Her greatest hope in this life was and is for her children to do something they really like, to enjoy life and do something really interesting, and to not waste their lives. She hoped they would all be pleasant to their spouses and raise their children well. Dorothy reflected on how she would spend a lot of time playing games with the children when they were younger. It was hard work and took a lot of time but to her, there was nothing more important. She looked forward to each day and what kept her going was a strong desire to be there for her children. She wanted to be an example for them. She didn't think just telling them what to do was enough, she wanted to live it out for them, with them and in front of them.

"What keeps you going now that they are all 'grown' up?"

Nothing about gold or power. No grandiose ideas of the temporary things of this world, just a place to be with those you love. Once she responded with that simple yet deep answer, I realized that heaven was just going to be a place where she could keep doing what she had been doing all her life.

How many of us trudge through life murmuring about how bad this world is, how evil it is, how unfair it is? Yes that is all true, but Dorothy Wolfe lives in the same world we do—and for longer than most of us—yet she has been able to separate the good from the bad, the important from the unimportant. While doing this she has given herself a glimpse of heaven on earth. She is embracing a life that she will be quite happy to live until she is a 110 or forever, depending on which comes first. **NL**

By Michael Morrison

Justified By Faith, Not By Law

A Study Of Galatians 1

Someone had been telling the Galatian Christians false stories about Paul's relationship with the original apostles and the Jerusalem church. Paul responds by recounting his history—and he uses that story as a launching pad for preaching the gospel of salvation by grace. Chapter 2 includes two important interactions.

An agreement between Peter and Paul

Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also (Gal. 2:1). Grammatically, it is not clear whether this is 14 years after Paul's conversion, or 14 years after his first visit with Peter (1:18). It may have been A.D. 48—probably the famine-relief visit that Luke describes in Acts 11. ¹

I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain (Gal. 2:2). Paul described his message to the leaders in Jerusalem—he was not asking them for instructions or orders (contrary to what the opponents in Galatia apparently said). Was Paul afraid that he was preaching the wrong message? Apparently not, but he feared that the apostles might undercut his work if they disagreed with his gospel. ²

Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek (2:3). Paul hints that there was some controversy, but the apostles agreed with him on at least this much: that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised. Unfortunately, they did not seem to communicate this conclusion to the lay members, and that lack of communication later led to problems. People from Jerusalem traveled to other church areas and took it upon themselves to demand that other churches conform to

their standards. The church visits may have been authorized by the apostles, but the specific requirements probably were not.

Paul says that the controversy arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves (2:4). These people claimed to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but at least from Paul's perspective, they had missed the message. They did not just want to "spy on" believers' freedom—they wanted to eliminate it. They wanted the new faith to be just as demanding as the old one. In Judea, tensions with Rome were rising, and some zealots were quick to accuse others of religious compromise. ³ Paul says this pressure for conformity amounts to slavery. (He will use the "slave" language again in chapter 4.)

We did not give in to them for a moment—despite some pressure to do so, Paul implies—so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you (2:5). Paul stood against the pressure not just for the convenience of his people, but for the truth of the gospel. The gospel is not just a message of how people are saved—it requires that people be freed from obsolete obligations and social barriers.

Did the leaders tell Paul to add some requirements to his gospel? No: As for those who seemed to be important—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance—those men added nothing to my message (2:6). Paul seems indirectly acknowledge that the other apostles were important in some way, but they were not essential for his mission. Although they eventually gave their approval, he did not *need* their approval in order to preach the message Jesus had told him to preach.

On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as

Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles (2:7-8). They recognized that Christ had given Paul a mission, and they let him do it. Paul gives Peter a positive word here, but implies that he has authority only over Jewish churches, and not the Gentile church in Galatia.

So they agreed to go their separate ways: James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews (2:9). Implied in this division of labor is that the leaders would not meddle in each other's ministry—an agreement being broken by Paul's opponents in Galatia, who were claiming to act with authority from Jerusalem.

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do (2:10). Paul had come to help the poor believers in Jerusalem, and his letters show that this continued to be part of his ministry (Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-4). It was a humanitarian effort not to poor people in general, but to the poor members of the Jerusalem church. To Paul, it had theological significance, for it illustrated the unity of Gentiles and Jews.

So they agreed: Peter would go to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. But the plan failed to address one circumstance: what should be done in churches that contained both Jews and Gentiles? That is the next step in the story.

A disagreement between Peter and Paul

Paul's next words are: When Peter came to Antioch... Paul introduces this topic as if the readers *already knew* that Peter had gone to Antioch, and that they knew what Peter had done there. Paul's

opponents had probably told the story; now Paul tells his side: I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong (2:11).

Paul backs up to give the context of the story: Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group (2:12).

Old Testament laws did not require Jews to eat separately from Gentiles, but Jewish custom did (cf. Acts 11:3). Peter knew that this custom was not biblical, so he ignored it. However, when representatives of the Jerusalem church arrived, he changed his behavior. ⁴ It was a change of behavior based on a desire to please people—the very thing Paul had been accused of (1:10).

However, this separation implied that the Gentiles were second-class citizens, that they would not be fully acceptable unless they conformed to Jewish laws. Paul saw this as a violation of the gospel. If God was willing to live in these people, then the Jewish believers ought to be willing to eat with them.

Other people followed Peter's example: The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray (2:13). The change in behavior was not consistent with their beliefs, and was not consistent with the gospel, so Paul spoke to them all by addressing Peter, who had set the example:

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile ⁵ and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? (v. 14). Peter had been living like a Gentile, and he should not pretend that he didn't. He had been ignoring the rules that sep-

arated Jews from Gentiles, but his change in behavior implied it was wrong to be a Gentile. "Peter is in effect requiring the Gentile converts at Antioch to adopt a higher standard of Torah observance than he himself would normally follow." ⁶ Social discrimination violates the truth of the gospel. ⁷

Unity in the church does not require that everyone follow the strictest opinions. God does not require Gentiles to live like Jews—and he does not require Jews to do it, either! Even the Jews are allowed to live like Gentiles, and the church should not let itself be tyrannized by overly conservative critics.

Paul explains that Jews are saved by faith, not by keeping the law: "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ⁸ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. ⁹ So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ ¹⁰ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (vv. 15-16).

Paul's first statement about "justification" is that it does *not* come through the law. This negative way of introducing the term suggests that it was not Paul's original way of explaining the gospel. Rather, the Judaizing opponents were using the word, saying that people could be justified (or declared righteous) only by keeping the law. ¹¹ Paul uses their terminology, but turns it around. Even those who try to keep the law cannot be justified by doing the law, because everyone fails at some point or another.

We cannot claim to be righteous on our own merits—if we are going to be declared righteous, it must be on some other basis. That is why the Jewish believers, like the Gentiles, put their trust in Christ, not in themselves. The implication here is that since Jews and Gentiles are accepted by God on the same basis, for the same reason, then they ought to

accept one another. Jews are not required to eat Gentile foods, but they should be willing to sit down at the same table!

A perfect source of righteousness

We are not justified by keeping the law. Does that mean that God doesn't care whether we sin? No. Paul asks, "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! (v. 17). ¹² We are justified in Christ, by being united with him, so that he shares his righteousness with us. When we trust in Christ rather than ourselves, we admit that we are sinners, and that we cannot be declared righteous on our own merits. God accepts us even though we are sinners, but his pardon should not be interpreted as permission to sin. (The Judaizers were apparently saying that Paul's gospel encouraged people to sin.)

Paul's next statement is puzzling: If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker (v. 18). It seems that Paul was accused of inconsistency, but it isn't clear what he is referring to. ¹³ An inconsistency would prove that Paul broke the law either before or after his change.

His point seems to be about sin and the law, for his next statement is: For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God (v. 19). Elsewhere, Paul explains that people die to the law through Christ (Rom. 6:3; 7:4). Christ suffered the worst penalty of the law on our behalf, and it has no further claim on us. Since we died with Christ, the law has exacted its penalty on us. But this does not mean that we are free to live however we please—rather, it means that we are to live for God. Paul will elaborate on that in the last third of his letter.

Paul explains his new outlook on life: I have been crucified with Christ and I no

longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (v. 20). Paul no longer views himself as an individual trying his best to keep the laws of God. That old approach was flawed, and it died with Christ. Paul considers all his previous merits as good as dead (see Phil. 3:7), and his life has value now only as it is empowered by Christ, only as it is in union with Christ.

He was united with Christ in his crucifixion, and he is united with Christ in his resurrection. Whatever good he does, even his faith/fulness, is from Christ living in him. The reference point for Paul's life is not the law, but the fact that the Son of God ¹⁴ loved Paul and gave himself to save not just the whole world, but for Paul himself. It became personal for Paul. Christ gave himself to save Paul, and when Paul started to believe that, he abandoned his own agenda for life and began to live for God, letting his life be directed by Christ. This emphasis on Christ does not promote sin—it promotes a radically God-centered life.

Paul concludes: I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (v. 21). There is a contrast: Either righteousness is based on the law, or it is based on grace. Either it is earned, or it is given. And Paul figures that if there was any way on earth that people could get righteousness by keeping laws, then Jesus died in vain—and that is simply unthinkable.

Paul had seen proof with his own eyes that Jesus was alive, that God had given him resurrection life ahead of everyone else, which meant that he was the Messiah. And God would not let the Messiah suffer the most ignominious death unless it were absolutely necessary. The fact that God let his own Son be crucified was proof to Paul that righteousness could be attained in no other way. Salvation comes through Christ, not through the law!**NL**

Questions for discussion

Peter went to the Jews, and Paul to Gentiles (v. 9). A comparable situation today might be that one preacher agrees to focus on European-Americans, and another on African-Americans. Is this approach wise, or racist? What problems might result?

How well do I remember the poor? (v. 10)

Does the "truth of the gospel" require that we eat with believers who have customs we do not like? (v. 14)

Why is it that people cannot be declared righteous on the basis of keeping the law? (v. 15).

If "I no longer live," why does it matter *how* I live? (v. 20)

Endnotes:

1. Ben Witherington, *New Testament History*, 197. Some scholars identify the Galatians 2 visit with the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) instead, saying that Paul did not mention the Acts 11 visit because he had no discussions with the apostles on that visit and it was therefore irrelevant for his story. The topic in Galatians 2 and Acts 15 is the same: whether Gentiles should be circumcised. This would mean that Galatians was written *after* the Jerusalem Council. Support for the "late date" of Galatians also comes from the "northern Galatia" theory, which says that Paul is writing to people who are Galatian by ethnicity, and that Paul did not reach their region until after the Council.

Other scholars say that it is unlikely that Paul would have visited Jerusalem on the famine-relief visit *without* meeting with anyone and without discussing this topic, and in order to answer objections Paul would have had to include *all* his visits to Jerusalem no matter what was discussed. In Gal 2:2, he specifically

says that the discussions were private, whereas the Acts 15 council was a public discussion. He says he went in response to a revelation, which comports well with Acts 11:28. And Gal. 2:10 says that the apostles wanted him to *continue* to remember the poor, which makes it sound like he had already done something for the poor—bringing famine relief. On a controversy like this, more than one discussion was probably necessary. This means that Paul wrote Galatians *before* the Jerusalem Council, and Paul was writing to people in Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium—in southern Galatia. Those cities were in the province of Galatia even though the people were not Galatian by ethnicity. Acts 2:9 shows that people could call themselves by their province, not just by ethnicity. But in the end, the scholarly controversy about the date of the letter and location of the recipients does not affect the interpretation of the letter.

2. "If they reject the legitimacy of this mission, it will indeed make Paul's work futile in one sense, for their rejection will thwart God's intent to bring Jew and Gentile together as one in Christ" (Richard Hays, "Galatians," *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XI [Abingdon, 2000], 223).

3. The sociological pressures may have been similar to what we see in some Muslim regions, where radicals threaten violence against anyone who does not adhere to strict standards—for example, shaving is supposedly a sign of weakening religious loyalty, so radicals may threaten barbers who shave their customers. "We will publicly shame you as a compromiser unless you conform to our standards." Paul calls this tyranny of judgmentalism an attempt to enslave.

4. We do not know if the men from James demanded this separation, or if Peter was merely afraid that they would want it. Perhaps he planned to do it temporarily, to avoid offense, but ended up causing offense to the Gentiles.

5. In this phrase, Paul has broadened the discussion beyond the question of *eating* with Gentiles, but it is difficult to determine exactly what he meant. In the first century, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles usually focused on circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath days. Some rabbis taught that Gentiles were required to keep the laws given to Noah. Gal. 3:17 suggests that the difference lies in the laws added in the days of Moses. Gentiles were expected to keep the laws that existed in Genesis, but were not required to keep those added later.

6. Hays, 235.

7. “One can betray the truth of the gospel not only by preaching false doctrines but also by engaging in false practices—particularly practices that fracture the unity of the church.... God has brought into being a new community that embraces Jews and Gentiles together as God’s people. This is not merely an implication of the gospel or an inference from the gospel; rather, it is an integral part of the gospel itself” (Hays, 248).

8. “The phrase hardly expresses Paul’s own view of Gentiles, and should probably be heard as an echo of what the group from James had said” (James Dunn, *Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* [Cambridge, 1993], 74).

9. The Greek says “the faith of Jesus Christ,” and some scholars take this literally—that people are saved by the faith/fulness that Jesus himself had (the Greek word can mean either *faith* or *faithfulness*). See Hays, 239-240. This would be similar to saying that his righteousness is imputed to us. We are saved by what he has done, not by something we do. We need faith, but our faith is always imperfect—it cannot save us, so we must trust in Christ. Our faith and his faithfulness go together.

10. Again, the Greek says “faith of Christ.” If the meaning is our faith in Christ, the verse is repetitious. If the meaning is his faithfulness, then the verse says that we trust in Christ with the result that we are accepted on account of his faithfulness, not on account of our works. Paul may be playing on the two meanings of the word.

11. “Before mentioning the positive basis on which a person *can* be justified, or ‘righteoused’, Paul emphasizes the negative basis on which such justification is *not* possible. This order may well reflect the fact that the statement is made in a context where Paul is arguing precisely against those who do think that ‘the works of the law’ are necessary for all who would be members of God’s people” (David Horrell, *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* [2nd ed.; T & T Clark, 2006], 77). Paul apparently had not used the word *justification* when he was actually in Galatia.

12. Since the original Greek did not have any quote marks, it is not clear how much of this passage was spoken to Peter in Antioch. The NIV puts the ending quote mark at the end of v. 21, but it is possible that vv. 15-21 are an expansion of the original statement. These verses seem to speak to the Galatian situation better than the one in Antioch. “Paul merges his response to Peter into the opening statement of his appeal to the Galatians.... Galatians is what he should have said to Peter at Antioch had time and sufficient reflection allowed it” (Dunn, 73). On the other hand, Hays thinks that the quotation extends through v. 21 because Paul continues to use first-person pronouns as if he is speaking to a Jewish audience—but he notes that “the desired effect is that the Galatians will hear the speech to Peter as being addressed to their situation as well” (Hays, 230).

Paul never tells us whether Peter agreed with him; most scholars conclude from this that Peter did not agree (Hays, 231). Some Jewish Christians maintained

separate churches for several centuries after Christ.

13. Is he talking about rebuilding a barrier between Jews and Gentiles? Or were opponents saying that Paul would change his teaching on the law? Or is he using a proverb to talk about rebuilding *sin*, after preaching that Jesus died to destroy it?

14. Paul does not often use this title for Christ. Here, it seems to imply “One who is like God.”

de Michael Morrison

Justifié par la foi, et non par la loi

Une étude de Galates 2

Certains avaient raconté aux chrétiens de Galates des histoires fausses concernant la relation de Paul avec les premiers apôtres et l'Église de Jérusalem. Paul répond en écrivant sa version de l'histoire et l'utilise comme une rampe de lancement pour prêcher l'Évangile du salut par la grâce. Le 2^e chapitre de l'épître aux Galates comprend deux interactions importantes.

Accord entre Pierre et Paul

« Quatorze ans plus tard, je suis remonté à Jérusalem en compagnie de Barnabas. J'avais aussi emmené Tite avec moi » (Ga 2.1). Grammaticalement, il n'est pas clair si c'est 14 ans après la conversion de Paul ou 14 ans après sa première visite auprès de Pierre (1.18). Il est possible que ce soit en l'an 48, probablement au cours de sa visite pour secourir les frères affligés par la famine décrite par Luc en Actes 11.¹

« J'ai fait ce voyage pour obéir à une révélation divine. J'y ai exposé l'Évangile que j'annonce parmi les non-Juifs, je l'ai exposé dans un entretien particulier aux dirigeants les plus considérés. Car je ne voulais pas que tout mon travail passé et futur soit compromis » (Ga 2.2). Paul décrit son message aux dirigeants de Jérusalem : il ne leur demande pas des instructions ou des ordres (contrairement à ce que les adversaires en Galatie disaient apparemment). Paul avait-il peur de prêcher le mauvais message ? Apparemment non, mais il craignait que les apôtres puissent affaiblir son travail s'ils étaient en désaccord avec son Évangile.²

« Or Tite, mon compagnon, était d'origine païenne. Eh bien, on ne l'a même pas obligé à se soumettre au rite de la circoncision » (2.3). Paul suggère qu'il y avait une certaine controverse, mais les apôtres étaient d'accord avec lui sur au moins un point : que les païens n'avaient pas besoin d'être circoncis. Il

semble qu'ils n'aient malheureusement pas communiqué cette conclusion aux membres de l'Église, et que le manque de communication ait plus tard engendré des problèmes. Des gens de Jérusalem sont allés dans d'autres Églises et ont pris l'initiative de demander qu'elles se conforment à leurs normes. La visite des Églises peut avoir été autorisée par les apôtres, mais les exigences spécifiques ne l'étaient sûrement pas.

Paul dit : « Et cela, malgré la pression de faux-frères, des intrus qui s'étaient infiltrés dans nos rangs pour espionner la liberté dont nous jouissons dans notre union avec Jésus-Christ » (2.4). Ces gens prétendaient croire que Jésus est le Messie, mais selon Paul, ils n'avaient rien compris du message. Ils cherchaient non seulement à « épier » la liberté des chrétiens, mais aussi à l'éliminer. Ils voulaient que la nouvelle foi soit aussi exigeante que l'ancienne. En Judée, alors que des tensions avec Rome montaient, certains zélotes étaient prompts à accuser les autres de compromis religieux.³ Paul affirme que cette pression à la conformité revient à de l'esclavage. (Il utilisera le mot « esclave » une autre fois au chapitre 4.)

« Mais nous ne leur avons pas cédé un seul instant ni fait la moindre concession afin que la vérité de l'Évangile soit maintenue pour vous » (2.5). Paul a résisté à la pression, non seulement par souci pour son peuple, mais aussi pour la vérité de l'Évangile. L'Évangile n'est pas seulement un message sur la manière d'être sauvé – mais il nécessite que les gens soient libérés des obligations obsolètes et des barrières sociales.

« Quelle a été, à cet égard, l'attitude des dirigeants les plus influents ? – En fait, ce qu'ils étaient alors m'importe peu, car Dieu ne fait pas de favoritisme. – Eh bien, ces gens très influents ne m'ont pas imposé d'autres directives » (2.6). Paul semble reconnaître indirectement que les autres apôtres étaient importants d'une certaine manière, mais non

essentiels à sa mission. Même s'ils ont plus tard accordé leur approbation, il n'en avait pas besoin pour prêcher le message que Jésus lui avait ordonné de prêcher.

« Au contraire ! Ils ont constaté que Dieu m'avait confié la charge d'annoncer l'Évangile aux non-Juifs comme à Pierre celles de l'annoncer aux Juifs. Car celui qui a agi en Pierre pour qu'il soit l'apôtre des Juifs a aussi agi en moi pour que je sois celui des non-Juifs » (2.7,8). Ils ont reconnu que Christ avait confié une mission à Paul, et ils l'ont laissé la remplir. Dans ces versets, Paul adresse un mot positif à Pierre, mais il implique que le dirigeant de Jérusalem n'a autorité que sur les Églises juives, et non sur l'Église des non-Juifs en Galatie.

Ils se sont donc mis d'accord pour aller chacun de leur côté : « Ainsi Jacques, Pierre et Jean, qui sont considérés comme colonnes de l'Église, ont reconnu que Dieu, dans sa grâce, m'avait confié cette tâche particulière. C'est pourquoi ils nous ont serré la main, à Barnabas et à moi, en signe d'accord et de communion ; et nous avons convenu ensemble que nous irions, nous, vers les peuples païens tandis qu'eux se consacraient aux Juifs » (2.9). Dans cette division des tâches, il est sous-entendu que chaque dirigeant ne se mêlerait pas du ministère de l'autre – une entente brisée par les adversaires de Paul en Galatie, qui prétendaient agir avec l'autorité de Jérusalem.

« Ils nous ont seulement demandé de nous souvenir des pauvres – ce que j'ai bien pris soin de faire » (2.10). Paul était venu secourir les chrétiens pauvres de Jérusalem, et ses lettres montrent que cela a continué à faire partie de son ministère (Ro 15.25-27 ; 1 Co 16.1-4 ; 2 Co 8.1-4). C'était un effort humanitaire destiné non aux pauvres en général, mais aux membres pauvres de l'Église de Jérusalem. Pour Paul, cela avait une signification théologique : c'était une démonstration de l'unité des païens et des Juifs. Ils se sont donc mis d'accord :

Pierre irait vers les Juifs et Paul vers les païens. Mais ils ont oublié d'inclure un point dans leur entente : Que devrait-on faire dans les Églises composées de Juifs et de non-Juifs ? C'est la prochaine étape de l'histoire.

Désaccord entre Pierre et Paul

Paul écrit ensuite : « Mais, lorsque Pierre est venu à Antioche [...] » (2.11a). Paul présente ce sujet comme si les lecteurs *savaient déjà* que Pierre était allé à Antioche et ce que Pierre y avait fait. Les adversaires de Paul avaient probablement rapporté l'histoire, mais Paul raconte maintenant sa version : « [...], je me suis opposé ouvertement à lui, car il avait tort » (2.11b).

Paul revient en arrière pour replacer l'histoire dans le contexte : « En effet, avant l'arrivée de quelques personnes de l'entourage de Jacques, il prenait part aux repas communs avec les frères non-juifs ; mais après leur venue, il s'est esquivé et s'est tenu à l'écart, parce qu'il craignait les croyants d'origine juive » (2.12). La loi de l'Ancien Testament n'exigeait pas que les Juifs mangent séparément des païens, mais la coutume juive l'exigeait (Actes 11.3). Sachant que cette coutume n'était pas biblique, Pierre n'en a pas tenu compte. Cependant, quand les représentants de l'Église de Jérusalem sont arrivés, il a changé son comportement.⁴ C'était un changement de comportement basé sur un désir de plaire aux gens – la chose même dont Paul était accusé (1.10).

Cependant, cette séparation de Pierre d'avec les chrétiens non-juifs impliquait qu'ils étaient des citoyens de second ordre, qu'ils ne seraient pas entièrement acceptables à moins de se conformer aux lois juives. Paul a vu cela comme une violation de l'Évangile. Si Dieu acceptait de vivre dans ces gens, alors les chrétiens juifs devaient accepter de manger avec eux.

D'autres personnes ont suivi l'exemple de Pierre : « Comme lui, les autres chrétiens d'origine juive se sont mis, eux aussi, à cacher leurs véritables convictions, au point que Barnabas lui-même s'est laissé entraîner par leur dissimulation » (2.13). Leur changement de comportement n'était pas conforme à leurs croyances, ni à l'Évangile. Paul a donc parlé devant tous en s'adressant à

Juifs vivent comme des non-Juifs ! Même les Juifs ont le droit de vivre comme les non-Juifs, et l'Église ne devrait pas se laisser tyranniser par des critiques trop conservateurs.

Paul explique que les Juifs sont sauvés par la foi, et non par l'observation de la loi : « Nous qui sommes Juifs d'origine, nous ne faisons pas partie de ces

La loi de l'Ancien Testament n'exigeait pas que les Juifs mangent séparément des païens, mais la coutume juive l'exigeait (Actes 11.3). Sachant que cette coutume n'était pas biblique, Pierre n'en a pas tenu compte. Cependant, quand les représentants de l'Église de Jérusalem sont arrivés, il a changé son comportement.⁴ C'était un changement de comportement basé sur un désir de plaire aux gens – la chose même dont Paul était accusé (1.10).

Pierre qui avait donné l'exemple :

« Mais quand j'ai vu qu'ils ne marchaient pas droit, selon la vérité de l'Évangile, j'ai dit à Pierre devant tous les frères : Toi qui es d'origine juive, tu vis comme un croyant d'origine païenne⁵, et non comme un Juif. Comment peux-tu vouloir obliger les frères d'origine païenne à vivre comme des Juifs ? » (2.14) Pierre avait agi comme un non-Juif, et il ne devait pas prétendre le contraire. Il n'avait pas tenu compte des règles qui séparaient les Juifs des non-Juifs, mais son changement de comportement impliquait qu'il était mal d'être un non-Juif. « En effet, Pierre demande aux convertis d'origine païenne à Antioche d'adopter une norme d'observation de la Torah plus élevée que lui-même suivait normalement. »⁶ La discrimination sociale viole la vérité de l'Évangile.⁷ L'unité dans l'Église ne requiert pas que tous suivent les opinions les plus strictes. Dieu n'exige pas que les non-Juifs vivent comme des Juifs ni que les

pêcheurs que sont les païens.⁸ Cependant, nous avons compris que l'on est déclaré juste devant Dieu, non parce que l'on accomplit les œuvres que commande la Loi, mais uniquement par la foi en Jésus-Christ.⁹ C'est pourquoi nous avons, nous aussi, placé notre confiance en Jésus-Christ¹⁰ pour être déclarés justes par la foi et non parce que nous aurions accompli ce qu'ordonne la Loi. Car, comme le dit l'Écriture : Personne ne sera déclarée juste devant Dieu parce qu'il aura accompli ce qu'ordonne la Loi » (2.15,16).

La première mention de Paul sur la « justification » dit qu'elle ne vient pas par la loi. Cette façon négative de présenter le sujet suggère que ce n'était pas la manière originale de Paul d'expliquer l'Évangile. C'est plutôt les adversaires judaïsants qui utilisaient le mot, disant que les gens ne pouvaient être justifiés (ou déclarés justes) qu'en observant la loi.¹¹ Paul utilise leur terminologie, mais à l'inverse. Même ceux qui

essaient d'observer la loi ne peuvent pas être justifiés en le faisant, parce que tous échouent à un moment ou l'autre.

Nous ne pouvons pas prétendre être justes par nos propres mérites – si nous voulons être déclarés justes, ce doit être par un autre moyen. C'est pourquoi les chrétiens juifs, comme les chrétiens non-juifs, mettent leur confiance en Christ, et non en eux-mêmes. L'implication est celle-ci : puisque Dieu accepte les Juifs et les non-Juifs par le même moyen, alors, pour la même raison, ils doivent s'accepter les uns les autres. Les Juifs ne sont pas obligés de manger la nourriture des non-Juifs, mais ils devraient accepter de s'asseoir à la même table !

Une source parfaite de justification

Nous ne sommes pas justifiés en observant la loi. Cela veut-il dire que Dieu ne se préoccupe pas de ce que nous péchions ? Non. Paul demande : « Mais si, en cherchant à être déclarés justes dans l'union avec le Christ, nous avons montré par là même que nous étions des pécheurs comme les païens, cela signifie-t-il que le Christ est complice du péché ? Loin de là ! (2.17)¹² Nous sommes justifiés en Christ, en étant unis avec lui, afin qu'il partage sa justice avec nous. Quand nous mettons notre confiance en Christ plutôt qu'en nous-mêmes, nous admettons que nous sommes pécheurs et que nous ne pouvons pas être déclarés justes par nos propres mérites. Dieu nous accepte même si nous sommes des pécheurs, mais son pardon ne devrait pas être interprété comme une permission à pécher. (Les judaïsants disaient apparemment que l'Évangile de Paul encourageait les gens à pécher.)

L'énoncé suivant de Paul est difficile à comprendre : « Car si je remets en vigueur le régime de la Loi que j'ai abandonné, alors je me place moi-même dans la situation d'un homme qui transgresse la Loi » (2.18). Il semble que Paul ait été accusé d'inconsistance,

mais ce à quoi il fait référence n'est pas clair.¹³ Une inconsistante prouverait que Paul a brisé la loi avant ou après son changement.

Son point semble être celui du péché et de la loi, car son prochain énoncé dit : « Car c'est par la Loi que je suis mort au régime de la Loi afin de vivre pour Dieu. En effet, j'ai été crucifié avec le Christ » (2.19). Ailleurs, Paul explique que les gens meurent à la loi par la mort de Christ (Ro 6.3 ; 7.4). Christ a souffert le pire châtement de la loi pour nous, et elle n'a plus rien d'autre à nous réclamer. Puisque nous sommes morts avec Christ, la loi a exercé son châtement sur nous. Mais cela ne veut pas dire que nous sommes libres de vivre comme bon nous semble, mais que nous devons plutôt vivre pour Dieu. Paul élaborera ce sujet dans le dernier tiers de sa lettre.

Paul explique sa nouvelle vision de la vie : « Ce n'est plus moi qui vis, c'est le Christ qui vit en moi. Ma vie en tant qu'homme, je la vis maintenant dans la foi au Fils de Dieu qui, par amour pour moi, s'est livré à la mort à ma place » (2.20). Paul ne se voit plus comme quelqu'un qui essaie de faire de son mieux pour observer les lois de Dieu. Cette ancienne approche a échoué et est morte avec Christ. Paul considère toutes ses œuvres antérieures comme une perte (voir Ph 3.7), et sa vie n'a de valeur que si elle est fortifiée par Christ, unie à Christ.

Il était uni avec Christ dans sa crucifixion, et il est uni à Christ dans sa résurrection. Toute bonne chose qu'il puisse faire, même sa foi, vient de Christ qui vit en lui. Le point de référence de la vie de Paul n'est pas la loi, mais le fait que le Fils de Dieu¹⁴ l'a aimé et s'est donné lui-même pour sauver non seulement le monde entier, mais Paul lui-même. Cela lui est devenu personnel : Christ s'est donné pour le sauver. Quand Paul a commencé à croire cela, il a abandonné ses propres plans et s'est mis à vivre

pour Dieu, laissant Christ diriger sa vie. L'accent mis sur Christ ne fait pas la promotion du péché, mais celle d'une vie radicalement centrée sur Dieu.

Paul conclut : « Ainsi, je ne rejette pas la grâce de Dieu en revenant à la Loi. En effet, si c'est l'obéissance à la Loi qui permet d'être déclarée juste, alors le Christ est mort pour rien ! » (2.21) Paul présente un contraste : la justice repose soit sur la loi, soit sur la grâce. Elle est soit méritée, soit donnée. Et Paul déduit que s'il y avait un moyen sur terre pour que les gens puissent être justifiés en observant des lois, alors Jésus serait mort en vain – ce qui est tout simplement impensable.

Paul avait de ses propres yeux vu la preuve que Jésus était vivant, que Dieu l'avait ressuscité avant tout autre être humain, ce qui veut dire qu'il était le Messie. Et Dieu ne laisserait pas le Messie souffrir la mort la plus ignoble à moins qu'elle ne soit absolument nécessaire. Le fait que Dieu ait laissé son propre Fils être crucifié était une preuve pour Paul que la justice ne pouvait s'obtenir par aucun autre moyen. Le salut s'obtient par Christ, et non par la loi !**NL**

Questions

1. Pierre est allé vers les Juifs, et Paul vers les païens (2.9). Une situation comparable aujourd'hui pourrait être celle d'un prédicateur qui accepte de se concentrer sur les Euro-Américains, et un autre prédicateur sur les Afro-Américains. Cette approche est-elle sage ou raciste ? Quels problèmes peut-il en résulter ?
2. Est-ce que je me souviens des pauvres ? (2.10)
3. La « vérité de l'Évangile » requiert-elle que nous mangions avec des croyants qui ont des coutumes que nous n'aimons pas ? (2.4)
4. Pourquoi les gens ne peuvent-ils pas être déclarés justes en observant la loi ? (2.5)
5. Si « je ne vis plus », pourquoi ma manière de vivre est-elle importante ? (2.20)

Notes

1 Ben Witherington, *New Testament History*, p. 197. Certains érudits considèrent plutôt la visite dont il est question en Galates 2, comme étant celle du Concile de Jérusalem (Actes 15), disant que Paul n'a pas parlé de sa visite mentionnée en Actes 11, parce qu'il n'avait eu lors de cette visite aucune discussion avec les apôtres et qu'elle n'était donc pas pertinente à son histoire. Le sujet en Galates 2 et en Actes 15 est le même : à savoir si les païens devaient être circoncis. Cela voudrait dire que l'épître aux Galates a été écrite après le Concile de Jérusalem. L'appui à une date ultérieure de l'épître aux Galates vient aussi confirmer la théorie de « la Galatie du Nord », qui dit que Paul écrit aux gens qui sont des Galates d'origine, et que Paul n'est allé dans leur région qu'après le Concile.

D'autres érudits disent qu'il est peu probable que Paul, lors de sa visite à Jérusalem pour secourir les victimes de la famine, n'ait pas rencontré quelqu'un pour discuter du sujet et que, pour répondre aux objections, il aurait eu à inclure toutes ses visites à Jérusalem, peu importe les sujets discutés. En Galates 2.2, il dit spécifiquement que les discussions étaient privées, tandis que le Concile dont il est question en Actes 15 était une discussion publique. Il dit qu'il y est allé pour répondre à une révélation divine, ce qui correspond bien avec Actes 11.28. Et Galates 2.10 dit que les apôtres voulaient qu'il continue de se souvenir des pauvres, ce qui suggère qu'il avait déjà fait quelque chose pour les pauvres : secourir les victimes de la famine. Sur une telle controverse, plus d'une seule discussion était probablement nécessaire. Cela veut dire que Paul a écrit aux Galates avant le Concile de Jérusalem, et Paul écrivait aux gens de Piside, de Lystre, de Derbe et d'Iconium, dans le sud de la Galatie. Ces villes se trouvaient dans la province de la Galatie, même si les gens n'étaient pas Galates d'origine. Actes 2.9 montre que les gens pouvaient s'identifier par leur province, et non seulement par leur origine ethnique. Mais en fin de compte, la controverse entre les érudits au sujet de la date de la lettre et du lieu d'origine des destinataires n'affecte en rien l'interprétation de la lettre.

2 « S'ils rejetaient la légitimité de cette mission, dans un sens, cela anéantirait le travail de Paul, car leur rejet contrecarrerait la volonté de Dieu d'unifier les Juifs et les non-Juifs en Christ » (Richard Hays, « Galatians », *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XI [Abingdon, 2000], p. 223).

3 Les pressions sociologiques ressemblaient peut-être à celles que nous voyons dans certaines régions musulmanes, où les radicaux menacent d'user de violence contre quiconque n'adhère pas à leurs normes strictes. Par exemple, vu que le rasage de la tête est

censé être un signe d'un manque de loyauté religieuse, les radicaux peuvent alors menacer les barbiers qui rasent leurs clients. « En compromis, nous vous humiliions publiquement, à moins que vous ne vous conformiez à nos normes. » Paul appelle cette tyrannie de toujours vouloir s'ériger en juge une tentative d'asservissement.

4 Nous ignorons si les hommes de l'entourage de Jacques ont demandé cette séparation, ou si Pierre craignait simplement qu'ils la demandent. Il prévoyait peut-être le faire temporairement pour éviter d'offenser quelqu'un, mais il a fini par offenser les païens.

5 Dans cette phrase, Paul élargit la discussion au-delà de la question de manger avec des non-Juifs, mais il est difficile de déterminer exactement ce qu'il voulait dire. Au cours du 1^{er} siècle, la distinction entre les Juifs et les non-Juifs se concentrait généralement sur la circoncision, les lois alimentaires et les jours de fête. Certains rabbins enseignaient que les non-Juifs devaient observer les lois données à Noé. Galates 3.17 suggère que la différence repose sur les lois ajoutées à l'époque de Moïse. Les non-Juifs devaient observer les lois qui existaient dans la Genèse, mais pas celles qui ont plus tard été ajoutées.

6 Hays, p. 235.

7 « Quelqu'un peut trahir la vérité de l'Évangile non seulement en prêchant de fausses doctrines, mais aussi en s'engageant dans de fausses pratiques, en particulier des pratiques qui brisent l'unité de l'Église [...]. Dieu a créé une nouvelle communauté qui rassemble les Juifs et les non-Juifs comme le peuple de Dieu. Ce n'est pas simplement une implication ou une conclusion de l'Évangile, mais plutôt une partie intégrale de l'Évangile comme tel » (Hays, p. 248).

8 « La phrase n'exprime pas le point de vue de Paul sur les non-Juifs, et doit probablement être comprise comme un écho de ce que le groupe de Jacques avait dit » (James Dunn, *Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* [Cambridge, 1993], p. 74).

9 Le grec dit « la foi de Jésus-Christ », et certains érudits le prennent littéralement – que les gens sont sauvés par la foi que Jésus-Christ avait (le mot grec peut vouloir dire foi ou fidélité). Voir Hays, p. 239 et 240. Cela reviendrait à dire que sa justice nous est imputée. Nous sommes sauvés par ce qu'il a fait, et non par quelque chose que nous faisons. Nous avons besoin de foi, mais notre foi est toujours imparfaite : puisqu'elle ne peut pas nous sauver, nous devons croire en Christ. Notre foi et sa fidélité vont ensemble.

10 Ici encore, le grec dit « foi de Christ ». Si la signification est notre foi en Christ, le verset est répétitif. Si la signification est sa fidélité, alors le verset dit que nous croyons en Christ, avec le résultat que nous sommes acceptés grâce à sa fidélité, et non grâce à nos œuvres. Paul peut jouer sur les deux significations du mot.

11 « Avant de mentionner le moyen positif par lequel une personne *peut* être justifiée, Paul souligne le moyen négatif par lequel une telle justification n'est pas possible. Cet ordre peut très bien refléter le fait que l'énoncé soit formulé dans un contexte où Paul argumente précisément contre ceux qui pensent que les "œuvres de la loi" sont nécessaires pour tous ceux qui sont membres du peuple de Dieu » (David Horrell, *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* [2^e édition, T & T Clark, 2006], p. 77). Paul n'avait apparemment pas utilisé le mot *justification* quand il se trouvait en Galatie.

12 Puisque le passage original n'était pas entre guillemets, nous ne savons pas quelle partie de ce passage s'adressait à Pierre à Antioche. La version NIV ferme les guillemets à la fin du verset 21, mais il est possible que les versets 15 à 21 soient une élaboration de l'énoncé original. (Les versions françaises n'ont pas mis ces versets entre guillemets.) Ces versets semblent mieux décrire la situation en Galatie que celle à Antioche. « Paul fusionne sa réponse à Pierre dans l'énoncé d'ouverture de son appel aux Galates [...]. Ce qu'il écrit aux Galates est ce qu'il aurait dû dire à Pierre à Antioche si le temps et une réflexion suffisante l'avaient permis » (Dunn, p. 73). Par ailleurs, Hays pense que la citation va jusqu'au verset 21, parce que Paul continue à utiliser des pronoms à la première personne, comme s'il parlait à une assistance juive. Mais il remarque que « l'effet désiré est que les Galates entendent le discours destiné à Pierre, comme s'il s'adressait aussi à leur situation » (Hays, p. 230).

Paul ne nous dit jamais si Pierre était d'accord avec lui ; la plupart des érudits en concluent que Pierre n'était pas d'accord (Hays, p. 231). Certains chrétiens juifs ont maintenu des Églises séparées pendant plusieurs siècles après Christ.

13 Paul parle-t-il de reconstruire une barrière entre les Juifs et les non-Juifs ? Ou ses adversaires disaient-ils qu'il changerait son enseignement sur la loi ? Ou utilise-t-il un proverbe pour parler de rebâtir le *péché*, après avoir prêché que Jésus est mort pour le détruire ?

14 Paul n'utilise pas souvent ce titre pour Christ. Le mot ici semble impliquer « Celui qui est comme Dieu ».

Bill Hall
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The Editor,

Northern Light

101 - 5668 192 Street,
Surrey, BC V3S 2V7
or email us at:

northernlight@wgc.ca

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