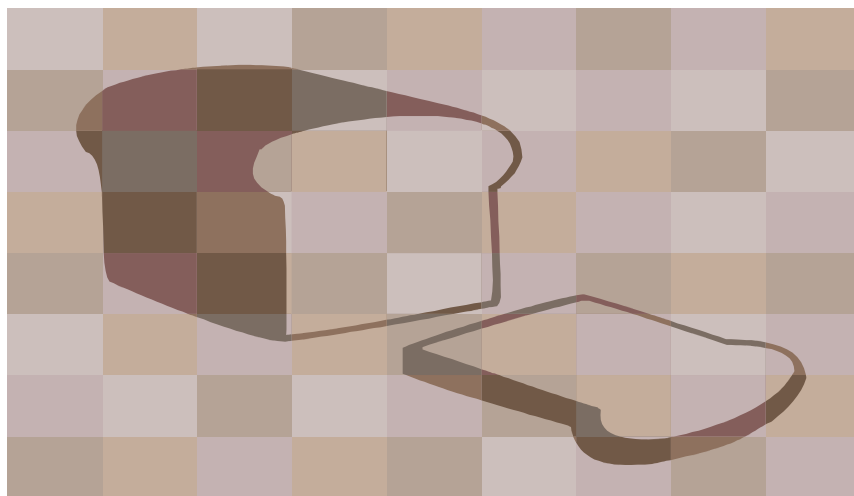


Favour



Enjoying the children's bread

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Enjoying the children's bread

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Introduction

We live in an age when sound doctrine often gives way to what we feel and to what we experience. Feelings change with the wind and experiences are so often the result of living in a fallen world - where, according to Jesus, the prince of this world rules and we can expect tribulation.

There is a great need to lift our sights to the truth of the written word and beyond our experience, so that our experience can catch up with the truth.

The scripture tells us faith must come first - indeed it is described in Hebrews 11 as 'the substance' of what we hope for, and 'the evidence' of what is not yet seen..

Then our faith will determine our experiences, which in turn, so often, reflects in more maturity in our feelings.

We are going to set out in this booklet the basis for an expectation of favour from God, because scripture exhorts us that, '*the truth will set you free.*' John 8:32

When we really do believe that the Lord will grant us His favour – then we are empowered to see life's experiences in a different way and to act in increased trust in Him. The result is that circumstances and experience can be changed so that we can reign in life.

Chapter 1

Let's define what we mean by favour

The very early church increased daily:

*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having **favour** with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:46-47*

The word translated 'favour' is 'charis,' and in almost every other reference in the scripture it is translated 'grace.'

So favour is grace, and grace is favour, or another way of saying it – being in a state of graciousness – as scripture here reports regarding the very early church.

So there we have it. Favour is goodwill, it's kindness beyond that which is either due or usual, it's friendly regard and it's grace. It is not merited or earned in any way whatsoever.

This is what we are discussing in this booklet - the kindness of the Lord to His children beyond anything we can imagine, and not earned by merit.

The kindness of God

Every Christian would agree that the zenith of God's kindness to mankind, and to each of us individually, is expressed in Jesus Christ. The perfect, sinless, Son given freely to an undeserving, and oft times, ungrateful world, as an acceptable sacrifice for sin, and as the only way to salvation. The only way to a relationship with God the Father.

The children's bread

Jesus had this to say in one of the bible's most difficult passages:

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

The Jews therefore quarrelled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

"For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

"This is the bread which came down from heaven-- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

John 6:51-58

However one seeks to interpret this passage there is a very clear message- Humans need bread (or its equivalent) to maintain physical life. Bread is fully taken into the physical system of the body such that the two become one and inseparable.

In the same way we must take Jesus fully into our system such that we are inseparable – the references to His body and blood showing our full recognition of His death on the cross, that is the sacrifice, He made on our behalf.

Jesus is the favour of God given to man – to each and every one that will believe in Him – thus He is our sustenance. He is the children's bread and He represents the full favour of God.

Favour is the goodness of God, personalised in Jesus, and manifest into our lives.

Chapter 2

Can we expect to receive God's favour?

One is tempted to say - 'Yes, of course,' and many Christians will readily agree. However, we must also take into account human nature and there are many, and perhaps all of us at times, who question whether or not we can expect the favour of God.

At one level the scripture tells us that we have already received all that is necessary:

*'Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,
According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.'*
2 Peter 1:2-3

Yet our experience, and the experiences of those around us, continually seem to say something different. Life can seem full of shortages, sicknesses, injustices, unfulfilled hopes and so on.

If God has given us all things that pertain to life, then why does life so often seem fraught with problems?

If God is good – how can this be? If God is not good - then the whole question of His favour can be forgotten.

His goodness

'Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?'
Romans 2:4

The goodness of God leads us to repentance – it was God's goodness in the very first place that led us to finding Him at all. He led us to Himself with a definite purpose in mind –

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.' John 15:16

The Lord God chose you to bear fruit.
Here is His purpose for your life. It may not be the same as your purpose for your life, and this is where so much trouble starts.

Let us consider the logic for a moment –

God gives His Son for you – He purchases you such that *'you are not your own you were bought with a price.'* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

He now has ownership and therefore He can dictate your actions – but He chooses not to be a dictator, rather He seeks to work together with you in your free will.

He has plans for you - Ephesians 2:10 tells us that He has prepared good works for us to walk in them.

Simple logic tells us that if God is good – and He is, (it was His goodness that drew us to Himself to start with), and if this good God has plans for us, then we could expect those plans to be the best for us and to lead to fruitfulness and we could expect His enabling to work out those plans.

However, there are three forces working against His purposes.

- a) Our own nature (flesh) is said to be at war with the Spirit of God. Galatians 5:17
- b) The world and those who populate it are 'fallen' – that means the world is full of sin and has completely different standards and objectives than the Lord. John 15:18
- c) The world is currently ruled by the Prince of Darkness who has a host of fallen angels working for him. John 14:30 And who seeks to devour whom he can. 1 Peter 5:8

- **We can expect the favour of God**
- **But there are forces working against it.**

Chapter 3

Expectation is part of the story

You are what you eat!

This is the world's wisdom and, of course, the saying relates to our physical diet. In a sense we are the sum total of what we eat – the food has been completely absorbed by our bodies which have also rejected the waste.

So can we and should we draw a spiritual parallel? Already Jesus has told us that we should 'eat His body and drink His blood,' – we saw that in chapter 1 where we quoted from John 6: 51-8.

So what should we 'eat' in spiritual terms. Jesus represents above all the full representation of truth:

'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.'

Colossians 2:8-10

In the first part of this quote we are warned that the philosophy of this world will cheat us – i.e. will prevent us from receiving what is rightfully ours to enjoy.

In the second part we are told in Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form. So when we 'eat' Jesus we are 'eating' the fullness of the Godhead.

In John chapter 1 Jesus is given another name – that name is, in Greek, 'Logos' and translated in English, 'word.'

John tells us the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

So now we can draw at least one conclusion – we should be 'eating' the full revelation of God as represented by Jesus, the '*logos*' or 'word.'

Our bible describes itself as the 'writings' (in Greek - *graphie*) and as such is a part of the logos, the full revelation of truth. It is inspired and will be good food for us to 'eat' in our spiritual diet.

God's favour as pictured in the Olive Tree.

Scripture shows us that favour and the fatness of God in a remarkably descriptive passage which is full of instruction for us – this passage shows that we can expect God's favour.

Before we look at the actual passage I want to list the points to look out for:

- 1) The root of the Olive Tree is 'fatness' – this has the meaning of becoming replete or, 'stuffed' in common language. In the passage it is associated also with goodness.
- 2) Nations are described as branches and are either grafted in or are not. Thus the nation(s) will or will not receive the flow of fatness from the root. Any nation, whether grafted in or a natural branch, draws from the root – which is the root of fatness.
- 3) The cutting off of branches is for unbelief.
- 4) Israel were natural branches in the Olive Tree, but some of these natural branches were cut off for unbelief – leaving any believing branches still there! (A believing Jew was one who believed in the coming Messiah as his sin bearer and saviour.)
- 5) Gentiles were 'grafted in' but warned that they too could be cut off for unbelief.

So where does this leave you and me – assuming that we are born again believers, we are 'in' the Olive Tree, and are and can draw on the root of fatness.

'I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,

"Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?

But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."

And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.

Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always."

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

*And if **some** of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.*

You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."

*Well said. **Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith.** Do not be haughty, but fear.*

For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

*Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; **but toward you, goodness**, if you continue in His goodness.*

Otherwise you also will be cut off.

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen'.

Romans 11

The Olive Tree represents the full favour of God

So we can see that the Olive Tree is all about the goodness, the favour, the fatness of God which is supplied by the root. Branches represent nations of people – Jew and Gentile. It was ‘natural’ for Israel to be ‘in’ the Olive Tree as the chosen people of God – a position national Israel forfeited through unbelief.

(‘Israel’ is not the Olive Tree itself as some commentators would have us believe. Israel is not described as the root or even as the trunk but only as branches thereof, albeit natural branches.)

My believing friend we, born again believers, are in the Olive Tree, we can expect the flow of goodness, favour, fatness from the root. Watch out though, the passage makes it clear that unbelief will stop the flow and lead to being ‘cut off’ from the root. (I do not infer the loss of one’s eternal salvation here at all, rather it is the root of fatness that one is cut off from. Our eternal inheritance is guaranteed.)

Chapter 4

What is favour?

We can see from scripture that when Israel was at its peak – under David, it was well established in the purposes of God, and under Solomon it revelled in the goodness of God. However, in the reign of Solomon it all started to go wrong for Israel through the admixture of other religions – leading eventually to the cutting off of Israel when they rejected the Messiah.

At its peak Israel was the leading nation of the world – we know that from scripture:

‘And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.

Each man brought his present: articles of silver and gold, garments, armour, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate year by year’.

2 Chronicles 9:23-24

Here we see all the Kings of the earth bringing annual tribute to Solomon. This speaks clearly of Israel’s leading position in the nations at that time.

When the fabulously wealthy Queen of Sheba visited, and saw the abundance in Israel, such was the effect on her that the scripture tells us, *‘there was no more spirit in her.’* (2 Chronicles 9:4)

The fantastic promise of God to Abraham – *‘ that his descendants would be too many to number’* - is recorded as being fulfilled in this time, see 1 Kings 3:8.

From this we can conclude that God’s favour is worth having and that God’s promises are certain – though often conditional.

New covenant

We have to bring this concept of favour into the context of the covenant that we have with God. The terms of that covenant are laid out for us in the New Testament.

Like any commercial arrangement it is vitally important to understand the terms of the agreement / contract, and to make a distinction between the current agreement and any previous one. For this reason we look to the New Testament because it records a New Covenant / Agreement.

The Old Testament charts the history of God's dealings with man up to the coming of the Messiah. As such it is inspired and contains the wisdom of God for that time. However, we have to be careful to 'rightly divide the word of God,' meaning rightly applying the scripture to its intended time frame.

Paul put it like this:

'..... if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,'
Ephesians 3:2

Paul states that now we are in a dispensation of grace (or favour). A dispensation could be described as being like a household. The household has 'rules' by which it operates. The previous dispensation was one of 'Law' – God had given the Law for His chosen people to live by. These were the 'house rules' of that time.

When Israel was 'cut off' and the Gentiles 'grafted in' the dispensation changed to one of grace, because the Law had been fulfilled in the Messiah. Paul tells us that the Law, by demonstrating that it was not possible for man to keep it, was a tutor pointing to the need of the Messiah, – but He came and was not recognised. In the New Covenant there is a fundamental change - it is the Holy Spirit, rather than the law, who convicts of sin and points to Jesus.

The flow of the blessing of God

Favour can be described as the flow of the blessing of God – that God wants to bless His children is amply demonstrated in the following scriptures:

'For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.'

Romans 5:17

'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' Hebrews 4:16

'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.' James 1:17

Key points:

- 1) We are expected to 'reign in life.'
- 2) There is an abundance of grace (favour)
- 3) Come – you are invited – especially in time of need.
- 4) It is only good gifts that come from God because there is no variation or even shadow of turning in Him.

Favour then:

- * Enables us to overcome problems – that is to reign in life.
- * Provides for our needs.
- * Is in abundance.
- * Is freely available.

Again we are faced with the question – why does life so often seem to be full of the opposite of favour as we enumerated earlier?

Favour is not....

- A get rich quick concept.
- Related primarily to money.
- The 'prosperity gospel.'

Quite a lot of what is taught as 'doctrine' in some circles is very orientated towards money and material prosperity. The concept of 'favour' is not linked to money – in fact we need God's favour in all sorts of circumstances where money is irrelevant.

On the other hand, and to complete the picture, it would be strange indeed to teach that we are favoured of God and then exclude financial and physical provision. So we don't.- **God's favour is all encompassing.**

Chapter 5

The 'more than bread' concept

In order to bridge the gap between what we see in scripture and what we seem to experience in life we are going to look more deeply at what I am calling 'the more than bread concept.'

Jesus gave us clear guidance

When Jesus was in the wilderness, fasting, the devil challenged Him with hunger, Jesus had this to say in response:

'Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

*But He answered and said, "It is written, '**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**'"* Matthew 4:1-4

We are not designed to live only on physical bread. We need 'spiritual' more than bread even more so.

Jesus describes this 'spiritual' more than bread as being every word that proceeds (or is proceeding) from the mouth of God.

In order to understand exactly what is being said here we need to look at one more original Greek word. Here it is inserted into the sentence:

'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every *rhema* that proceeds from the mouth of God'

'*Rhema*' is translated 'word.' In chapter 3 we saw that one of Jesus' names was '*logos*,' also translated 'word.' So what exactly do these two Greek words mean?

'*Rhema*' means 'a little phrase or saying.' What is really important is what is being said and who is saying it!

'*Logos*' we have already described as meaning the 'full revelation.' As such the '*logos*' will include every *rhema* ever spoken and also includes the whole of the written scripture.

Clearly the two words are closely connected but are not interchangeable – thus it is vital to understand which word is in use.

Man does not live by bread alone but by every little phrase or saying that is proceeding from the mouth of God. We have a God who speaks to us – Jesus said, *'My sheep hear My voice,'* it doesn't get much clearer than that. (John 10:27)

So our 'spiritual' more than bread is the literal voice of God speaking to us and we need to learn to hear and apply. (This is covered in detail in a booklet 'Hearing God Speak.')

Another logical link

We are in the process of forming another logical link – our 'more than bread' is the voice of God.

The voice of God brings faith:

'So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (rhema) of God.'
Romans 10:17

Thus the favour of God can be delivered through faith.

I am not saying that 'through faith' is the only way God's favour is manifested in our lives – for the 'sap' in a tree can always be rising. But, 'through faith' is a path, chosen by God, to deliver His specific blessing and favour in addition to the more general flow of favour rising like sap all the time. i.e. bread and more!

This brings us to yet another logical sequence seen in the scripture:

'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'
Hebrews 11:1

In this sequence:

| | |
|--------|---|
| First | there must 'hope' |
| Second | there must be faith |
| Third | the manifestation as described in the rest of Hebrews 11. |

We have already seen the link between ‘spiritual more than bread’ and faith.’ In doing that we have, as it were, jumped in half way through the sequence – now we must go back and make sure that we understand the first part of the sequence.

Hope is the essential first ingredient on our journey to the fullness of the manifestation of the power of God.

Definition of hope

Hope is the certainty of future blessing.

‘I know that the Lord will bless me.’

Joshua was told that he would make his way successful and prosperous if he meditated day and night on the book of the law. We have to re-interpret this wise instruction into the dispensation of grace. Our meditation will be primarily in the New Testament because that is the contract / agreement between God and man for this time. (Some meditation in the Old Testament will be beneficial so long as we rightly divide what is still applicable in this day. For example – mediation in the law may have some historical interest and may increase our knowledge of the way the Lord has dealt with His people in the past but carries no instruction for the present – see Paul’s letter to the Galatians. There are some excellent scriptures which show aspects of the character of God in the Old Testament – well worth meditating on.)

Hope is built on the promises and on the character of God mainly as displayed for us in the New Covenant.

For example:

‘And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His} purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God {is} for us, who {is} against us?

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Romans 8:28-32

[New American Standard Version]

See what tremendous ‘hope’ there is in this passage. - God will cause all things to work for good for those who love Him.

For many believers we now hit a problem. For whatever reason they just cannot believe that this is true – unfortunately that is called ‘unbelief’ and causes a blockage in the flow of God’s favour.

The scripture tells us how to overcome this unbelief and I have dealt with it fully in other booklets. I would recommend therefore that the reader also refer to the following booklets:

‘Hope – the certainty of future blessing.’

‘Renewing the mind’

‘Working from rest’

‘Faith or presumption.’

Chapter 6

It's unmerited

This is one of the hardest facts for any human to grasp – God's favour is unmerited. The bible calls that GRACE.

His favour will flow over us because of what has been accomplished in His Son. Jesus shares all the glory of the Father because they are one. Now believers are found 'in Christ' – we are one with Him. The bible expressly describes it – 'we have become one spirit.' (1 Corinthians 6:17)

We know that the Lord God created the whole physical realm and we know that He has intervened in the physical realm, on behalf of His chosen people, all through history.

Therefore we can say with certainty that God is able and willing to intervene on behalf of His children today – and indeed we have already seen scriptures inviting us to seek His intervention in times of need.

Coming empty handed

It is important that we understand the unmerited nature of grace – coming to the Lord as if we are entitled to some merit through our behaviour or our success or our standing, will avail nothing. We come because we are children, blood bought, and deeply loved and favoured by God – we are coming to 'daddy' in that sense. We are coming because we know who we are but we don't know His specific strategy for meeting our present need.

Certainly we can seek to remind the Lord that we are blood bought and that He has made promises to us in the scripture – however, all we are really doing is reminding ourselves, and that is no bad thing!

The nature of favour is that it is a gift – the giver is the Lord the receiver is you and me. As we dwell on that concept for a moment, let's consider the concept of 'gift:'

Given out of free will.

Chosen especially to suit the recipient.

Often unexpected.

A gift is chosen by the giver to suit the receiver. So we see that unmerited favour is not our idea of what I want, and I want it now. Rather it is the flow of goodness from God whose gifts are like this:

'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.'
James 1:17

Receiving – taking hold of the favour.

We have seen that the children's 'more than bread' comes by faith – it is the result of hearing, God speaking a 'rhema' word to us. But we have to receive that word. Look at Romans 5:17:

'much more those who receive the abundance of grace'

Receive is 'lambano' in the Greek and it means to 'take hold of for oneself.'

When God speaks we are to take hold of that word from Him and not to let it slip away because our flesh rejects it or the enemy questions it, as so often happens – for then doubt creeps in and we are in unbelief.

Chapter 7

Spirit and truth going arm in arm

Church history is full of groups of believers and church movements. Many of these groups or movements have, as it were, specialised in one aspect. Some have focused strongly on the biblical truth, unfortunately often denying the Spirit. Some have focused on the Spirit, unfortunately often without the plumb line of the truth. Neither of these approaches encapsulates the whole of God's revelation to mankind.

There is a passage in the book of Zechariah which shows the perfect harmony with the golden result:

'Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep.

And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps.

"Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left."

So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?"

Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."

So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.

'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."

Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees-- at the right of the lampstand and at its left?"

And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?"

Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."

So he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth."

Zechariah 4:1-14

Let's look at some of the key points:

The temple is being built

The abiding power is 'by My Spirit.'

Zerubbabel's hands are a necessary part of the process.

The plumb line is there.

We can look upon these as a biblical type and apply them to our life:

We are now the temple of the Holy Spirit and He is the abiding power by whom we are changed progressively into the likeness of Christ.

Our 'hands' are a necessary part of the process.

The plumb line of truth is essential to verify 'uprightness.'

In the passage above the Lord granted Zerubbabel a vision to enhance his understanding –

Two olive trees are dripping oil which is then used to continually keep the lampstand alight (without human intervention – as was necessary in the historical Jewish temple).

These two olive trees represent the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord God – surely that would be Jesus (the logos – the truth) and the Holy Spirit standing by the Father.

Spirit and truth working together produce the 'golden oil' which keeps the lamp alight. Oil is often used in connection with anointing – representing god's presence and blessing.

So it will be in our 'temple' – if we want to see the light continually burning, then truth and Spirit must be given equal standing – not 50% Spirit and 50% truth, but, 100% Spirit and 100% truth.

Then we will see and receive the full favour of God.

(The two olive trees are also referred to as the two witnesses in Revelation. Whilst we cannot be absolutely sure it seems very likely that these two witnesses are Moses (representing truth) and Elijah (representing the Spirit))

Chapter 8

Blockages and perseverance

Let's take a look at what might stand in the way of the full flow of god's favour.

1) Unbelief

Romans 11 tells us that Israel was cut off for unbelief, so it is clear that unbelief is likely to be the major problem.

Unbelief often arises when our trust in the Lord is not fully developed.. For whatever reason we cannot quite accept His goodness – even though scripture tells us that it is His goodness which leads us to repentance.

Somehow we still feel that in some, or most, or all, circumstances God is testing us or judging us. This thinking creates a situation where we are less able, or even unable, to perceive His favour, which is then curtailed by our unbelief.

If we approach our relationship with the Lord on the basis that He is judgemental towards us, then it is very easy for the accuser of the brethren to condemn us with our failures. For there will certainly be failures in the course of life. Scripture tells us the judgement that was due to us was laid on Jesus Christ. He has borne the punishment already (see Isaiah 53). Why then do we allow ourselves to come under condemnation?

Rather, the position should be that we rejoice in the goodness of God who has made full and total provision for our weaknesses and failures in the cross of Christ. This does not mean that we enjoy sin, failure and weakness. The Holy Spirit will convict us of these things so that we can repent. But it does mean that we are free from condemnation, free to expect and to enjoy the favour of God.

Now clearly, if we choose to revel in sin and choose to indulge the flesh, and choose to walk away from the path of righteousness, we will find that we are unable to expect the Lord to look favourably upon us. We will also feel condemned for the full scriptural quote says that *'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'*. (Romans 8:1) So those not walking by the Spirit are likely to feel condemned.

This is not to say that we can achieve righteousness ourselves – we cannot. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to change us from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18) – there is a process going on in us bringing us bit by bit into a closer and more pleasing walk with God. We can co-operate with this process, we can invite the Holy Spirit to work in us and we can know that we are being changed as we go.

2) God is testing me

Another common line of thinking is that God is constantly testing us through the circumstances of life – as if He has to find out about us. If we think this problem or that problem is God testing us, then somehow we have to pass the test! And if we don't (which is usually the case) then we are back into condemnation and the accuser moves in to increase the problem.

There are so many stresses, strains and problems in the world that God does not have to add to them. Problems are caused by the fact that the world is fallen, so sin abounds, and by the fact that the devil is the prince of this world.

Our reaction is not to be 'God is testing me.' No not at all. In fact the bible gives exactly the opposite message –

'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' Hebrews 4:16

In the book of James, chapter 1, we are explicitly taught that God does not test anyone. Here the Greek word for tempted and tested is exactly the same – so the passage can be read using either translation. Whatever, the message is clear - the Lord does not test / tempt anyone – He has no need to do so, for He knows all there is to know about us already.

3) God is trying to teach me something

The third common line of thinking when problems arise is 'God is trying to teach me something.' In my experience of meeting and hearing people who say this, they never seem to know what it is that God is supposed to be teaching them. This observation alone should be enough to quash this concept for Jesus is the best teacher the world has or will ever know. Not only that, the scripture tells us clearly that the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth – He is our teacher, not circumstances.

4) I'm sharing the suffering of Christ

Really? When was Jesus sick, or in poverty, or unable to help those who came to Him in need. When was Jesus a failure? When was Jesus depressed? When did Jesus sin? The scripture says that we share the sufferings of Christ so in what way did He suffer?

- a) He was opposed by Satan. That caused some pressure – but Jesus dealt with the pressure and defeated Satan. Satan is now a defeated foe. Jesus specifically gave us authority over his works. So, yes we will suffer opposition from Satan, but we are already empowered to overcome it.
- b) Opposition from people - Indeed we will suffer opposition from people. These moments can be turned into prayer for our oppressors -often with amazing results.
- c) Jesus was crucified. We also embrace crucifixion. We have to treat our flesh as if it were crucified with Christ – so that we can come through to saying with Paul, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.' This is worked out on a daily basis.

Perseverance

Jesus told us plainly – 'in this world you will have tribulation.' (John 16:33) Therefore we cannot expect life to be 'plain sailing' even though we are to expect to receive the favour of God.

Scripture tells us that perseverance has an important part to play in developing godly character within us (Romans 5:4) – therefore when situations arise which require both patience and perseverance we are to experience God's favour within the situation until He delivers us from it.

The big danger for us is that we tend to blame the Lord and even rail at Him, instead of seeking His grace, and resting in the certain knowledge that His grace will carry us through and will deliver us.

In this context we could consider Job – not that there is an exact parallel. The point is that there was deliverance by grace into a wonderful conclusion. Job did not accuse God even though Satan was permitted to 'throw everything at him.'

(In the New Covenant we have been given authority over the works of Satan [Luke 10:19] – this is never said to be so in the Old Testament.

Therefore we need not suffer under the works of our enemy. This is why we cannot draw an exact parallel with Job, for he had no authority over the works of the devil – but we can see the outcome of his perseverance and take heart.)

Chapter 9

Clear channels

'At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Matthew 18:1-3

Jesus is speaking with clarity – entering into the Kingdom requires a childlike attitude. It is this simple level of trust that the Lord is looking for in us. However, we have become adult, grown up, and we like things to be more complex and we like to think that something we do in some ways qualifies us for some benefit or reward. We like to accomplish things – it gives us a sense of self worth.

In the Kingdom of God our self worth is actually down to just one thing – God loves us. Again scripture is abundantly clear – there was nothing of any value whatsoever in us that stirred love for us, in Him (Romans 5:8). His love for us is purely because of His innate goodness.

For most of us there is a lot of 'baggage' to clear out of the way. All those feelings that we must somehow earn our way with the Lord must go. All that striving to please Him must go. All that striving in our own strength to conquer sin must go. All that remains is to be a love relationship with Him in which we trust Him and in which we trust the Holy Spirit to change us more and more into His likeness.

Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing is what we have available to offer to the Lord – nothing. We are saved by grace – that is His unmerited favour – He chooses to favour us because of His love and because of His goodness, not because of anything we have or can do.

So you can see that a childlikeness is required, a simplicity that accepts we cannot contribute to grace, we can only receive it.

The only way into this simple childlike attitude is through love – receiving His love and loving Him in return. Even loving Him is beyond our natural ability – so my favourite and most frequent prayer is pertinent:

'Holy Spirit fill me with more and more love for Jesus.' Amen.
(*Prescription - take as frequently as possible.*)

Keeping the channels clear

The revelation of the favour of God has grown over the last few years when a fellowship we attended (called the Olive Tree) was seeking the Lord to understand why He had named the fellowship so.

I had been seeking the Lord for some time until I eventually reached that point of understanding through study and prayer – I was ready to share my new insights with the men of the fellowship over our weekly breakfast together.

Before I could speak, Gordon, one of the brothers said he had asked the Lord for a word, and that the Lord had replied with one word – 'favour.' That was exactly the word my study and prayer had led me to also.

As a result we felt the very clear leading of the Lord that we were on the right track.

This resulted in us asking the Lord to reveal how the channels of His favour could be kept clear. The Lord gave us some clear answers:

- 1) Understand and believe the scriptural basis for favour.
- 2) Acknowledge the fact that the Lord has re-gathered Israel and that He has future plans for that Nation. That does not mean that every decision and every action of the government of Israel has to be agreed with.
- 3) For married couples - husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. See yourself and your wife as part and counterpart, as in the initial creation before the fall.
Wives – consider your husband as head of the household and beware of any desire to control him. The judgement on Eve contained the statement that her desire * 'would be for her husband but that he would rule over her.'
- 4) Do not be anxious for anything, but cast, or throw away your cares on Jesus.
- 5) Be generous with money.

- 6) Freely give spiritual gifts.
- 7) Build yourself up by speaking in tongues.
- 8) Keep your mind renewed and built up in truth through biblical meditation.

[* this is desire 'to control' – see Genesis 4:7 where sin desires to control Cain, it is the same Hebrew wording in Genesis 3:16]

Chapter 10

Let's do it

With all bible study there comes a point where one can choose theory and leave it at that, or, one can seek to turn the theory into life changing experience - by action.

The Lord is ready, willing, able and desiring to exhibit His favour to His people, just as he exhibited it to Israel when they fulfilled His requirements of those days.

The expectation of His favour is a state of mind based on sound biblical understanding. Sometimes our unbiblical thinking is very deep rooted and that needs to be addressed. In a booklet called 'Renewing the Mind' I have shown how, through biblical meditation, even deep seated error, prejudice and wrong thinking can be addressed and changed.

Hope faith and love.

Paul tells us that many things will fall away but that these three will remain. He goes on to tell us that love is the most important. Elsewhere he also tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. That brings us to hope.

Hope is critical to receiving God's favour – because hope and faith go hand in hand and are 'belief', whilst 'unbelief' will be a blockage.

Biblically expressed, 'hope is the certain expectation of future blessing.' This expectation (or hope) is based upon the true nature of God, both His character and His promises. Scripture describes Him to us and our testimony, as we look back over past experiences, should reinforce the truth – God is good.

If self-examination reveals that one does not have that deep seated inner certainty, then it is opportune to take steps to build hope so that the full flow of God's favour can be received.

(I have dealt with the subject of hope in another booklet, 'Hope - the certainty of future blessing.')

Faith is described as the foundation of things hoped for. That is – hope is present already, then we perceive the Lord's intention in a matter (hear

God speak) and faith arises. Faith then becomes the foundation for the thing hoped for to come into reality in our experience. (See booklet 'Faith or presumption.')

In many ways love is the real key issue. Love has many attributes described for us by Paul. A deep and intimate love relationship with the Lord is a crucial factor in knowing Him and appreciating His character. Without love such faith as we have can become hard, harsh and fail to be Christlike.

I know of no way in which we can increase the love of God within us – it becomes a question of the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us to increase love for the Lord in us. Only the Holy Spirit can change us on the inside and deepen our relationship. We can pray and invite Him to do so.

Let's do it - let's pray. 'Holy Spirit fill me with love for Jesus, more and more and more love for Jesus.' Amen.

Chapter 11

Objective

We have come a long way in our journey. Our objective was to be increased in the favour of God. Now we must consider one of the hardest factors of Christianity.

Death to self.

I have described this as one of the hardest aspects of Christianity because our own flesh will strenuously object to ‘dying’ and is likely to try to do all to avoid it altogether.

Yet, scripture is very clear on the matter – here are some examples:

Unless a seed fall into the ground and die it remains alone and bears no fruit. (John 12:24)

It is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. (Galatians 2:20)

The flesh wars (lusts against) with the spirit. (Galatians 5:17)

In my flesh dwells no good thing.

Discarding even garments stained by the flesh.

Crucified with Christ. (Romans 6:6)

There is no question about it – if we want to be in the full flow of God’s good intentions for us, then we need to die to ourselves, so that we live unto Him. Indeed, I doubt that we can genuinely and completely hope for His favour to fully flow over us and at the same time live a fleshly existence. On the other hand when we are fully surrendered to His will – then it seems natural that His favour will flow over us.

Unanswered prayers.

Christ living in us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, manifests in an attitude in us that treasures other peoples good. We want to see others benefit and be blessed.

In today’s atmosphere believers frequently become self- centred instead of fruitful. Indeed some preachers and teachers promote heavily a gospel of personal prosperity. Times don’t change, hear what James wrote:

‘You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.’
James 4:3

It seems that, even in the early church, there were those who saw the gospel as a means of personal gain (1 Timothy 6:5) and prayed for their own material well being (James 4:3). That is not the gospel. The gospel teaches us of an eternal dwelling place prepared for us, where God Himself will dwell with His people. In this place there will be no sickness etc etc. it is a place of perfection.

Our 'frantic' prayers for a bigger better new car, a bigger better home, this latest gadget or that, merely show that we are self centred and materialistic. The Lord knows about the things that we need -(Matthew 6:32)

He adds to us according to our need and according to His wisdom when we focus on Him and His Kingdom.

Chapter 12

Zealous for good works.

We have arrived at the end of our journey and at God's desired outcome. He wants His children to be fruitful:

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." John 15:16

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

We, as children, are seen as branches abiding in the vine – that is our life is the sap flowing from vine and causing us, as branches, to bear fruit. Surely this speaks of a totally surrendered life, intimately joined to the giver of all life, Jesus.

It also speaks of fruit in abundance coming forth in our lives – that is not at all the same thing as us setting out to be fruitful by creating big ministries or any ministries. Rather it is speaking of what the Holy Spirit will achieved in and through us if we co-operate with Him in what He plans for us.

Another way of expressing this would be to say that the Holy Spirit is working out His ministry in us and not that we are working out our ministry in His power.

Our zealousness then is to be targeted at working at what we are called by the Lord to do, together with Him so that the life of Christ is worked out through us. There is no ambition here, other than the ambition to please Him by flowing with Him. That is the picture of the vine - where fruit is borne by the branches as they remain abiding there, not as they struggle in their own strength.

Now we will see the favour of the Lord in full measure. No matter what our circumstances we will be full of the Holy Spirit – full of love, full of joy, full of peace. And, of course, the Lord knows our needs and will add to us beyond what we can imagine.

We will experience the joy of answered prayer because we have learnt to pray according to His will (as revealed by His *rhema* words). We will

experience the joy of being blessed and being a blessing to others. As we hear His strategy and obediently follow it.

God bless - may you enjoy the flow of the 'fatness' of God and may you hear and receive that additional element, above 'bread alone' as He speaks to you.