



Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship

Study Supplement No. 2

1. Can You Trust the Holy Spirit to Save You?

by Joseph Tkach

2. Life after war

by Michael L. Zorn

3. Starting right and finishing well (Bible Study)

by Michael Morrison

May 2002

Something worth thinking about...

By Joseph Tkach

Can You Trust the Holy Spirit to Save You?

One of our elders recently told me that the main reason he was baptised 20 some years ago is that he wanted to receive the power of the Holy Spirit so that he could overcome all his sins. His intentions were good, but his understanding was a bit flawed. (No one understands perfectly, of course, and we are saved by God's mercy despite our misunderstandings.)

The Holy Spirit is not something we can "switch on" to achieve our overcoming goals, like some kind of supercharger for our willpower. The Holy Spirit is God, present with us and in us, giving us the love, assurance and close fellowship that the Father has for us in Christ. Through Christ, the Father has made us his own children, and the Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual sense of knowing that (Rom. 8:16).

The Holy Spirit gives us intimate fellowship with God through Christ, but he does not suspend our ability to sin. We still have wrong desires, still have wrong motives, still have wrong thoughts, words and actions.

Even though we may want to stop a particular habit, we find that we are still unable to do it. We know that it is God's will for us to be freed from this problem, but for some reason we still seem to be powerless to shake its influence over us.

Can we believe that the Holy Spirit really is at work in our lives—especially when it seems like nothing is really happening, because we are not being very "good" Christians? When we struggle with sin again and again, when it seems like we are not changing much at all, do we conclude that we are so messed up that not even God can fix the problem?

Babies and adolescents

When we come to faith in Christ, we are born again, regenerated, by the Holy Spirit. We are new creatures, new persons, babes in Christ. Babies are not powerful, not skilled, not self-cleaning.

As they grow, they acquire some skills, and they also begin to realise that there is a lot they cannot do, and this sometimes leads to frustration.

They fidget with the crayons and scissors and fret that they cannot do as well as an adult can. But the fits of frustration do not help—only time and practice will help.

This is true in our spiritual lives, too. Sometimes new Christians are given dramatic power to break a drug habit or a bad temper. Sometimes new Christians are instant "assets" to the church. But more often than not, it seems, new Christians struggle with the same sins they had before, have the same personalities they had before, have the same fears and frustrations. They are not spiritual giants.

Jesus has overcome sin, we are told, but it sure seems like sin still has a grip on us. The sin nature within us has been defeated, but it still treats us like we are its prisoners. O wretched people that we are! Who will save us from the law of sin and death? Jesus, of course (Romans 7:24-25). He has already won the victory—and he has made that victory ours.

Alas! We do not yet see the complete victory. We do not yet see his power over death, nor the complete end of sin in our lives. As Hebrews 2:8 says, we do not yet see all things under our feet. What we do is trust Jesus. We trust his word that he has won the victory, and we trust his word that in him we too are victorious.

Still, even though we know we are clean and pure in Christ, we would also like to see progress in overcoming our personal sins. Such progress may seem excruciatingly slow at times, but we can trust God to do what he has promised—in us as well as in others.

After all, it is his work, not ours. It is his power, not ours. It is his agenda, not ours. When we submit ourselves to God, we have to be willing to wait on him. We have to be willing to trust him to do his work in us in the way and at the speed he knows is right.

Adolescents often think they know more than Dad knows. They think they know what life is all about and that they can handle it all pretty well on their own. (Not all adolescents are like that, of course, but the stereotype is based on some evidence.)

We Christians can sometimes think in a way similar to adolescents. We may begin to think that "growing up" spiritually is based on right behaviour, which leads us to start thinking of our standing with God in terms of how well we are behaving. When we are behaving well, we might tend to look down on people who don't appear to have their act together so well. When we aren't behaving so well, we might fall into despair and depression, believing God has left us.

But God does not ask us to make ourselves right with him; he asks us to trust him, the one who justifies the wicked (Rom. 4:5), who loves us and saves us for the sake of Christ. As we mature in Christ, we rest more firmly in God's love demonstrated supremely for us in Christ (1 John 4:9). And as we rest in him, we look forward to the day described in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Perfection!

When that day comes, Paul says, we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We will be made immortal, imperishable, incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:52-53). And God redeems the inner person, not just the outer. He changes our innermost being, from weak and corruptible, to glorious and (most important of all) sinless. Instantly, at the last trump, we will be changed. Our bodies will be redeemed (Rom. 8:23), but more than that, we will finally see ourselves as God has made us to be in Christ (1 John 3:2). We will then see plainly the as-yet-invisible reality that God has made true in Christ.

Through Christ, our old sin nature has been defeated and demolished. In fact, it is dead. "For you have died," Paul puts it, "and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). The sin that "so easily entangles us" and which we strive to "throw off" (Heb. 12:1) is not part of the new person God has made us to be in Christ. In Christ, we have new life. At Christ's appearing, we will at last see ourselves as our Father has made us in Christ. We will see ourselves as we really are, as perfect in Christ, who is our true life (Col. 3:3-4). It is for this reason, because we have already died and been raised with Christ that we work to "put to death" whatever in us is earthly (v. 5).

We overcome Satan (and sin and death) in only one way—by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11). It is through the victory of Jesus Christ, won on the cross, that we have victory over sin and death, not through our struggles against sin. Our struggles against sin are expressions of the fact that we are in Christ, that we are no longer enemies of God, but his friends, in fellowship with him through the Holy Spirit, who works in us both to will and to do God's good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

Our struggle against sin is not the cause of our righteousness in Christ. It does not produce holiness. God's own love and grace toward us in Christ is the cause, the only cause, of our righteousness. We are made righteous, redeemed from all sin and ungodliness, by God through Christ because God is full of love and grace, and for no other reason. Our struggle against sin is the product of the new and righteous self we have been given in Christ, not the cause of it. Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8).

We hate sin, we struggle against sin, we want to avoid the pain and sorrow for ourselves and others that sin produces, because God has made us alive in Christ and the Holy Spirit is at work in us. It is because we are in Christ that we fight the sin which "so easily entangles us" (Heb. 12:1). But we gain the victory not through our own efforts, not even our own efforts as empowered by the Holy Spirit. We gain the victory through the blood of Christ, through his death and resurrection as the incarnate Son of God, God in the flesh for our sakes.

God has already done in Christ everything that needed doing for our salvation, and he has already given us everything we need for life and godliness simply by calling us to know him in Christ. And he did this simply because he is so almighty good (2 Peter 1:2-3).

The book of Revelation tells us that there will come a time when there will be no more crying and no more tears, no more hurt and no more pain, and that means no more sin, for it is sin that causes pain. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the darkness will end and sin will no longer be able to deceive us into thinking we are still its prisoners. Our true freedom, our new life in Christ, will shine forever with him in all its glorious splendour. In the meantime, we trust the word of his promise—and that is something worth thinking about.

By Joseph Tkach

Life after war

By Michael L. Zorn

SPOKANE, Washington—its New Year's, Jan. 1, 2002, and they just set off fireworks. I'm having a hard time because my body is telling me that it hears mortar fire, and I want to hide. This is part of life after war. The morning after, one might ask: "How did I sleep?" I had nightmares of a mortar attack and a flack vest with shrapnel in it. In fact, I have had 30 years of nightmares. Nights where I slept for only four hours and nights when the nightmares were so horrible I felt I was in the presence of Satan. I was too scared to go back to sleep again.

Reality of war

Hollywood can present war in graphic detail, but the reality of living through it, and after it, is a never-ending tale in itself. What I experienced in Vietnam runs the gamut from exciting new things and experiences, to stark fear.

One of my worst experiences in Vietnam was when one of my sergeants, a quiet, gentle, black man from the Carolinas, asked me to check to see if his weapon was on semi-automatic. I did as he asked, not realising his intentions.

He walked 50 feet away, disappearing behind a sandbag wall. Then I heard the weapon fire, and before I could reach him another sergeant came running out and said: "It is too late. He has blown the top of his head off." You see, my friend had received word that his daughter had run away and that his wife was filing for divorce.

I had to live with the horror and guilt that he had really been crying out for friendship. The Army tells you not to talk to anyone about these things, so for 25 years I lived with horrific nightmares.

I experienced being responsible for the protection of Vietnamese civilians and their families. I stopped fellow soldiers from stealing from a helpless woman, then I retreated out of fear for myself and the lives of the men with me when five Vietnamese soldiers broke into her home, beat her family and all five raped and beat her.

How do I look her in the face? I was sent to protect those who could not defend themselves.

Coming home

What is it like to come home, where the people you have known all your life have forgotten you? Where the media, wanting a bigger paycheck, have joined the enemy camp and accuse veterans of the very things we went to stop. Where the very people you were willing to give your life to serve will take a vet who lost his legs to a land mine and throw him on the ground and call him a baby killer.

Have you ever wondered what it is like to see someone disembowelled while alive or see their children taken and killed before their eyes? I know, and I live with that kind of horror in my mind.

I also know the reality of living with abandonment and being totally devoid of human emotion. You cannot deal with the places that America asks its young men to go and the things it asks them to do.

Emotional wounds

To do what the military requires, you cannot allow your emotions to enter into your daily thoughts and then come home to a nation that does not want you any more.

I lived for 30 years without ever letting my guard down. A civilian may not have any understanding of a life constantly on guard duty. You spend your adult life wondering why you're alive and why God didn't just let you die and spare everyone a lot of misery.

I've stood in the shower many times and said, "God, it would have been so much easier just to have died over there." I'm not alone. Two hundred other vets have told me the same thing. In the military, a Purple Heart is awarded to a soldier who receives a physical wound. No purple hearts are given for the psychological damage you may receive through a war. Then there are those things you inadvertently pass on to your family—anger, fear, bitterness, resentment, betrayal and a spirit of wandering through life. Wives and children don't get purple hearts, but the Veterans Administration says that a Vietnam vet adversely affects at least 18 women's lives.

I was born in 1947, right after World War II. My father was a veteran, and my mother's father was a Spanish-American War veteran. If you follow my family tree back to its beginning in America, you would find us involved in all kinds of wars.

I thought it was all over

When I came home on April 30, 1969, to a wife and daughter, I thought it was over. I was through with the government and all that I was asked to do. I wanted to put it behind me forever, but you cannot be involved with something as life-altering as war and come back and pick up right where you left off like nothing ever happened.

I went to college, got a degree, had three more children, was baptised, went to church and tried to make my life right. No matter what I tried since Vietnam, nothing worked, nothing would fit.

I have been asked: "What is it like to sit all night with a rifle waiting to kill anything that moved?" I knew without a doubt, that when it came, I would kill without a thought. "What is it like when you see blood running out of a man's neck?" I am not shocked, as this is part of day-to-day life. I have lived with it for the past 33 years. It followed me through every day into every night, and it moulded every thought and influenced every decision, until I was totally broken.

I've spent the last three and half years learning how to examine every thought, and still there is a rage that burns like a pilot light waiting to be triggered. Only God's grace gets me through each day

My sister wrote a letter to the Veterans Administration. She said she took her brother to the airport in March 1968 and met him when he returned to Fort Lewis, Washington, on April 30, 1969. My family got a body back, but the man we sent to Vietnam never has come home.

Through God's grace I am now coming home a little each day. Larry Barkemeyer, who, like me, is involved in Point Man Ministries, which helps heal vets, has a music tape called "20 Years of Tears." One of the songs is "The Boy I Used to Know." The lyrics are;

The boy I used to know was strong,
Yet with a kind, gentle way.
He is not here any more.
But every once in a while he comes
around."

What is it like to have a marriage that does not work, or not see your child go to his first day of school or to be able to watch their high school or college graduation? What is it like to never be able to succeed at anything you try?

What is it like when you set out as a young man with all the right intentions but what you agree to do is not what you thought it would

be. Then the rest of your life is not what you agreed to. We all had dreams, ambitions and goals. But what we endured in a year of war changed us so much. We are happy to just get by one day at a time without tears. Is that all you expect out of life?

What is this thing that the medical community calls Post-traumatic Stress Disorder? It is not just emotional scars; it's chemical imbalance, loss of brain mass, and the very violation of what God created us for. It is not something new. It has been here since the day Cain slew Abel and God cursed Cain with wandering.

Medical science now has the tools to connect all the pieces of the puzzle, except one, of what goes on in a man's mind. Without the grace of God you cannot find peace in your life. I found peace when God humbled me while I was homeless. I was physically broken and unable to work. I had lost all will to go on with my life.

The answer

Then through a long road of discovery, God showed me how Paul could abound in whatever circumstances he found himself. Facing death, chained to a guard, Paul said, "I have a peace that surpasses all understanding." When your life gets so desperate that the only thing you can do is cry out in prayer, God is waiting.

He wants to lead you out of the darkness into the light. When you are unable to produce anything in yourself, God is able to abundantly bless your life beyond comprehension. When you're all alone and you cannot bear the loneliness any more, God can bring a wife and children into your life. Without God's grace to sustain me through each day, the horror and reality of what I have been through and how it stole everything I desired in life, I could not go on each day.

Sobering statistics

More than 200,000 Vietnam vets have killed themselves. Just over 58,000 died in Vietnam. Our suicide rate is 33 percent higher than the national average. Compared to people our age who did not serve in Vietnam, it is twice as high. Of unexplainable one-car fatalities, 70 percent involve Vietnam vets.

At best, 60 percent of us have some level of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder to live with and deal with for the rest of our lives. We have the highest rate of drug and alcohol problems for our age group, and the highest percentage of incarceration. The divorce rate for Vietnam veterans is twice the national average. In Seattle, Washington, 87 percent of the street

kids (runaway, throwaway children) were children of Vietnam veterans. Our unemployment rate is twice the national average for our age group, and 25 percent of us live on less than \$7,000 a year. One third of all of the homeless people in America are veterans.

Now our nation is involved in yet another war. We'll have a whole new generation of young men and women who will come home to what? Only God in us through Jesus Christ can make a difference in what this new generation will face. Can we love them just as Christ would? Accept them just as he called them. After all, he did the same for all of us.

By Michael L. Zorn

Michael L. Zorn, a member in Spokane, Washington, entered the Vietnam War during the Tet Offensive in 1968 and served until April 1969. His e-mail address is Ptsdvet@spocom.com

Bible Study

By Michael Morrison

Starting right and finishing well.

A study of Philippians 3

Paul writes to the church in Philippi to encourage them to rejoice in their trials and to be considerate of one another. In chapter 3, he comments on the foundation of the faith and exhorts them to finish well. He tells them that salvation is not by works, but he exhorts them to work. Let's see how he balances these two thoughts.

The true people of God

Although Paul is only in the middle of his letter, he indicates his transition by writing, "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!" (3:1). He wants to stress that joy is found "in the Lord."

"It is no trouble for me to write," he says, "the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you" (3:1). In other words, I've told you before, but I think it will be helpful if I

remind you. Then he warns them about false teachers.

"Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh" (3:2). Paul is referring to Judaisers, who taught that people must be circumcised in order to be saved. This heresy was apparently not an urgent problem in Philippi, but Paul wanted to be sure that the Philippians wouldn't fall for it.

He uses harsh words about those who taught salvation by works—dogs, evildoers, mutilators. He used the Gentile objection to circumcision—that it was a mutilation of the flesh. Paul was not opposed to Jews circumcising Jews, but in this letter, writing to a primarily Gentile church, he felt free to use the Gentile perspective.

"Dogs" was Jewish slang for Gentiles. Why does Paul refer to the Judaisers by their word for Gentiles? He considers them not truly the people of God, not part of the true Israel. "For it is we who are the circumcision," he writes (3:3)—and by that word *we*, he is including his Gentile readers. Although they are not physically circumcised, they are part of the true circumcision (Romans 2:29).

Those who have faith in Christ have the circumcision that counts, the circumcision of the heart. We Christians, not the Judaisers, have the true worship: "we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" (3:3). Our hope of salvation, he says, is not based on our flesh, anatomy or genealogy. Our confidence is in Christ.

Past performance is worthless

If salvation were based on genetics and Jewish laws, Paul would do well. Even though he has those, he trusts in Christ, not in his works.

"Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more" (3:4).

Then he lists his merits: "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (3:5-6).

Paul has everything the Judaisers have, and more. He was born a Jew, educated in Judea, zealous even by the standards of the strictest group. He did everything he could, but it was not enough. Not because he failed, but because even at its best, the old approach does not work. He had to start over.

No one can accuse Paul of preaching grace for his own benefit or to ease a troubled conscience. Paul has gone from being a respected rabbi, to being a persecuted apostle, for one reason only: he is persuaded that Christ is the truth, the way and the life. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (3:7). He counts those things as spiritually valueless. They cannot bring him any closer to God. "What is more," he writes, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (3:8). Paul was willing to give up all his Jewish advantages, all his merits, because Christ is so much more valuable. Paul is still a Jew, of course, but genetics and traditions cannot save him.

"I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (3:8). Circumcision is not wrong in itself, but it is worthless for salvation—and actually harmful if someone trusts in it. Only Christ counts; only he is of value for our relationship to God. Paul wants something far more valuable than anything Judaism can offer, and that is Christ.

On judgment day, Paul wants to be found in Christ, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (3:9). True righteousness does not come through law-keeping (no matter how well we keep the laws)—it comes only as a gift of God to those who trust in Christ. This is the right place to start.

Eyes on the goal

Paul's goal is "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (3:10-11). Now he knows only in part (1 Cor. 13:12), but he wants to know Christ fully, and he will experience this only in the resurrection. But to share in Christ's glory, Paul also shares in his sufferings, and by doing so, he will in some way attain the resurrection. Not that he will earn salvation through his sufferings, but that through faith he is united to Christ, including his crucifixion and death (Rom. 6:3-6). He shares in Christ's sufferings as well as his glory. Both are part of being "in Christ" through faith. He has joined Jesus in

the journey of salvation, and he is willing to follow him wherever he leads.

But Paul has not yet achieved what he wants: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Phil. 3:12). So Paul works hard to perform the work for which Jesus called him. This is part of knowing Christ—knowing his will and being eager to do it. Paul wants to experience the riches of Christ, even if they involve some suffering. His confidence in Christ does not make him complacent or lazy. And again he says: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (3:13-14). He does not rest on the many good things he has already done—he works, for that is what Christ called him for. Paul is not talking about qualifying or earning the prize, but about his zeal for it.

Good examples

Paul has a reason to explain his eagerness—he wants the Philippians to share his approach. "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things" (3:15). Those who are mature recognise that they are not yet complete, but the immature sometimes claim victory prematurely. So Paul adds, "And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you" (3:15). As you mature in Christ, you will learn to think this way, too.

"Only let us live up to what we have already attained" (3:16). Those who are in Christ should live like it (Eph. 4:1); we should let Christ make a difference in our lives, changing us, giving us zeal for his work. And to reinforce this active faith, we are to be attentive to good examples. "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Phil. 3:17).

Be zealous for Christ, he says. "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18). Here Paul equates the gospel with "the cross of Christ." The good news is based on a crucified Saviour, for salvation comes through what Christ did, not on what we do. But many people are embarrassed by the cross and stress works instead.

"Their destiny is destruction," Paul says (3:19). "Their god is their stomach"—they seek financial support—"and their glory is in their shame."

They glory in the flesh, in circumcision and works of the law. But now that Christ has come, it is shameful to choose these things instead of Christ, or to insist on both, when Christ is all that we need. Paul concludes, "Their mind is on earthly things" (3:19). In contrast, Paul says, "Our citizenship is in heaven" (3:20). Our minds are set on heaven, not on earth. We focus on the spirit, not the flesh. Our hope is in the future, not in this world. "We eagerly await a Saviour from there [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ, who,

by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (3:20-21). When Christ returns, we will be like he is (1 John 3:2). He will give us the righteousness we need, and that is why we can so eagerly strive to do his will. "Therefore," Paul concludes, "that is how you should stand firm in the Lord" (Phil. 4:1). Be eager, press onward, and trust in Christ!

Questions for application

- Have I been fairly successful at keeping biblical laws?
- Does that tend to give me confidence?
- Do I count my past (whether good or bad) as rubbish, as irrelevant?
- Do I want the fellowship of sharing in the sufferings of Christ?
- Does confidence in Christ make me zealous, or complacent?
- Can I trust God to teach people who think differently than I do?
- What is my attitude toward the cross of Christ?

If you would like to discuss with us any information printed in this free booklet please contact

The Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship

Tel. (03) 9726 8898