

VOLUME 2

BY  
GOD'S  
WORD

60 REFLECTIONS  
FOR LIVING IN GOD'S WORLD



PHILLIP D. JENSEN

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# Contents

Preface .....	9
1. Faith comes from hearing .....	11
2. A utopian dream .....	15
3. The sacrifice of family .....	20
4. The founding Father .....	23
5. To give and to receive .....	28
6. Lord over all .....	32
7. The Sunday next before Easter .....	36
8. A testimony to life .....	40
9. The modern eulogy .....	43
10. A couple grieves .....	47
11. Jazz and generosity .....	50
12. An old-fashioned view .....	54
13. Jesus loves Osama .....	59

14. Your mind (still) matters .....	63
15. Church and state .....	67
16. Imbibing hypocrisy .....	73
17. A soldier's fear .....	79
18. The crimes of the educated .....	82
19. The shame of the shameless .....	86
20. Addicted to addiction .....	90
21. A missionary sees clearly .....	96
22. Godly contentment .....	100
23. Episcopal repentance .....	104
24. The unknown God .....	108
25. Amazing grace .....	112
26. A colourful life .....	117
27. A lonely death .....	121
28. Preaching Christ gives hope .....	125
29. Father and son .....	128
30. Spiritual inferiority .....	132
31. All my worldly .....	136
32. When tears make better sense than words .....	141
33. Idolatrous games .....	145
34. An unnecessary protest .....	150
35. The justice of discrimination .....	155
36. Costly living .....	159
37. The 'arrogance' of humility .....	163

38. Wonderful God .....	167
39. The gullible sceptic .....	171
40. An evangelist falters on suffering .....	177
41. The unfinished work of Christ .....	181
42. The revelation of God .....	185
43. The democracy of sinners .....	190
44. Showing partiality .....	196
45. On being evangelical (i) .....	200
46. On being evangelical (ii) .....	205
47. Unmediated media .....	210
48. Raising your children .....	215
49. The Bible myths .....	218
50. Traditions old and new .....	224
51. The image of Jesus? .....	229
52. A Christian Christmas .....	234
53. When is a television show immoral? .....	239
54. Miracles in John .....	245
55. The impoverishment of the soul .....	250
56. A matter of life and death .....	254
57. Worldly spirituality .....	260
58. Sorrow over idol busyness .....	265
59. Advancing atheism at Easter .....	269
60. A certain hope .....	275





# Preface

*G*od commands Christians:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

This second volume of *By God's Word* is part of an ongoing attempt to avoid conformity to the world and to assist our transformation by a renewed mind. It is so hard to avoid the conforming message in our world of mass media. It is so strange and counter-intuitive to understand God's world by God's word. But that is our task, and we must not shirk the responsibility because it is difficult.

As in the first volume, this is a collection of short essays that look at the world through the glasses of Scripture. They are explorations of life from a biblical viewpoint.

Most of the essays offer a Christian response to the issues and problems of our day, while others are based on the stories of real people I have known and ministered to over the years (although the names and details have been changed). In all of them, I have sought to bring the Bible to bear on the issues and challenges that face us in God's world.

I hope that in reading them, and in reflecting on the passages of Scripture that are included after each one, you may be encouraged afresh to see the world through the lens of the word of God.

I am very grateful to Emma Thornett and the team at Matthias Media for all their hard and expert work in turning these occasional pieces into a single volume.

Phillip Jensen  
May, 2009

# I

## Faith comes from hearing

*F*aith comes from hearing—in particular, hearing the word of Christ. In the message of Christ we find the object of our faith. Having found him, we trust him and rely upon what he says to us, for that is the nature of faith.

However, faith is not a uniquely religious experience. Whenever we trust people, we have faith in them. That is what the word ‘faith’ means: it is trust or dependence. It is relying or depending upon somebody or something. We come to trust (or distrust) people by listening to them. Without any communication, it is impossible to trust. So faith comes from hearing.

But hearing alone does not save us. Even hearing the message of Christ does not save us. We must believe the message we hear. We must trust the speaker. If the

message of God is not combined with faith, it is unfruitful for the hearers. It is like the children of Israel in the wilderness: God spoke to them but they rebelled against his word and perished under his wrath. But when the message is met with faith, it brings life and salvation, for “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13).

So the messengers of Christ who speak his word are highly valued. Those who come to faith and salvation through hearing the message of Christ love the messengers. As the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom 10:15).

Ideally, our parents spoke the good news of Jesus to us. Sometimes it comes from other members of our family. Sometimes we come from a family without any Christians, and we hear it instead from friends or neighbours. Sometimes we hear it from strangers, for nobody we know is able to tell us the message of Christ. Whoever tells us this message, we remain greatly in their debt for bringing us salvation. We can always thank God that he spoke to us through our Sunday school teacher, our fellowship leader, our friend at school, our friend at work or our friend in our street.

It is therefore very important that the word of God is taught, learned, spoken and heard as much as possible. There is no faith in Christ where his name is not proclaimed; salvation comes to people through his message. So it is a Christian’s joy and responsibility to listen to God’s word

regularly and, when we listen, we should do so with faith and obedience.

We should be reading God's word daily. Whenever we can gather with others to study and hear his word, we should grab the opportunity. Joining a Bible study group and reading God's word to each other is a great way to be challenged regularly to faith in the word of Christ. When the church gathers, we gather to hear God's word. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote to tell him "how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim 3:15):

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching . . . Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim 4:13, 16)

Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ. We must pray for opportunities to hear the word of Christ, so that our faith will grow. We must pray for opportunities to speak the word of Christ, so that many more people will hear the gospel message. We must pray that people will hear the word of Christ—not with hardened hearts, but with faith.

### **For reflection**

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom

they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for

“Their voice has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world.”

(Rom 10:14-18)

## A utopian dream

*A* multicultural society is a dream that does not stand up to analysis.

Of course, it is good for us to dream of living in harmony. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people who had nothing in common, other than their humanity, lived in peace with each other? Wouldn't it be more wonderful still if people so respected each other's differences that they enriched rather than denigrated their neighbours? Many even hope to extend tolerance to the point where no-one is ever offended by the behaviour or lifestyle of another.

For Christians, multiculturalism expresses our concern for the welfare of other people. We extend hospitality to the alien and the refugee; we accept God's sovereign allocation of languages and nations from the Tower of Babel; we reach out to strangers with the saving message of Jesus; we reject

the imperialism of this world's kingdoms in favour of God's eternal kingdom—the one that is not of this world.

But as a non-Christian religion, multiculturalism is the utopian dream of individualists and libertarians: “I want freedom. I want the freedom to be myself. I want the freedom to do whatever I want without the restrictions of other people's choices. I want the unfettered right to be me.”

As with all idealistic dreams, multiculturalism has within it profound and admirable hopes set in contrast to dark and unpleasant nightmares. This creates unrealistic and impractical goals. Of course we want people to live in peace and harmony—“World peace” is the stereotypical beauty queen's response. Of course it would be better to have world peace without coercion. Of course it would be wonderful if world peace could be built on an appreciation of our diversity and variety. And of course the nightmarish alternatives of apartheid, assimilation, conquest and the melting pot are dreadful. To separate people ethnically smacks not only of racism, but also of inhumanity. To require everybody to adopt the majority culture is oppressive. To wipe out every alternative culture by conquest is the guilt of imperialism. And to throw everybody in together to create a new, mixed culture requires rejecting our past and assimilating into an unknown nationalistic future. Fundamental to all these nightmares is the fear that I am going to be told how to live—I will be told what to do and, worse, what not to do. All of these



nightmares are about the victory of the community over the individual. They all restrict freedom.

But a 'multicultural society' is a contradiction in terms. The more multicultural, the less it is a society. The more we differ from each other, the less we are able to socialize. For example, to insist that all Australians speak English is a terrible restriction of personal freedom; and yet everybody speaking the language of their choice limits social interaction or communication.

Most governments use the rhetoric of multiculturalism as a soft way to induce migrants into accepting the assimilation of their progeny: in the first generation we accept that you do things differently, but we will educate your children into bicultural living and we will assimilate your grandchildren into mainstream culture.

Some cultures are very resistant to assimilation. While materialists are easily bought into the mainstream, religious cultures do not quickly change. They have more deep-seated values than the cheap and easily purchased souls of atheists and materialists; they make different lifestyle choices. They will not be assimilated into coercive multiculturalism. They will not accept nationalism as their religion. They will continue to practise their moral choices of conscience concerning family life, marriage patterns and child raising. They will run their own schools to raise children within their distinctive culture, and they will commend their culture/religion to others, for they believe not in the values of culture, but in the virtues of life.

Some of these practices will contradict the wishes of society or the historical culture and law of the nation, and so they will create tension within society. When there are a sufficient number of adherents, especially living together, these minorities may create ghettos and no-go zones. And so religion is more than a matter of private conscience. Polygamy is, for some, the right way to live; society would benefit if it were introduced and regulated. To deny polygamists their rights is a denial of multicultural ideals. But do monogamous taxpayers want to contribute to the welfare benefits of polygamists?

It is not ultimately possible to divorce our legal, social, political, educational or welfare systems from our history. They are all expressions of the protestant British culture that created modern Australia. Even the reality of tolerance and the dream of multiculturalism came out of that protestant British mindset—it is neither the dream nor the practice of Saudi Arabia or communist China.

But are there limits to the tolerance of multiculturalism? Do we really want several legal systems—tribal traditional, Sharia and British—all co-existing in one united society? The logic of secularist multiculturalism says yes. The reality of life says no.

Law without ethics and morality is tyranny. Ethics and morality without any overall philosophy or religion are vacuous. A nation without an ethical culture creates oppressive jingoism rather than tolerance or justice. As one of our political leaders once said: “Australia first,

above all else”. Thankfully, the reality is that many Australians put God first. Our Lord Jesus went so far as to say, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10:37). This puts him a long way ahead of “Australia first, above all else”. But then again, Jesus is God.

### **For reflection**

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (Rev 7:9-12)

*When we look through the glasses of Scripture, we see God and his world and his people and ourselves in clearer focus.*

*B*y God's word the world was made.

By God's word it is sustained moment by moment.

And by God's word we can know God through Jesus Christ, and live each day to please him.

In this encouraging collection of reflections, Phillip Jensen offers warm encouragement to live by God's word in every aspect of our lives—from generosity to grief, and from morality to motherhood.

Each reflection is followed by a Bible passage for further thought and prayer.



**Phillip Jensen** is an internationally renowned preacher and evangelist. He is the author of the well-known *Two Ways to Live* gospel presentation, as well as numerous books and Bible study materials, including *Guidance and the Voice of God*. With his wife, Helen, he lives in Sydney, where he is currently the Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral.

