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Absent From the Body

Joe Crews

1 Introduction

Clergy and laity alike have often stumbled over some of the writings of Paul the Apostle. Scattered among the letters which he addressed to the churches are a few verses that almost seem to contradict what he wrote in other epistles. At least they have been interpreted as contradictions. But did the great, spiritual, straight-thinking Paul write confusing things? Or is the contradiction only in the way readers have twisted his words?

A perfect example of the problem appears in the first few verses of 2 Corinthians 5 where Paul speaks about life and death. His language has been understood by many to teach that thereward of the righteous is bestowed at the moment of death and that an immortal soul leaves the body to face an immediate reward or punishment. If this is the true meaning of Paul's words, we are faced with some serious inconsistencies within the epistles. Let us examine the verses in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 and discover what Paul actually did teach on this crucial subject.

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we

would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

(For we walk by faith, not by sight.)

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

In order to get the picture clearly in mind, let us review the verses point by point.

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|----------------|---|
| Vs. 1 | Paul introduces an earthly house and a heavenly house , and says: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God,
an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." |
| Vs. 2 | He states our condition while in the earthly house. "In this we groan" and "being burdened." |
| Vs. 2,3 | He tells us what we desire in that state. "Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked." |
| Vs. 4 | Paul repeats these facts once again. "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon." |
| Vs. 4 | He then states the result of being clothed with the house from heaven that he so greatly desired. "But clothed upon, that MORTALITY might be SWALLOWED UP OF LIFE." |
| Vs. 5 | The Spirit is a pledge that mortality shall eventually be swallowed up of life. |

- Vs. 6** “Who also hath given unto us the earnest (assurance, pledge) of the Spirit.”
Paul states the grounds of his confidence. “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.”
- Vs. 7** **A parenthetical comment on successful Christian living.** “(We walk by faith, not by sight.)”
- Vs. 8** **He repeats a willingness to be absent from the body and to be with the Lord.** “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.”

With the subject fully before us, let us determine the meaning of the terms Paul uses in the text. What does he mean by the “earthly house” and the “heavenly house”? By being “clothed upon” and “unclothed”? By “mortality” being “swallowed up of life”? By being “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord”?

The apostle answers all of these questions for us. In verse 6, he defines “our earthly house” as being “at home in the body.” The chief characteristic of this house is that it may be “dissolved.” In other words, it is mortal. This earthly house is, therefore, our mortal body or our present mortal condition. This fact appears too obvious for further comment.

The house from heaven is “eternal” or immortal and represents the state of immortality that awaits the redeemed beyond the resurrection. Here is where the greatest misunderstanding enters the picture. Some have thought that the “house from heaven” is put on at the moment of death. But the apostle clearly spells out the TIME when he will put on immortality.

2 The Time of the Change

Notice how he explains when “mortality is swallowed up of life,” in Romans 8:22, 23, “...ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” This verse in Romans is a perfect, striking parallel to the verses in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 and clarifies when we shall be clothed with that immortality. Notice the similarity of language and thought:

To the Corinthians Paul Wrote:

“We... in this tabernacle do groan.”

“Given to us the earnest of the Spirit.”

“Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.”

To the Romans Paul Wrote:

“We groan within ourselves ...”

“Have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”

“Earnest expectation... waiting for the redemption of our body.”

These two scriptures are speaking of the same experience. The ultimate object in both cases is to change this mortal body into the immortal body and to change this “earthly house” into the “house eternal in the heavens.” Please notice that in one verse Paul was “earnestly desiring to be clothed” with his house from heaven, and in the other verse his “earnest expectation” was the “redemption of the body.”

The comparison proves that this clothing from heaven takes place at the “redemption of the body.” Paul adds the final clarification in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 when he again describes the TIME this change takes place: “...we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump... this mortal must put on immortality.” In other words, even though death should dissolve this mortal body, Paul makes it very clear that we do not put on the house from heaven (immortality) until the coming of Jesus and the redemption of the body. This is also established by the repeated references to the “naked” or “unclothed” state.

3 Unclothed in Death

What is meant by the term “unclothed”? Notice that Paul specifically declared that he did not desire to be naked or unclothed. We can be certain, then, that the unclothed state did not involve being with the Lord, since Paul did not desire it. In fact, the apostle made reference to being clothed with only two houses, the earthly and heavenly. In the unclothed state, he was neither in the earthly body nor clothed with the heavenly. That leaves only one possible explanation. To be “unclothed” or “naked” is the condition of death that is the interlude between the dissolving of the earthly house and putting on the heavenly.

4 Only Two Houses

Some have claimed that the house which we have “eternal in the heavens” is the immortal soul with which we immediately enter into heaven when the earthly house is dissolved. But this could not be. Notice the impossibility of such an arrangement. If the soul inhabited that heavenly “house” immediately at death, what happens when it must inhabit the immortalized body after the resurrection takes place? It is in the glorified resurrection bodies that the righteous dwell with God for eternity. This would involve those souls leaving the “house eternal in the heavens” which they inhabited at death, and going into the redeemed bodies at the resurrection. Then what happens to the house they vacated? Are the saints to have “houses to rent”? Moreover, this view introduces something that Paul never mentioned; for here we have THREE HOUSES, but Paul’s language allows for only TWO. And one would have to be abandoned according to the popular view. Would it stand abandoned and fall into ruin? All this is unscriptural and absurd. Such a view is an impossibility.

The fact is that Paul is not talking here about the soul at all. He does not even once mention the soul in the passage or its context. He is simply contrasting the present life with the far more glorious life to come in heaven. He did not look forward to the sleep of death (being “unclothed”) when he would not be with the Lord, but he did long for the redemption of the body when he would be clothed with the “house eternal in the heavens.” While still in this life he would be clothed with a mortal body; and after mortality is “swallowed up of life,” he would have a heavenly, immortal body. But whether in the earthly tabernacles or house from heaven he would still have a body. Nowhere does Paul separate a soul from the body. It is either a body on this earth and being absent from the Lord, or it is a redeemed body in heaven and being present with the Lord.

5 Earnest of the Spirit

Here is further positive proof that Paul was referring to the resurrection as the TIME to put on that eternal house. To both the Corinthians and the Romans, Paul emphasized that the Spirit was a pledge that they would be clothed with immortality. What did he mean? Of what is the Holy Spirit in our hearts and earnest or pledge? Is it a proof or assurance that we have immortal souls that will live on when the body is dead? Is that what Paul meant? No. The apostle makes it abundantly clear that the Spirit is a pledge of the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection. “... ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the EARNEST of our inheritance until the **redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.**” Ephesians 1:13, 14.

Do not miss the point Paul makes that the “earnest of the Spirit” points to the time when our inheritance is received in full and the bodily redemption takes place. Paul used the same expression in 2 Corinthians 5:5 when talking about putting on the house from heaven, “God hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” That Spirit is the pledge of the resurrection of the body. Another text removes all doubt: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” Romans 8:11. This verse provides undeniable proof that the indwelling Spirit is a guarantee that our mortal bodies will be quickened at the resurrection.

6 Swallowed Up When?

Now let us take note that Paul used an argument that forever precludes the doctrine of the soul going to heaven at death. In one simple statement, Paul shattered the popular argument for natural immortality. He said, “we... do groan that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” 2 Corinthians 5:4. Obviously, mortality can only be swallowed up by immortality, or eternal life. Is this the passing of the soul from the mortal body at the hour of death? Let us look at it. What is there about man, according to the common view, which is mortal? The body. In addition, what is immortal? The soul. Assuming for a moment that this is true, then what happens at death? At death the body, which is mortal, does not become immortal, but loses all its life and crumbles back to dust in the grave. Moreover, the soul, which was immortal before, is no more than immortal afterwards. Is there any “swallowing up of mortality by life” here? Just the reverse! Mortality, or the mortal part, is swallowed up by death! There is not as much life afterward as there was before, because after death only the soul lives, while the body, which was alive before, is now dead. That view is in contradiction to what the Word of God actually says. We must reject it.

Paul knew the Corinthians would not be confused by his language in 2 Corinthians 5 about mortality being swallowed up by immortality, because he had already written his first epistle to them explaining when that immortality would be put on. “... in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump... this mortal must put on immortality. THEN shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:52-54. When would death or mortality be “swallowed up?” “THEN,” Paul said. When is THEN? “In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.” How can anyone stumble over the plain language of these verses?

Paul was longing for that change from the earthly mortal body to the glorious immortal body. He stated that the change would take place on the resurrection-translation day. His chief hope seemed to center upon being translated without ever being “unclothed” in death. He yearned to “be clothed upon” by translation at the coming of Jesus, so that he be not found “naked” (in the grave). Translation would mean that mortality would be “swallowed up of life.”

Nevertheless, he hastened to express confidence, as we have just pointed out, in the certainty of a resurrection when death would be swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54). In either case, whether by translation or resurrection, he would be “clothed upon” with the immortal body. Either mortality would be “swallowed up” by being translated, or death would be “swallowed up” by being resurrected.

Paul does not linger over the “unclothed” state, because his hopes rested in the new body to be received at Christy s coming. He could not be “forever with the Lord” until that change took place “in the twinkling of an eye.” The interim sleep of death in the grave held no appeal for Paul, since it would seem but a fractional second of utter oblivion to the one who died. Looking beyond the uninviting nakedness of death to the land of life, Paul ruled out any possibility of a state between death and the resurrection when disembodied spirits could be present with the Lord.

7 Made for What?

The apostle makes one other point in 2 Corinthians 5 that destroys the idea of a disembodied soul. In verse 5, he affirms that God “hath wrought us for the selfsame thing.” What thing? For what purpose had God made man? Paul answers that we might enjoy a state of being in which “mortality is swallowed up of life.” Is that condition the separate existence of an immortal soul? Impossible! Because if man had not sinned, he would have reached that state without seeing death. God’s purpose in making man would have been realized without death taking place, and the idea of an immortal soul would never have existed. Surely no one could believe that God “wrought us” for the “selfsame” purpose of sinning, dying and leaving the body in some invisible soul form.

8 Paul’s Earnest Expectation

A related text that Paul penned to the Philippians has been twisted and misinterpreted much like 2 Corinthians 5. Here again Paul speaks of his “earnest expectation.” Philippians 1:20-24:

“According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour; yet what I shall choose I wot not.

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”

First, let’s clarify what Paul’s “earnest expectation” really was in regard to being with Christ. Did he expect to be with Him at death? Not one text of the Bible teaches such a thing. Let the apostle answer for himself concerning his “earnest expectation.” “For the **earnest expectation** of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” Romans 8:19. What was that manifestation when the sons of God would be revealed? Verse 23 answers, “... we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, **the redemption of our body.**” Paul’s earnest expectation and hope was for the time when his body would be redeemed.

He did not say one word in Philippians 1:20-24 about the TIME he would be with the Lord. Some have attempted to interpret this text as though Paul said he wanted to depart and be with Christ **immediately**, but the word **immediately** is not in the scripture. In these verses, Paul does not specifically state WHEN he will be with the Lord.

He only states his “earnest expectation” to be there. We have found from other scriptures that his expectation centered on the resurrection or translation of the body. Other passages further clarify without any equivocation when the great apostle expected to be with Christ.

- Romans 8:23
At the redemption of the body
- 1 Corinthians 5:5
In the day of the Lord Jesus
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-55
At the last trump
- Colossians 3:4
When Christ our life shall appear
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16
When the Lord descends with a shout
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1
At the coming of the Lord
- 2 Timothy 4:7, 8
At “that day” (by which Paul means the second advent of Christ)

Paul had two conditions in view: to live or to die. Between these two, he was in a strait. The cause of God on earth drew him here, but he was weary from beatings, stonings, and bodily suffering. He almost felt that death would be desirable over the struggle of living. So evenly balanced were the influences drawing him in both directions that he hardly knew which course he preferred. Nevertheless, he said it was more needful for the church that he remain here to give them the benefit of his counsel and labor.

9 How to be with the Lord

Paul positively refuted the idea of an immortal spirit leaving the body at death when he pinpointed the ONLY means of being with the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 he said, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the

air: and SO shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Please note the significance of that word “SO.” It means “in this way,” “in this manner,” “by this means.” “SO,” in this manner, by this means, “shall we ever be with the Lord.” By describing, without any limitation, the way and means by which we go to be with the Lord, Paul precludes every other means. If there is any other way of getting to be with the Lord, then Paul’s language is a stupendous falsehood. If we go to be with the Lord by means of our immortal spirit when we die, then we do not go to be with Him by means of the visible coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living. Then Paul’s words would not be true. There is no possible way of avoiding this conclusion, except by claiming that the descent of the Lord from heaven, the mighty shout, the trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, and the change of the living, ALL TAKE PLACE WHEN A PERSON DIES—a position too absurd to be considered.

Since Paul himself so carefully defines the manner of going to be with the Lord, why should man try to interpret Philippians 1:23 to mean something contrary to the writer’s own explanation? As we have just noted from 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, Paul knew of only two ways to be with the Lord—by translation or resurrection.

10 To Live Or to Die?

He expressed the hope that “Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.” Paul tied life and death to a physical body, not some soul or spirit. The alternatives that drew him were either “to live” or “to die.” He was “in a strait” between these two. If he lived, Christ would be magnified, and if he died a martyr’s death, the cause of Christ would be magnified. It would be “gain” either way, both for him and for Christ.

But after considering the two alternatives, upon which he could not make up his mind (to live or to die), Paul is suddenly struck with a third choice, which he quickly declares to be “far better” than the other two. He described it as “having a desire to depart and to be with the Lord, which is far better.” Better than what? Clearly, than either of the two he had just mentioned (living or dying). Again, we are reminded of Paul’s overwhelming desire to be translated without passing through the “unclothed” state of death. That was his deepest desire.

Once more, we are constrained to ask: When did Paul expect this translation to take place? Moreover, when did he anticipate the change from mortality to immortality? He answers: “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, THEN shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Colossians 3:4. When is THEN? At His second Coming. Have these appeared with Him in glory already? No. It will happen THEN, when He shall appear.

John agrees with Paul, “But we know that, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2. Think for a moment about the implications of that statement.

John could not have believed that the righteous dead were already in the presence of the Lord. If so, they were able to see him “as he is” at that very moment, and they would already be changed into the “likeness” of Christ. However, he refutes the idea that any have seen him yet and declares unequivocally that it will all happen “when he shall appear.”

11 Translation or Resurrection?

Finally, let us take note that in case Paul was not permitted to depart this life by translation and had to depart by death, he did not expect to be with Christ until the resurrection. He clarifies this in 2 Timothy 4:6-8: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time for my **departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: HENCEFORTH** there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me **AT THAT DAY**: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

In the clearest possible language, Paul not only explains but also emphasizes that his reward will be given at the coming of Christ. Even though his departure in death was “at hand,” he did not expect to be with Christ immediately. He expected it “henceforth.” The crown of immortality was “laid up for me,” he said. He would receive it “in that day” with others who would “love his appearing.” Surely,

those of us living today should anticipate that same glorious appearing when we too shall receive, with Paul, the crown of righteousness, which fadeth not away.

All That Glitters – The Ullanda Innocent Story

Exodus 20:3

The lights dimmed, and for a moment the audience hushed in anticipation. I glanced at myself in the mirror and felt my favorite bracelet to make sure it was securely fastened on my wrist. The band was made of 24-karat gold embedded with 56 tiny square diamonds. I never went anywhere without it, and tonight of all nights I especially wanted to look my best. Tonight I would sing the opening for Peabo Bryson's concert.

Bryson's famous hit "Tonight I'll Celebrate My Love For You" had topped the charts and given him instant fame. Neither of us knew it at the time, but two of his most popular recordings would be the title song for Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and "A Whole New World" from Disney's *Aladdin*. Both songs would win Oscars and give him worldwide recognition.

"Places, everyone!" the producer called.

I felt a slight flutter in my stomach, but there wasn't time to do anything about it except breathe deeply. I could hear the announcer's deep voice bellowing through the darkness, "And now ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Ullanda McCullough!" Suddenly the curtains lifted. An electric storm of colorful laser beams flashed through the air. They bounced off my bracelet and the sequins on my dress. My body swayed in rhythm with the beat.

Thousands of people sat in front of me, clapping and cheering. They didn't know it, as most had never laid eyes on me, but I had been in each one of their homes via the television and radio. I influenced them to buy certain products and go certain places. When they purchased a Coca-Cola, they might have hummed a little song that I recorded: "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony." Or maybe, as they soared in the wild blue skies, they might have chosen American Airlines because of the jingle I sang: "We're American Airlines, something special in the air." I even influenced their decision to buy certain brands of cat food. Later I would be dubbed by comedian and talk show host Joan Rivers as the "Queen of Jingles."

But in the meantime, commercials weren't the only thing going for a jingle singer. Celebrities like Diana Ross, Ashford and Simpson, Bette Midler, Whitney Houston, Bill Cosby, and Ray Charles needed background vocalists as well as opening acts. Fortunately, I was recording as a solo artist on Atlantic Records. William Morris Booking Agency offered me the opportunity to open in concert with Peabo Bryson. It felt wonderful to rub shoulders with famous people and make an excellent salary doing what I enjoyed best. Opening for a famous entertainer like Bryson was a dream come true, second only to the time I sang in the Appollo Theater.

The concert went great. Afterward some of the people who were responsible for my career plus executives from Atlantic Records honored me and the other musicians with red roses and champagne. We ate and celebrated our success until after midnight with 27 members of my family.

Glitter and Gold

The next day, after crawling out of bed around noon, I sat in front of the mirror staring idly at my reflection. "Who are you, Ullanda McCullough?" I wondered. "What makes you so special that you walk with the rich and famous?"

Just then the phone rang. It was Luther Vandross, a well-known recording artist whose hits repeatedly topped the charts of pop music.

"Ullanda, I was at your concert last night," he began. "You looked fabulous."

"Why, thank you!" I was stunned and wondered what else to say. But I didn't need to worry.

"Tell me," he continued, "where do you buy your clothes? Every time I see you in the studio you look so great. I need to do some shopping, and I've got the feeling that you know just where to go. I'm looking for some real nice jewelry, too. Exclusive pieces."

"The showroom is right on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street," I told him. We chatted for awhile longer about clothes and jewelry. He ended the conversation with the promise that one day we would do a concert together.

I cradled the phone long after he hung up. Mixed emotions surged through me. Elation. Awe. Unbelief. Cloud nine is short-lived. The lights fade, the audience leaves. You slowly float back down to planet Earth, wondering if you'll ever rise to such heights again.

My thoughts drifted to childhood and family. Life had not always been so glamorous and kind. My parents separated when I started the first grade. Both drank heavily and couldn't manage five children plus a job. So I went to live in a large house with my grandparents and Aunt Helen. Since grandfather was a minister in the Church of God in Christ, I found myself attending church several times a week. Grandmother cooked three meals a day, and Aunt Helen insisted that I wear clean dresses and shoes. They gave me my first glimpse of a structured family life.

Unfortunately, this arrangement lasted for only three years. By then Mother had remarried. My stepfather treated us well and worked two jobs to provide for his instant family. I appreciated his hard work, but at the same time I missed my father. No one could ever take Father's place.

Because our stepfather was forced to work long hours, Mother turned more often to alcohol for comfort. It seemed that she could never find complete happiness.

Maybe that's why singing became such an important part of my life. Aunt Helen had encouraged me to sing in the choir while I lived with her. My two sisters, Sonja and Verbena, sang with me. In fact, we daydreamed about being the new Supremes. My dream shattered, though, when Sonja married. Then two of my friends joined me, and we harmonized together quite well. Singing provided companionship and lifted my spirits. It helped me to forget my loneliness and pain.

It seems that secular music and dancing go hand in hand, kind of like cereal and milk. Before long I became a regular on a TV program called *Swinging Time* (somewhat like *American Bandstand* with Dick Clark). All I had to do was dance to Motown music. The show was filmed not far from my hometown, Detroit. I didn't know it at the time, but at age 13 I steadily began building my talents for a career in the music business.

I met Pam Vincent during my senior year, in the fall of 1967.

"I used to watch you dance on *Swinging Time*," she told me. "You were great."

Pam and I became instant friends. She was so thoughtful and caring. She drove a bright red Ford and always seemed to have plenty of money. I thought her parents were wealthy. Then one day we were driving along in her car, listening to the radio. Suddenly she reached over and turned up the volume.

"Listen, Ullanda. That's me singing."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean, that's me singing."

"No, it's not." I countered. "That's Freda Payne singing 'Bring the Boys Home.'"

"But I'm singing the backup. Listen." Pam then began singing the background harmony.

"Are you serious?" I wondered aloud.

"You're always wondering where I get my money," she explained. "Well, this is how. I sing backup for various artists."

"That's incredible." I told her. "You have the best job in the world."

"I enjoy my work," she told me. "But I'm quitting so I can go to college. I've been looking for someone to take my place while I'm gone. Are you interested?"

Interested! It was a dream come true. To do the thing I most enjoyed, meet famous people, and get paid a fantastic salary. I couldn't believe my luck.

Pam was kind enough to introduce me to the right people and schedule an audition. To my surprise and relief, they invited me to sing with two other girls. I had embarked on a new career. My life would be forever changed.

Big Break

It wasn't long before I became a member of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, making almost \$30 an hour.

One day Jackie Hicks, the leader of a female backup group called The Andantes, phoned and asked if I would consider singing with them. "One of our girls is dropping out," she explained.

"I'd love to become an Andante!" I answered. They had backed Smokey Robinson, the Four Tops, the Temptations, and the Supremes. Maybe this would be my big break into the music business.

I hung up the phone and realized that I'd been holding my breath. I gasped for air and fell back on the chair laughing. "Motown, ready or not, here I come!"

Success

Singing with the Andantes opened the door to even greater opportunities. Andy Williams came to the Detroit Amphitheater and opened for Quincy Jones. He paid me \$1,500 to sing on stage with him for one week. That was big money for a young female with no college education in the '70s, and I spent it as fast as I earned it.

For some reason I liked, no craved, expensive things. I spent thousands of dollars on rings, bracelets, necklaces, furs, and classy clothes so I could hear people I worked with, like Whitney Houston or Michael Bolton, tell me how great I looked.

I knew my hard work had paid off when I saw Elizabeth Taylor in an outfit identical to one I bought in London. At first I was really upset, but then it dawned on me that it proved I had good taste.

Yet it seemed as though I never had enough. My gold bracelet embedded with 56 square diamonds was my favorite, and I never took it off except to shower or swim.

At times I felt guilty. I knew that my grandfather would be disappointed in my appearance. I remember going to visit him once as a young teenager. I had just painted my nails a bright red. Grandfather looked at my hands and said, "Oh, Ullanda! Your nails are bleeding." His gentle reproof cut me to the heart. I hated to disappoint him. Yet I reasoned that this was show business, and appearances meant everything. People paid to see glitter and gold.

The Invitation

From the world's perspective I should have been completely happy. I wasn't. I felt elated with each new accomplishment, but each one became more short-lived and less satisfying. Relationships failed and left me empty. Sometimes I felt God calling to me, beckoning me to reach out and touch Him. I felt His

warm presence like sunshine on my shoulder. I thirsted for something better, but in my short-sightedness something better meant a nicer apartment, expensive clothes, another piece of jewelry, or a higher paying assignment. I jetted back and forth across the States. One night I would be on TV singing with Smokey Robinson, and the next night I would be in New York taping a commercial.

Then God whispered a little louder. After facing major surgery alone, my sister pleaded with me to follow Jesus Christ. I thought of my lifestyle and what accepting Christ would mean. No one told me that I had to give up my career, but I sensed that the lowly Carpenter wouldn't be found decked in gold and singing about sex, love, and beer. I listened to her pleas, heard the Spirit's invitation, and backed away.

Then God spoke louder. This time in an airplane. Suddenly, I felt like Jonah tossed about in the storm, except land seemed farther away. The plane shook through turbulent clouds, rattled when thunder roared and lightening flashed. It felt like an insect trying to fly against the force of a hurricane. And while the flight attendants staggered up and down the aisles preparing for the worst, I squeezed my eyes shut and battled the storm inside.

"Come to me, Ullanda," the Holy Spirit pleaded.

"But I've worked so hard," I argued back. "I'm afraid of what You might ask me to do. What You might ask me to give up."

"But if you gain the world and lose your soul, what would it profit you?"

I'm not sure how long this went on, but as the storm worsened, my heart cried out in fear. "Okay, God, I'm ready. Forgive me of my sins. Spare my life, and I will follow you."

I now have no doubt there is a God. I sensed His presence that night. I felt His peace. The plane leveled out in a smooth flight as the storm quickly retreated. It was as if He stood in that plane as He stood so many years ago in a boat tossed by mountainous waves, lifted His hands, and commanded the elements of nature, "Peace, be still."

I walked off that plane a different person. I wasn't totally sure where I stood with the Lord, but I knew He was for real. He spoke to me, and my heart heard His voice. I acknowledged Him.

I didn't know it at the time, but God gently woos His children step by step. He planted my feet in the right direction, and I would never forget that encounter with Him.

From then on my eyes opened to His leading. Without realizing it, I saw people in a different light, became a little kinder, and began to see the ugliness of sin.

Others noticed the change in me, which always sparked an interest in God. His name seemed to pop up in every conversation. One of the other jingle singers, Yvonne Lewis, told me that she used to be strong in the church but had wandered away. "I'm coming back to God," she confided in me, "so I've been attending church again."

Spurred on by a bond in Christ, we began meeting in her Manhattan apartment just to talk about God and study the Bible. Others eventually joined us until we had a fairly good-size group. We sang songs, read the Bible, and prayed.

Then Yvonne invited me to attend church with her. That encounter with Yvonne and her church would forever change the course of my life.

Follow Me

Week by week, I attended worship services, prayer meetings, and choir practice. Most important of all, I learned to communicate with God on a moment-by-moment basis. My frightening experience in the

airplane convinced me that prayer really worked. I discovered that it is the Christian's lifeline.

During one witnessing program, a lady made a comment about Christians representing Christ inside and out. She used the expression "modestly attired."

"What do you mean?" I asked her. "I've never heard of that before."

For the first time I noticed that this lovely woman wore very little, if any, colorful cosmetics and that the only jewelry on her was a simple watch.

"I believe that we can represent Christ better if we are temperate in all things. You know, not extravagant."

Her eyes fell on my bracelet and rings. At the wholesale price my bracelet cost \$5,000.

We were interrupted, so I didn't get to question her more. But I couldn't shake the thought. I knew that Paul spoke of being "temperate in all things." 1 Corinthians 9:25-27. It never occurred to me that dress fit in that category.

It seemed natural to ask God about it. "Show me if my jewelry is offensive to you," I prayed. I picked up my Bible and it fell open to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," I read.

Well that doesn't say anything about jewelry, I thought to myself. I began sifting through the pages trying to find the words "jewelry" and "makeup." I couldn't find anything.

Maybe that's just her opinion, I reasoned. But I couldn't shake it off easily. I kept seeing her face and hearing the word "extravagant." I looked at the bracelet on my wrist and the rings on my fingers. Then I pulled down the car mirror and studied my reflection. Bright eyeshadow, dark eyeliner, red lipstick. What did others think of when they saw me? A show girl?

God sees the heart, I argued. But wasn't I supposed to be His witness? The salt of the earth? Was I transmitting my Christianity to others? All of a sudden my whole appearance seemed fake and shallow. Would the real Ullanda McCullough please stand up?

True Beauty

I heard God's Spirit speaking to my heart. This is it, Ullanda. Jewelry is a god to you. You spend thousands of dollars on this stuff. Worse still, you love how it makes you look. You love how it glitters. You won't go anywhere without it. Take Me with you, Ullanda. Let My love shine in your heart and give you true beauty. Take Me with you wherever you go.

I knew then that I had to let it go. After I arrived home, I fell on my knees and prayed for God's guidance. Once again I felt a strong sense of His presence. I knew that God had spoken to me. I felt like one of the "haughty women of Zion" Isaiah describes in Isaiah 3:16-24.

"Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: ... the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels, The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness: ... and burning instead of beauty."

I took off all of my jewelry, except the bracelet. Somehow I couldn't quite bring myself to part with it

yet. But I continued to study. I wanted all the information that I could find in the Bible concerning adornment. Two stories spoke volumes.

In Genesis 35:1-4, Jacob was instructed by God to return to Bethel (where he was converted) and make an altar. You might say that he had an appointment with God. He realized the sacredness of this occasion. His immediate response was to cleanse the whole household of anything that was defiling or sinful. "Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean," Jacob instructed them in verse 2. Then verse 4 tells what unholy objects they turned over to him: "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears."

Again it hit home to me that jewelry is so unlike Christ that God considers it offensive.

The next story (Exodus 33:1-6) took place between God, Moses, and the children of Israel. They were preparing to enter the Promised Land. God told them to strip off their ornaments before they came into His presence. "I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee." Verse 5.

"I want to live in your presence continually, Lord," I prayed. "I want to enter the heavenly promised land."

1 Timothy 2:9 spoke directly to me. "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array."

The words of that woman in church came back to me, and one phrase kept repeating itself in my mind: "representing Christ," "representing Christ," "representing Christ." How could I possibly represent the King of the universe? If anyone ever had a reason to be extravagant, it was God. He deserved a crown of gold; yet when He came to this earth in the flesh, He wore a crown of thorns. As sinful as I was, how could I wear something that only He deserved to wear?

Suddenly, it dawned on me that all jewelry worn on these sinful bodies is vanity. God wanted to adorn me as Peter describes in 1 Peter 3:3, 4—not with the wearing of gold, but with a meek and quiet spirit.

Yet in spite of what I had read, I still didn't take off my bracelet. I continued to pray that God would show me what to do.

The Bracelet Becomes a Witness

It was about this time that a friend of mine mentioned that he wanted a Hebrew and Greek study Bible. I purchased one and wrapped it. The following week on my way home from church, I felt impressed to stop at Valerie Simpson's home. Valerie is part of the famous musical duo Ashford and Simpson. They recorded quite a few hits and wrote much of Diana Ross' music. I had done backup for this group. It was Valerie who introduced me to the jeweler where I bought my bracelet wholesale.

As I drove toward her home, a strong impression came over me to give Valerie the Bible and my bracelet. Yet I argued with the Spirit's direction. Why should I give my bracelet to Valerie when she has more jewelry and money than I'd ever have? No, that didn't make any sense. And the Bible was for another friend. But I recognized the direction to be from the Lord, and I knew that His thoughts are higher than my thoughts, so I needed to trust and obey.

I drove directly to Valerie's home in Manhattan, reached for the Bible, and placed it in my lap. My hands began to shake and my palms sweated. I could feel the sensation of tears swelling up in my eyes, but I couldn't cry. I knew that God in His mercy was doing this for my own good. I had no problem giving up my rings and necklaces, but the one piece that I loved most was the one God impressed me to give away.

The nanny opened the door. "Valerie isn't here," she explained.

"This is crazy," I remember thinking to myself. "Now what am I supposed to do?" Once again I felt impressed to leave the Bible and the bracelet. What an odd combination!

The nanny looked puzzled as I slowly unhooked the safety latch and slid the diamond cuff bracelet from my arm. I handed it and the present to her with the request that she give them to Valerie. Then I turned and practically ran to the car. The tears flowed all the way home, but I felt joy because I knew the Lord was pleased. Now I was determined to get rid of anything that stood between me and God.

Valerie called me the next week. "Ullanda, what are you doing?" she practically screamed on the phone. "I know you are a Christian, but you're going too far. I can't wear your bracelet. I've seen it on you for six years."

I tried to explain, but I knew that she couldn't understand. "Alright," she finally conceded. "I'll keep your bracelet for the time being, but I won't wear it."

It wasn't until later that I understood the reason for leaving the bracelet with Valerie. Evidently, that gold band was a constant reminder to her that I had become a Christian. But she resolved that she would never wear it. When a magazine asked to photograph her for a cover, Valerie called the jeweler to send over enough jewelry to wear during the shoot. He promptly sent over a gold bracelet embedded with 56 tiny diamonds. It was identical to mine.

"Ullanda," she begged, "please come get your bracelet. Every time I see it, I think of you and your conversion. I know how far I strayed from God. So I've made up my mind that I'm going back to church. I've got to get my life back in tune with God. Please pray for me."

I took the bracelet back, knowing that by giving it away, I had broken its power over me.

Go and Sell All That You Have

I decided to give my life totally over to the Lord and be baptized into a new life with Christ. But every time I looked in my closet or drawers, I was reminded of my old life. I needed to get rid of the stuff that had held me in chains for so long. I decided to hold a sale. Valerie said it would be fine to hold it in her home.

It just so happened that Bill Cosby's home was in the same neighborhood as Valerie's. I couldn't help but wonder what he must have thought when I drove up and dragged boxes and boxes of furs, clothes, and jewelry to their door in the hot August sun. With Cosby's fun-loving personality, I could just imagine him with a silly grin on his face as he watched through his French windowpane, wondering what in the world that crazy girl was doing in front of his home with all those clothes.

I suppose he must have heard that the home of Ashford and Simpson was about to have its first grand opening. All of our well-to-do friends in show business, some famous and some not so famous, were invited. I categorized the fur coats together, then designer suits, shoes, and bags. I wanted to show my jewelry to a select few before I opened it up for everyone else.

The first customer rang the doorbell exactly at noon. From then on it was like a circus. Some said they couldn't believe their eyes. No one had any idea that I had that much stuff.

A girl named Tee told me that she'd had her eye on my bracelet for years but could never afford one. "Are you sure you want to sell it?" she asked. "I know what it's meant to you."

I used the opportunity to tell her what the Lord had done for me. Then I gave free books to all who made purchases.

A part of me was also up for sale that day. The old man of sin was about to trade in all my stuff for a much greater gift. I never shed a tear as I handed over the bracelet to a satisfied customer. Although I had paid only \$5,000 at wholesale price, it had increased in value. I think Tiffany and Company sold

one like it for approximately \$26,000 dollars. I sold mine for \$3,500.

The New Ullanda

For a time, I continued singing jingles. But the thrill of working with the rich and famous left me. Ashford and Simpson asked me to do another concert with them at Radio City Music Hall. The concert, a charity event for AIDS research, would be attended by popular movie stars such as Shirley MacLaine. It would be my first secular concert since I had totally given my heart to the Lord.

I arrived with no makeup or jewelry. I worried about what they would think or say. They didn't seem to mind. We laughed and talked as usual. I felt accepted by them. We prayed before we went out on stage. And I felt great. It occurred to me that I didn't have to wear all that stuff to feel good about myself.

But others thought I had gone crazy. "You look terrible without makeup and jewelry," they argued. "Does Christ really demand that of you? We're Christians, but we don't feel impressed to give up ours."

It was sometimes difficult as a new babe in Christ to answer their questions. I tried to explain to them that we are all saved by the blood of Christ. His sacrifice on the cross paid for our salvation. He took our place, and there was nothing we could do or give up that could earn that gift. But at the same time, nothing should stand between us and God. God has to be first. That's why the first commandment states, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:3.

He wants us as His children to walk in truth and love, humbleness and humility. Proverbs 6:16 and 17 states that there are seven things God hates. The first one is a proud look. And what makes us proud? Isn't it our money and accomplishments? Or anything that makes you seem better than the person beside you. What did Christ tell the rich young ruler? "Go and sell what you have."

I'm not suggesting that you can't be rich and be a Christian at the same time. It's a matter of priorities and what you're doing with your wealth. I do know that God warned us against living for the world. And the closer I walked with Christ, the less attractive gold and glitter became to me. There is only one superstar in my life, and that is Jesus.

New Directions

I wanted to learn more about Christ and His plan for me. After abusing my body for so long, staying up late, jetting across the world and going from one relationship to another, I needed time to absorb the Bible. I didn't want to be a casual Christian. It was all or nothing with me.

It was then that I heard about a small, self-supporting health institution named Uchee Pines in Alabama. This Christian organization was founded by medical missionaries who had a desire to teach people how to live in harmony with God and nature. After corresponding with them for some time, I sold all that I had in the big city of New York and moved there.

Uchee Pines proved to be just what I needed—a quiet retreat where I could be restored physically, mentally, and spiritually. I needed a sense of direction in my life.

Eventually word spread around that I had become a Christian. I began receiving invitations to sing God's praise in music and share my testimony at various events. An evangelistic meeting here or a charity event there. After a few concerts, the invitations poured in. Today I am just as busy as before, jetting around the world, but this time I'm using my talents for the Lord. I've sung in Japan, South America, and all over the United States. And, of course, I've recorded albums.

I met a Christian man named Patrick Innocent. We fell in love and married on July 14, 1991. I am so thankful for his dedication. We travel the world together, spreading the gospel with testimony and song. In Brazil we ministered to 125,000 people. Patrick always makes an appeal to our listening audience after my music and testimony.

We want others to experience the same peace and happiness that we've experienced. It seems natural to talk about Christ to all my friends. Some shy away, but others open up and become genuinely interested.

Just recently we had the privilege of studying with a lovely couple named Eunice and Raymond. We took the Amazing Facts Bible Study Guides to their home each week. Eunice had the same struggles with jewelry as I did. But after hearing my testimony and looking up the Bible texts, she and her husband gladly went into the watery grave of baptism to begin a new life with Christ.

There is no way to describe to people the freedom that I find in Christ. Human language isn't adequate. I don't spend hours in front of the mirror worrying about how I measure up to other people. I don't feel the competitive spirit of trying to dress better or sing better than the person beside me.

This is not to say that I don't care about how I look or perform and the impression that I make on other people. But the reason and the methods are different. I take care of my body now because Christ died for this body. I can glorify His name through my body.

I appeal to anyone who is reading my testimony to take a look at your own life. Have you given your heart to God? Does He mean more to you than gold and glitter? To some of you, that ring on your finger is a symbol of a special event-perhaps a graduation, birth, or wedding. Or maybe your jewelry has been handed down in your family from generation to generation. "It's not a god to me," you might say.

Friend, God's Word is clear and simple. According to the Scriptures, there is no doubt as to the attitude of God concerning jewelry. His command for the children of Israel to remove their ornaments before going into the land of Canaan applies also to us before going into the heavenly Canaan.

It is often repeated, "God won't keep me out of heaven because of a little piece of jewelry." This trend of thinking displays a negative attitude.

Instead, we should be asking what we can do to please our Lord, who gave up everything for us. He knows that the general trend of humanity is to glorify self and bow to the gods of this world. He wants His children to be far removed from anything that would turn their hearts from Him.

He wore a crown of thorns so that I might wear a crown of jewels one day. But until the day arrives when He places them on my head, I shall try to walk in harmony with the lowly Carpenter.

An Update

Along with their travels around the world, Patrick and Ullanda Innocent co-host a one-hour TV variety program for the Three Angels Broadcasting Network entitled It's All About Love with Ullanda Innocent. They interview guests who have an inspiring story and provide special music. The program includes a kids health segment hosted by Patrick.

If you are interested in contacting Ullanda and Patrick for a concert, you may contact them at:

Second Advent Ministries
P.O. Box 448
Cedar Mountain, North Carolina 28718
1 (800) 539-7790 or
phone & fax (407) 299-9751

About the Authors

Called the "Coca-Cola girl," Ullanda McCullough Innocent sang the famous commercial "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. I'd like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company. It's the real thing!" Now Ullanda knows for certain that Jesus Christ is the real thing. All the money, fame,

and male attention she received while in the world just didn't bring her true happiness. At one time she spent most of her earnings on her addiction to fine jewelry, clothes, and furs-until she realized that they were becoming gods to her. Now she declares, "You may have all this world, but give me Jesus!"

Crystal Earnhardt has authored three books and written numerous articles for various magazines and publications. She and her husband live in Fair Play, S.C. with their youngest daughter, Carrie Ann.

Amazing Wonders of Creation

Joe Crews

ONE God's Handiwork

In spite of being marred by transgression, nature still bears an eloquent testimony to the love and power of a Divine Creator. After resting under the heavy curses of sin for almost 6,000 years, the incredible beauty of God's handiwork continues to amaze and enthrall. When we thank God for our blessings, we should never forget to mention these incomparable natural wonders that add so much meaning to every moment of our lives.

What would this planet be like without its restful carpet of living green grass and foliage? God did not have to clothe the ugly, bare soil with such a covering. Functionally, there needed to be no bright colors. Human beings could have survived on a bleak planet of gray ground and colorless plants. But they could not have survived as happily. The Creator Himself was not only a lover of beauty; He loved His creatures so much that He wanted them to be happy, too. That's why He draped the earth with a half-million varieties of contrasting blossoms and leaves. And hidden inside each tiny bud, God placed secrets that would challenge the genius of earth's greatest scientists.

How strange it is that so many of those who wrestle with these mysteries do not recognize the Creative Power that produced them. Even though many naturalists stand in awe of the creature, few seem to recognize and honor the Creator. Breathing the marvelous blend of nitrogen and oxygen that makes it possible for them to live, evolutionists refuse to acknowledge that the precise 79 percent to 21 percent mixture of gases was provided by something other than blind chance. Looking through eyes so delicately arranged that no combination of scientific genius can even understand, much less duplicate, their operation, unbelievers deny the miracle which makes it possible for them to see. Through ears, which connect to a brain more complex than the largest computer on earth, doubters listen to lectures on humanism and evolution.

Who are these people who scorn the record of God's creative power? They are only a tiny fragment of finite humanity, whose very existence, breath by breath, depends upon the operation of laws over which they have no control. Rejecting the divine origin of that for which they find no empirical evidence, many scientists ascribe miraculous qualities to matter itself. They build up theoretical creeds in which they place absolute faith, even to the point of believing that blind, unintelligent "nature" created life out of non-life.

TWO Is Chance Precise and Predictable?

What kind of faith is required to believe that all the orderly processes of nature were produced by chance? Almost every plant and animal exhibits amazing adaptations that can only be described as "miraculous." If these highly complex functions had no intelligent Creator or Designer, then our reasoning powers are staggered by the millions of "coincidences" that operate with infinite precision to produce perfect beauty, function, and reproduction on the earth.

Could they indeed be the products of accident or chance? Every law of science on the subject decrees that undirected, random nature tends toward deterioration rather than order. Surely the most persuasive evidence in favor of creationism is that of nature itself. The Bible suggests that the animals and earth should be asked about their own origin. In Job 12:7-9, we read: "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" Job says if you want to know how God operated in the work of creation, ask these various forms of life, ask the

earth, and the earth will explain how mightily God has wrought in these things.

So that's exactly what we're going to do right now. What does the earth have to say to us concerning the great power of God? Did you know there are miracles in every square inch of this earth? From the towering mountains to the vast, restless ocean and throughout the limitless universe of God, there is the throb and hum of life. From the microscopic to the immense, we can discover the fingerprints of the mighty Creator who brought all things into existence.

When I look at the universe and see the amazing fact that it is in perfect balance, that life in this world has been perfectly adapted to the conditions we find here, I know that some great intelligent power is behind it, making it operate in such an accurate manner. The Genesis account of the Bible has been completely vindicated by all the findings of true science. The writings of Moses have been found to be scientifically as well as historically accurate. In this booklet, we're going to look at the water and land in particular. By studying the mysteries of land and sea, we will see how wonderfully they support the biblical story of creation.

THREE

How Did Moses Know?

Let's go back to Genesis and take a look at the story as God gave it to Moses. Genesis 1:6 says, "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters that are under the firmament from the waters, which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day." Long, long ago the waters that were over the earth were actually right down here upon the surface. We know that there is a vast ocean in space, suspended in the atmosphere. We'll find out just what purpose it serves in a moment, but at one time that water was resting right here upon the earth. God divided it and lifted a part of it up into the heavens while part of it remained here.

Now look at verses 9 and 10. "And God said, Let the water under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good." How did Moses know there would be several oceans or seas? He had absolutely no human way of knowing there could be more than one body of water in the entire world. He never went around to see how many oceans were in the world, but God inspired this truth in Moses' mind. He said there were seas or oceans.

Here's another good question to ask. How did Moses know that all these various bodies of water would be connected and would rest in only one bed? Now, isn't that what he said? "Let all the waters be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear."

In the next verse, he says there were seas or oceans. It is a scientific, geographical fact that all the oceans of the world are joined together, and they do all rest in a common bed. Moses could not have known that of himself. He didn't say this of dry land. No, it was divided up into continents. Part of it would be over here and another big, discrete mass of it would be in another location. But concerning the waters, he said it would all be in one place, and yet it would be divided into oceans. I think it's tremendous that the Bible is so scientifically accurate as to reveal these things.

FOUR

Watering the Earth—God's Miracle

Now let's see how intelligence and design came into the ratio of land and water. One-quarter of the earth's surface is dry land, and three-quarters is covered with water. In the United States alone we have three and three-quarter million square miles of dry land, and all of it has to be watered and cared for. In fact, if it weren't watered, there would be no vegetation and no growing grass or trees.

Just imagine for a moment that the ratio of land and water was changed from what it is at present. The proportion of water and land determines the rainfall on the earth. Suppose the ocean was only half its present size. That would mean our rainfall would only be one-quarter of what we now receive. What would that mean for the three and three-quarter million square miles of land we have in these United

States? All of it would be turned into a vast, dry desert! But on the other hand, if half the present land were added to the ocean, there would be four times as much rainfall as there is now, and the entire United States would be turned into a vast marshland where human life would be almost impossible. Now suppose that mankind had to water this entire three and three-quarter million square miles of land. How could we ever spread out that water and irrigate the land effectively? What a tremendous task that would be! "There's plenty of water in the ocean," someone might observe, "we could simply use it to water the dry land." Although it may sound reasonable, there are three problems connected with it. First, transportation. We'd have to get the water out of the ocean and spread it evenly over the land. The second problem is the salt it contains, which would kill all the green plants. The third problem is weight. Water is 800 times the weight of the atmosphere, presenting the challenge of how to transport and disperse it.

FIVE

God Solves the Weight Problem

How has God solved the weight problem? First, He uses heat. We know heat expands things and cold contracts them, and that water is the material most subject to expansion. In fact, when turned into steam, it becomes 1,600 to 1,700 times its original volume. Remember, though, this water is 800 times heavier than the atmosphere. But God simply sends down the warming rays of the sun, turning the water into a vapor that is 900 times lighter than water. Now it is one-eighth times lighter than the atmosphere. So this vapor is easily lifted up out of the ocean, carried into the sky—perhaps miles into the air—and formed into great cloud masses.

The second problem is deadly salt, but God simply evaporates the water and leaves all the mineral deposits and impurities behind. Taken up into the clouds, the water is sweet and soft, perfectly adapted to irrigate the earth.

SIX

No Sprinkler System Like This

What about the third problem—transportation? The water that is lifted up is still hanging over the ocean, which doesn't need any more water. God sends along winds to blow the clouds and spread them out over the dry land area where it is needed. But how to get all the water down out of the clouds? Here is another wonderful miracle. Cold will contract, of course, so when the clouds pass over the mountain peaks, the cold air reaches up and begins to cool those clouds, turning the vapor into a condensation of moisture.

Now consider what would happen if the clouds gave up all the water they contain at one time—it would flood the entire surface of the earth with three feet of water! Therefore, the cooling process must be gradual. For example, if the temperature of the cloud is lowered by 9 degrees, it will drop *half* its water! So God arranges for a gradual cooling process to let the rain come down in gentle to vigorous showers to provide the amounts needed to revive the earth. What an incredible process! Of course, some of it rains back into the ocean, but it is needed there to provide the necessary amount of oxygen for fish living in salty ocean beds.

Did you know that these great facts of nature were all known and understood long before the scientists and naturalists discovered them? Ecclesiastes 1:7 is a most interesting verse. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full." Why not? The text continues to give the answer. "Unto the place from whence the river comes, thither they return again."

The Bible says the reason the seas do not overflow is that the water is taken up again and returned to where the rivers come from. And so there is a constant movement of water going up from the ocean in vapor form, carried as clouds over the land, and brought down again as rain, which forms rivulets that find their way back to the sea. Even though the great naturalists felt they had made a new discovery when they found out about the cycles of clouds, they could have known it all by reading the Scriptures.

SEVEN

Why Clouds Don't Break

Another text with scientific information is Job 26:8. "He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them." This is a beautiful text, explaining that the clouds don't break and spill all their water at once, even though millions of tons of water are drawn up from the oceans into the clouds. And, of course, Job was correct. We've just found that God has a process of gradual cooling that releases the water little by little as it is needed to irrigate the surface of the earth. God revealed it to Job long before mankind figured it out.

I'm sure all of us know that water has weight, and that its pressure increases dramatically as the depth increases. Certain fish that exist in the very bottom of the ocean are especially engineered by God to withstand this tremendous pressure. If brought quickly up to the surface, they practically explode. The pressure that God put into their muscular structure is still there on the inside when they are brought up where the pressure is not exerted from the outside.

This is a wonderful fact, but do you realize that we, too, live in the bottom of an atmospheric sea, which also has tremendous weight? At sea level we are living down at the bottom of a very heavy, dense covering. As the ocean is to the fish, so the atmosphere is to us. Every moment we live, a pressure of 14 pounds per square inch is exerted upon our body structure, and that's pretty heavy. We think a man is strong if he can carry 200 pounds on his back. In fact, the strongest man that ever lived put only 415 pounds over his head. Yet, every single form of life in this world, whether it's a 90-pound woman or a burly man, has a constant pressure of over 15 tons at sea level pushing and pressing upon them from every direction. That's 30,000 pounds!

Even the filmy, gauzy insects have been designed by God to withstand their proportion of this pressure. That little gnat, so light and frail that it seems anything could crush it, is built by God to withstand the weight of the atmosphere. Can you think this happened by mere chance? Consider Job 28:25. "To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure." The Bible says the wind has weight.

The air, in other words, is heavy. The atmosphere has weight. If you climb a mountain, the higher you climb, the thinner the atmosphere becomes, and you feel distressed and uncomfortable. Why? Because the pressure is not as great. You see, God has built in a certain amount of pressure that balances that on the outside at sea level. If you went high enough, you would be just as stressed as the fish brought up from the ocean depths. How wonderful that God has designed each living creature to be perfectly comfortable in its own environment.

EIGHT

Lucky Accident or Design?

Now consider another, even greater, miracle. The atmosphere around us is made up of two main ingredients—nitrogen and oxygen—whose mixture is always the same, whether at the highest mountaintops or in the deepest caves. The perfect balance is 79 percent nitrogen and 21 percent oxygen. You might ask, "Why is it this way?" Is there some particular reason for it? Is it important that we have this exact mixture of nitrogen and oxygen?" Yes, I can assure you it is most important. If the nitrogen were increased, our life processes would slow down and we would die. If the oxygen were measurably increased, our life processes would be rapidly increased. Our pulse rate would just run away and soon we would wear out and die. But God made it just right.

Suppose, for example, it was two-thirds nitrogen and one-third oxygen. If that proportion prevailed, and an electrical reaction caused the elements to combine, do you realize that the whole world would be turned into laughing maniacs? Everybody would be laughing because that would produce the laughing gas, N₂O, the same kind dentists sometimes use when extracting teeth. Or suppose it was divided half and half. That would produce nitric oxide, which is quickly fatal to all forms of life.

Was it just a lucky accident that it came out like this? Did some blind happenstance of nature produce this exact mixture that is necessary for life support? Or was there an intelligent design? This world would become chaotic if this atmospheric mixture slipped out of control for just a single instant.

We would see one of the most tremendous of all explosions, because nitrogen is the basic component of gunpowder; and oxygen, of course, makes for rapid combustion. It would be "Goodbye, world!"

And yet some day, apparently, there is going to an explosion like this. Some day the elements are going to melt with fervent heat, the Bible says. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:10 that "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." I don't know how God will arrange that, but I do know that some great fire one of these days is going to burn, and the earth will be purified by this strange fire of God. And the elements will be involved in it because the elements are going to melt. Maybe God is going to change just very, very slightly the present proportion of nitrogen and oxygen, causing this great conflagration to take place. I do know this—we must be ready for that day when it comes. The Bible indicates it is near at hand.

Another of the mysteries of nature was described in the Bible long before it was investigated by science. We read about it in Job 38:8–11. "Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?"

What beautiful, poetic language we find here to describe the creation of the ocean. It speaks of it as being born and coming forth from the womb. God says that the cloud was the garment of it and a thick darkness was a swaddling band placed around the ocean at its birth. But then God added, "Here ye may come but no further; here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

The scientists of this world have been amazed in learning the secrets of the tidal actions. They still don't understand all the deep, underwater cataclysmic actions that affect the tides and wave patterns. No naturalist on the face of the earth has figured out all the secrets of these swift tidal waves as they move to and fro in their own mysterious ways.

NINE

God's Heating System—The Gulf Stream

By the way, these tides and movements of water have been in perfect balance to contribute to mankind's comfort. I think of the mighty Gulf Stream, for instance. We don't know everything about it, but we do know life in the United States would be almost impossible were it not for the fantastic influence of this great stream. It comes out of the Gulf of Mexico, goes along the eastern seaboard, and up into the northern sections of the world. It is like a river, flowing through the midst of the sea, and can be seen distinctly from high above because of its different color.

In fact, this river is about 70 miles wide and nearly 3,000 feet deep. When it leaves the Gulf of Mexico, the water temperature is 84°, and off the coast of the Carolinas it is still a warm 80°. This warming influence actually makes the northern coastal regions of America and Europe inhabitable; otherwise, they would be frozen wastelands.

Now notice what happens as this warm river reaches the entrance of the Arctic region at Baffin Bay, where it meets a frigid polar stream that is rushing southward. As a result of the titanic collision of these two giants, the polar stream is forced to dive down thousands of feet, where it continues its southward course, coming up finally in the West Indies during their hottest season, thus cooling down the terrible tropical heat. The Gulf Stream gets deflected eastward, going up along the British Isles, making these habitable.

It was in God's plan for this to happen. I don't believe for a moment that all this happened by chance or accident. Without that deflection of the Gulf Stream, some of those northern lands would be locked in eternal winter. Surely God was behind the entire plan.

TEN

Goggles and Bifocals

Let's hurry along now and take a quick look at the creatures of nature and see how intelligence and design came into the picture. Think for a moment of the fish that inhabit the oceans. They are constantly subject to attack from their enemies from above—like the gulls that swoop down to make

their meals off marine life. Do you know that fish have specially constructed eyeballs enabling them to look almost instantly in any and all directions? They see behind, below, above and on the sides; furthermore, their eyes are designed to take into account the refraction of light.

Yes, fish can see 30 percent farther than other visual instruments because God designed the eyeball of the fish to take into consideration the refraction of light. We tend to think it's a wonderful accomplishment when the oculist manufactures special goggles for divers that compensate for refraction in the water, yet God did it for fish long before. Goggles could never have come into existence by chance, yet evolutionists contend that a fish's specialized eyeballs just happened.

In the waters of Malaya lives a fish with bifocal lenses built right in its eyes. This little sardine-sized fish is prized for food by the seagulls especially. They are constantly swooping down to gobble up this little fish if they can. So the little fish has to watch carefully for this approaching danger. It must have good far vision, but since it feeds on the microscopic larvae that abound in the water, it must have very good near vision as well. And do you know the Creator provided a little membrane that comes halfway up on its eyes, giving it bifocal vision? That little fish can look up and see the gulls coming or look down and see those nearby bits of life that it can feed on!

We think it wonderful that the skilled optometrist and oculist can perfect glasses permitting us to see near and far away, yet here is a *fish* that has been around for thousands of years—and God made it that way from the beginning. It did not just develop blindly; it had to be created. Intelligent design was behind it.

ELEVEN

Birds and Bees

Now let's examine two Pacific coast water birds. I can find no stronger evidence of design in nature than with the Ousel, a very friendly little bird that lives near mountain streams. It can usually be found where the water is swift-flowing and splashy. This buoyant bird will be floating along, apparently weightless, and then suddenly sink to the bottom like a piece of lead. There he walks around picking up bits of food on the streambed. After taking his fill, he goes over to the bank, shakes himself, and mysteriously sets himself afloat again like a wisp of smoke.

It has been discovered that this strange bird has some special equipment—a muscular apparatus that can instantly exhaust every bit of air from its body, letting it sink down; then when it walks out, it can take in air again and float off once more. Now, *that's* special creation, isn't it? The evolutionists would say, "Well, it needed to have this bit of apparatus, so nature provided it." Of course, they don't say what nature is, but maintain that it just grew by some accidental development. The truth is that God provided it. He made this particular bird as He did because He saw that it needed this for survival.

Another kind of bird found on the Pacific coast lives on a diet of large worms that live in holes in the sand. Because this worm is down at the very bottom of its hole, the bird must go down to get the worm out. It so happens that, although its beak is exactly the right length to reach into the hole, the narrow hole keeps the beak squeezed shut. What a predicament—to be able to see and reach a luscious worm but not be able to open his beak to pick it up! Do you know what God arranged for this particular bird? He created a tiny flap much like a surgeon's forceps at the bottom of the beak. With this special organ the bird can pick up the worm, back out of the hole, and gobble it down!

Isn't it wonderful that God thought of a little bird and made something special so it could get its food conveniently? If He so loves the little birds and provides the things to make their existence comfortable, don't you think He's willing to provide everything that we might need? He loves us even more. Remember, He knows when the sparrows fall.

Some years ago, a scientific magazine published an article by a clever biologist who did not believe in evolution. In *Evolution Goes to Pieces on a Bee's Knee*, the author first reviewed the evolutionist's teaching that when the need for a certain organ develops in any creature, the organ is produced in response to that need. Nature itself, or some blind chance, supposedly comes along and produces the necessary organ to fit the creature for survival. Then he cited the example of the bees. When bees crawl into pollen-filled blossoms, their breathing apparatus gets all stopped up with pollen. In fact, they can't

even breathe while they are inside gathering their pollen.

Now it so happens that every bee has a special brush located on its knees—a stiff brush—that it uses to clean out its breathing apparatus when it comes out of the flower so it doesn't suffocate. This biologist noted that if it were true that these insects develop special equipment in response to a need, the very first bee to exist did not have those brushes on its knees. When it went into the flower, it would have suffocated; consequently, the whole bee family would have become extinct right then and there. No, rather than these brushes developing slowly through the ages in response to a need, they were provided by God to meet the need and save the very first bee that was made.

The conclusion is that God anticipated the needs of His creatures and made them with every necessary apparatus. How thankful we ought to be that God can supply all our needs in advance. The Bible says the fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God." Only a God of love and power could have made the marvels we see about us. And if He cares for the tiny animal world, He cares for us, too. He loves us even more than He loves that little bird out on the West Coast, and He wants to save us. He wants to take us at last to a place where nature will be in perfect balance again and where all of the curse of sin will be forever removed.

TWELVE

And He Loves Me

Can we doubt the love of God, who makes such infinite provision for everything He created? Nothing has been left alone to suffer extinction or deprivation. Only man's bungling interference with the delicate balance of nature has brought sorrow and tragedy. If God cares for the needs of the tiniest cell of the smallest plant or animal, don't you think He loves us enough to care for us?

One of the most thrilling facts I learned about the miracles of nature concerned the lowly cocklebur. Surely it is one of the most despised of all plants due to its clinging, pricking nature. Yet consider the marvel of its reproduction. Every pod of the cocklebur has two seeds inside to guarantee its survival. But during the first year only one of the seeds will begin to grow. The other seed waits till the second year to start growing in order to perpetuate two seasons of growth. But if something happens to the first seed so that it does not grow and produce, the second seed begins to grow immediately instead of waiting for the next year. What built-in wisdom of God communicates to that waiting seed that it should begin to grow when the first seed is destroyed? No evolutionist has been able to harmonize miracles like this with their theories of naturalism and chance.

Surely we can see that God's care extends to the meanest and lowest order of growing things. Are we not more precious to Him than the cockleburs? If He works miracles to safeguard a clinging, contrary cocklebur, will He not guide the ways of those for whom He gave His life? May God open our eyes to the wonder and wisdom of His great work of creation. Tonight when you kneel to pray, remember to thank God for the landscape of beauty that always lies beyond the manmade mess of human obstruction.

America and the Ten Commandments

Anthony Lester

In July 2001, Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore, in the cover of night, placed in the middle of a public courthouse foyer a two-ton granite display that ignited a firestorm consuming American politics and the national media for months. Lawsuits were filed, protests on both sides were organized, and the battle over this country's destiny began.

What could cause such an ill-tempered debate on the future of religion in American politics? The 10 Commandments of course! Actually, it's hard to believe that God's law, delivered to His people on their freedom tour of the Middle East, could cause such an outrage. Designed specifically to give humans a guide to peace and harmony on earth, it was turned into a smoking platform of anger and self-righteousness. Perhaps not since the Scopes trial of the early 20th century has America experienced such rancor over the state-church controversy.

By the time the granite dust settled, the 10 Commandments had been removed from the court by the order of a higher justice; furthermore, Chief Justice Roy Moore was removed from office for unrepentantly defying the law of the land. Yet on the day of his expulsion, the passionate judge gave a warning to those who challenged his attempt to acknowledge God from his chair—he'd be back! And what he planned would change the course of American politics.

A foreboding claim, indeed, in what might appear to be the first real thrust by Christian-backed political forces to challenge the deepening secularization of the United States. Of course, this particular skirmish is only a preview of a greater conflict to come that will be like nothing we have ever experienced in this nation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Bible predicts who in America is going to win this war over religion and government. But before you begin figuring that out, you should ask yourself two questions: What side do you stand for on this issue? And are you sure that God is standing behind you?

Chapter 1 Faithful Paradox

For me, the controversy raging over the display of the 10 Commandments is not really about legality or the constitution. No. It really seems to be all about irony.

As the news reported daily of this battle, I soon began to wonder if anyone else was finding the whole thing paradoxical. As this huge outcry for the 10 Commandments to be displayed in schools, courthouses, and in other public places reached a feverish pitch in Internet chat rooms, on talk-radio shows, and in newsmagazines, I understood that most Christian churches in the country still teach that all or a part of them were nailed to the cross. (A belief that teaches the Commandments and/or their penalties are no longer in force for Christians.)

Proponents of that stance say that America should have them on display because they are a part of our Judeo-Christian heritage, even as they also say that Christ did away with the Commandments when He died. In fact, some also say He left just two new commandments with which believers should concern themselves.

Yet this is confusing: If the Commandments are no longer in effect, why are they, as Christians and Americans, trying to force them on every other citizen by displaying them as a government-sanctioned artifact? Also, if Jesus did away with them, can they really be part of a common Judeo-Christian heritage? Wouldn't the most correct course of action be to post the two new covenant commandments of Jesus for a Christian nation?

On the other hand, if the 10 Commandments were so important to this nation's Founding Fathers, why should we not be compelled to obey them implicitly—every one of them, with or without the benefits of grace—if America is to return to its glorious roots? If the Founding Fathers established

this nation on the pillar of the 10 Commandments, might they have reasonably expected them to be followed to the letter by likeminded Christian citizens?

Chapter 2 America's Purpose

Some might label me unpatriotic because I feel it necessary to point out a fundamental flaw in the reasoning of the many Christians who want to see the 10 Commandments displayed in government institutions. Although my purpose is not to argue the details of why this nation was founded, I do believe that the United States plays a pivotal and wonderful role in God's plan of salvation. As such, I love this nation as the gift from God that it is. My heart always soars with joy when I hear our national anthem.

Yet whether or not "Christian" leaders established this country as a "Christian" nation is not the issue. Of course, the ideals of Christianity and Judaism should be the moral compass that guides the hearts of our leaders. Christianity offers freedom to every human being, just as the United States has a strong record of fighting for freedom throughout the world. However, I don't think America is responsible for spreading God's end-time message to the world. Rather, America is here to protect His church, so *she* can take the gospel to every people and nation. I believe this is why America has acquired such undisputable power, unprecedented in the history of the world. Its economical and political influence protects God's last-day church from tyrant governments and unwanted political intervention, enabling it to freely spread the good news to people all around the world. God would surely bless such a nation.

Some Christians boldly claim that they want the Commandments displayed as a way to get God back into America, in addition to prayer in schools and in Congress. But is that really safe? Is the government the right power to tell us what is right and wrong morally? Surely we are blessed that our laws reflect the basic principles of God's Commandments; that's a very real comfort to even non-Christians. But by separating church and state, we are assured that no religious power will have the authority to override the conscience of those who might believe otherwise, suppressing the religious beliefs of another church. Yet well-meaning but misguided Christians who want to smash the wall of separation of church and state will turn the blessings of this country on their head and lead America into a terrible disaster.

Chapter 3 The Heart of the Matter

Frankly, this nation hasn't lost its way because the government or strident humanists seek separation of church and state, forbidding the government display of Commandments; it's lost its way because more and more of her people's hearts are seeking separation from God in their everyday living. It's not secular government that's sending this nation down the sewer of moral decay; it's secularized hearts!

Make no mistake; everything about the 10 Commandments speaks of religion. It just cannot be displayed as mere history, because any person who sees it, Christian or heathen, will understand its towering religious significance. It is so powerful that an atheist will feel its influence in a chamber of justice on the other side of the building and truly believe he has no fair shot because of his or her beliefs. And Christians need to understand this about God's law: It is not just a statue to display in public, like a costume from a famous movie. It affects everybody's lives, even the unbelievers', whether they want it to or not.

Likewise, every Christian acknowledges that the Commandments come directly from the hand of God. "And he gave unto Moses ... two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18). They are religious laws, period. The government of man has no real power or mandate to enforce them—they are enforced solely by God's omnipresence, universal power, and wisdom. And yet far too many Christians are secularizing their own hearts to God's Commandments, believing the government plays a part in the task He has given to each individual. We should not attempt to use the government to spread God's message—we should be using our own voices and the example of our lives. What example? Reflecting the spirit of the 10 Commandments.

So as some clamor about the separation of church and state, they still yet deny with their hearts and

mouths the ultimate authority of God's law. They lift up the Commandments without any intention of honoring them completely—the very definition of a form of godliness without power.

Shouldn't Christians in this country be more concerned about obeying those Commandments than making them a historical display on the walls in our halls of justice? Shouldn't we stop treating God's law as an idol of government, but instead as the living, fulfilled testimony of Jesus Christ?

The answer to these questions is yes, yes, yes! And here is why.

Chapter 4 Indisputable Facts About the 10 Commandments

Any healthy debate among Christians about God's law must begin with how God Himself defines the terms. Without this step, it's impossible to find a biblical consensus. Yet by letting God define our terms in this discussion, it won't take long to realize that the evidence compelling us to obey His Commandments today, in the new covenant faith, is overwhelming.

Here are 10 indisputable facts, or definitions, about the 10 Commandments from the Old and New Testaments—two witnesses, or dictionaries, of God's message to humanity.

1. God wrote the 10 Commandments. “And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables” (Exodus 32:16).
2. They are eternal, meaning they will not change or be erased. “All his commandments are sure. They stand fast forever and ever” (Psalm 89:34).
3. They are perfect as they are. “The law of the Lord is perfect” (Psalm 19). If they were perfect, would their function or purpose need to change?
4. We'll die if we break them. “He poured out his life unto death ... [bearing] the sin of many.” (Isaiah 53:5). Satan was first to convince a human otherwise.
5. It is our job to obey them. “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

These first five points are taken from the Old Testament. Many of those who want to display the Commandments argue that the laws are an old covenant relic meant for the Jews, and Christians aren't subject to them because they are outmoded in our relationship with Jesus. Although points 2 and 3 each seem to shatter this argument, we'll see later from the New Testament that Jesus also denied the claim that the Commandments have been nullified.

But first, this viewpoint contradicts one major reason given to showcase the Commandments in schools and other government-run institutions; that being, we have a government established on Judeo-Christian principles and displaying them is simply honoring that. If we live in contradiction to the Commandments, merely displaying them as a testimony of past government, it is hollow praise at best. We shouldn't treat God's law with such diminished value!

At worst, it is hypocrisy. For if we tell non-believers we want to honor our Judeo heritage, and then claim that actually following its principles is no longer important in a saving relationship with God, what other message could that send? It seems logical to conclude that to honor our Jewish heritage, we would honor the 10 Commandments in our lives and hearts. (In addition, displaying a religious icon to honor our past is in fact a sincere endorsement of those principles—something God has asked us to do, not an earthly government.)

But the New Testament, even after Jesus' death, doesn't regard the law itself any differently than the Old Testament. In fact, it is easy to conclude that the New Testament also affirms that God's law is forever and ever.

6. Breaking them is *still* wrong. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).
7. Humanity *still* needs them. “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law said, Thou shall not covet” (Romans 7:7).
8. Obeying them is *still* a sign of loyalty. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

14:15).

9. They are *still* eternal. “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17). Jesus exalted them! God established the law with His own voice; might it need Jesus’ voice to do away with them? Yet He never does, before or after His death!
10. They are *still* perfect. “Think not that I come to destroy the law ... but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17, 18). Jesus did not change any part of them.

It’s clear that Jesus wants us to keep the laws of God—the 10 Commandments—and I believe He is dismayed at the hollow gesture of displaying them in our government halls and not in our outward lives. Jesus continued to call the Commandments “laws,” and He never defined them differently. So this next verse is a clear message: “Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

Of course, Jesus also obeyed them exactly the way they were intended, so Christians surely cannot conclude that they are not meant to follow them as Jesus followed them. Isn’t that what Christians are—a reflection of Christ?

Chapter 5 Why the 10 Commandments Came First

Most if not all highways in the country have speed limits posted to warn drivers of the laws governing traffic in their jurisdiction. These speed limit signs tend to be very specific. Drivers are repeatedly warned that exceeding 70 mph on the highway is a violation of the law, and if caught, they will be subject to fees and other penalties.

Now imagine if after several years, even as new drivers are getting licenses, the government begins to take down these very specific signs and replace them with “Drive Safely” signs.

Here’s how it could happen: Drivers have been complaining for years that traffic laws are too confusing to understand and too restrictive to obey, though they are truly inspired when a new governor issues a proclamation saying, “Very specific traffic laws are a reflection of an even greater traffic law: drive safely.”

Years later, a new government decides the governor really meant that imposing specific speed limits is impossible for the average citizen today to reasonably obey while trying to get to work, get their kids to soccer games, and other everyday realities. (Even advanced safety features in cars seemed to make those laws archaic.) So they replace 70 mph speed limits with the “Drive Safely” signs and remove the penalties for exceeding them. Right below the new sign, they post, “Suggest 70 mph,” because most traffic engineers agree that 70 mph is the safest limit.

What happens? Some drivers believe 70 mph is in fact the safest, but others think safety is reasonably possible at 85 mph. Still others think that getting there faster is more important, and without having to worry about fees, they travel at speeds of 100 mph or faster! (Perhaps worse yet, some believe 20 mph is safest—as much as keeping in the left lane at all times.) In short, chaos rules the highways! More people actually die, and everyone fears for their lives.

That might be silly to imagine, but that is how Christians today are treating the 10 Commandments, a very specific set of rules based on two greater laws. Jesus said, “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matthew 22:37–39).

If He had stopped there, I would understand a little more how someone could believe the Commandments were no longer an issue. But He didn’t stop there, and I think He added His next statement to ensure no one would deny the laws’ eternal purpose. He says, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The specific speed limits hang on the greater commandment of drive safely, and without them a “Drive Safely” law would be useless to govern people. Anarchy would prevail! Why? Because humans can’t be trusted to figure out right and wrong in our selfish conditions. To paraphrase one modern-day philosopher, “Why are people who go faster than us dangerous and those who go slower than us annoying?” Right would always be what we wanted, and wrong would always be what we did not

want. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but the ends are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

Let’s reverse the scenario. What would have happened if God instead issued the two great commandments to Moses on the mountain without offering the 10 Commandments? The Bible tells us: “He that trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26). The world, influenced by sinful hearts and the deceptions of Satan, would quickly crumble. Sadly, much of the problem would be genuine believers foolishly thinking they could determine right and wrong without God’s explicit direction. In essence, it’s the same outcome if the 10 Commandments were ditched entirely for the two greater commandments.

There is only one way to unify a group of believers from all different backgrounds and beliefs—one common creed. That creed is God’s plan for the universe, His Word, and that emphatically includes His 10 Commandments.

Some well-meaning Christians also argue that the 10 Commandments should be displayed as “helpful suggestions,” and not laws that require penalty if broken. However, the problem is exactly the same! Without the danger of lawbreaking, and therefore the threat of a penalty, most people would freely violate the greater law. As mere guidelines, they are useless to create order—which is why the government will never remove specific speed limits. It is also why God has not done away with the 10 Commandments either. They still have a very legal and compelling interest in our lives.

You can also look at it this way: If you break the law that forbids lying, you have broken both of the greatest commandments. How? By lying, you cheat another human being. And you also show you have little faith that God can handle your crisis with truth.

Can it be any clearer? Break a 10 Commandment and you automatically break the greater commandments! This shows we are still under the obligation to keep the 10 Commandments, which are the two greater commandments in detail. (It also should be no surprise that Jesus in fact hung more details on the 10 Commandments, calling lust adultery and hate murder!) Many Christians utterly forsake God’s 10 Commandments but cleverly veil their disobedience behind these two great commandments. As such, men and women on their own define what it really means to commit adultery, what it really means to steal, what it really means to bear false witness, what it really means to honor the Sabbath, and what it really means to murder. Without the 10 very specific Commandments, it is much easier for “God’s people” to do terrible things in His name. It’s a slippery slope that can only be avoided by committing ourselves to His Commandments as recorded in the Holy Bible.

Some Americans are concerned about the real threat of moral relativism—the notion that there are no moral absolutes—infesting the nation today. For example, euthanasia, legalizing illicit drugs, homosexual marriage, and abortion are the results of a people who have lost sight of God’s eternal principles. But by doing away with either the Commandments or the penalty surrounding them, they are far down the road to moral relativism, because they rely on humans feelings, and not God’s written law, to ensure morality.

God wrote His Commandments, which are called eternal, for a reason: that there would be no doubt in our minds and hearts what it meant to obey Him.

Chapter 6 The Danger of Grace: Disobedience

Now imagine if a country wants to export several varieties of their tasty fruit into the United States, yet for reasons of public safety, our government decides that poor health conditions in that country are too dangerous to permit it.

So unable to legally transport their fruits into a willing-to-buy U.S. market, they begin to smuggle in their goods, and before long, their amazingly tasty food becomes a sensation.

Unfortunately, the government’s refusal to legalize the imports shows real wisdom. Soon people start to get strange illnesses traced to the fruit, and some even begin to die. What’s worse, the fruit begins to infect genes and harm unborn babies.

But strangely, the desire for the fruit continues to soar—people eat it ravenously despite the laws against it and the health effects. The government decides to take decisive action, and soon creates an amazing serum from a very rare blood type that sustains the lives of people who eat the fruit as long as

they continue to inject the serum.

To spread the word, the government offers the serum free of charge to anyone willing to take it. The only catch is that serum receivers are asked to evangelize about the dangers of this poisonous fruit. Even though the law still considers it illegal to buy, sell, or consume the fruit, they give a blind eye to those who spread the word.

Sounds suspect, right? Who in their right mind would willingly continue to eat the fruit knowing that it destroys their body and their children's lives? And most Americans who respect our laws would be outraged by such willing defiance and would not tolerate it.

Unfortunately, these Americans treat God's law the same way. Is it right to willingly eat the fruit even with the serum? Of course not, but some Christians think that because we have a serum, called "grace," our sins are covered in even *willful* disobedience. Does it really make sense to continue to sin because we have His grace? God wants to blot out sins not only in our lives, but also from the universe—might we consider cooperating by committing to obedience?

We must remember that there is a very fine line between admitting that we cannot overcome sin on our own and willful disobedience. Someday, the former will lead to the latter if we do not trust our Lord's promises that He can help us obey God's law (Revelation 3:21). The amazing thing is that the Bible says if we cling to Jesus, we will have victory. So I think the real question should not be, "Why are the Commandments so hard to obey," but rather "Why am I finding it so hard to trust God's promise?" Too often the phrase, "We can't keep them," really means, "God will forgive me anyhow." That is presumption, and it is a dangerous game to play with the Almighty.

That's why one of the most passionate arguments fired against "Commandment keepers" is the same argument that convinces me that obeying them is really a matter of loyalty to Jesus. It's been said that all we can do is believe, for we as sinful beings are unable to obey the law anyway.

But this is really a chilling argument when you unfold its ultimate conclusion. It's as if they are saying that all of those Bible verses about relying wholly on Jesus for salvation are actually saying we must instead be puppets possessed by Jesus. He must either overlook our sins with His blood or actually take over our bodies, choosing for us. But puppets don't love Jesus, nor do puppets care or choose. Why should they? If we are puppets, why care about the law at all—or even Jesus—who is the Commandments, the Word, in flesh?

Of course, the argument about simple belief is countered in the Bible. "You believe that there is one God. You do well. *Even the demons believe—and tremble!*" (James 2:19, emphasis added). Even the devil believes in the saving power of Jesus, but the Bible says he will not be saved. Which means it must require something that the devil and the demons don't do!

What could that be? It's acknowledging God by *choosing* to live the pure lives He meant for us. He wants His people to be active participants in His plan for their lives. This surely begins with belief, a crucial step. But it must not end there. What does faith really mean without commitment? "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26)!

Should we treat something He came to die for so carelessly? Some say, "Even if I don't want to sin, but do, it is covered under God's blood." Should we be so dispassionate and neglectful? I think the heartfelt plea is, "I will commit my heart to God's Commandments as a testimony of His grace in my life. Should I stumble, He will lift me up." But if we don't do our best, should we expect Jesus to continue paying the price?

The Word of God sums it up best as always: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that continues in sin is of the devil; for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God does not continue in sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:7–9).

Chapter 7 The Sabbath Conundrum

There are some supporters for posting the 10 Commandments who do agree that obeying them is indeed a part of the Christian experience. But for many, this leads to another irony.

If the government summons you to court at a certain time, it expects you to be there—not three days earlier or a day after. If it asks you to testify at a trial, it expects you to answer questions and not read a sports magazine. Neither does it want you to show up late or leave early. It also considers you in contempt of court, a lawbreaker, if you ignore the judge while he or she is trying to speak with you.

I have no doubt that most sincere Christians citizens would be angered by such disrespect for the institution for justice, yet these same Christians do not respect God's government regarding time with Him in His chamber. They don't show up when asked, and if they do, it's often on another day and they don't do the things asked of them.

Many Christians exclude the fourth Commandment from the other nine as a law meant only for the Jews. Others say that it is still a Commandment to obey, but one that Christians should practice on the first day of the week instead of the last day. Others still argue that it doesn't matter what day, as long as time is given to God. Yet can you ever imagine finding a judge who orders a trial on Wednesday to accept: "I showed up on Thursday! As long as I show up, does it really matter?" Of course, God will accept praise any day and time, and He will bless you for it. But this Commandment asks for your presence at a particular place and time!

Why is it then that when a judge tells us to show up, we know we are breaking the law when we don't and will suffer the penalty—but if the Judge of the universe asks us to show on a certain day, it's really just our call? By ignoring or altering the fourth Commandment, it is no longer a relevant part of the 10 Commandments as written in the Bible—the *inspired Word of God*. Indeed, if it can change on the whims of a person, why not the others? But Jesus Himself emphatically said this would never be the case. "Think not that I come to destroy the law ... but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17,18). He also said not one part of it would change, not even if the earth and its people passed into history. It's for all time and for all creation! In addition, He said the wording of the law would never change (Luke 16:17), which is what exactly has to happen if we are to accept that the first day is the Sabbath. Can you imagine changing a court summons date and passing it off as lawful? Many are surprised to hear that neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers ever tell Jewish converts to worship on the first day of the week. You might guess that many Jews would be put off by such a statement—after all, the Commandments are an essential part of their lives (their ancestors were stoned for not following it!) and they had heard with their own ears Jesus tell them to keep the Commandments. Public defenders would be outraged if a judge told them one day to be ready for trial on Thursday, then suddenly moved it to Wednesday to appease the prosecutors without telling the defense! Yet we hear about no such controversy regarding the Sabbath in the Bible.

This becomes even more problematic when Paul puts a stop to the practice of circumcision, replacing the commitment, or altering it, with baptism (Colossians 2:11). His act of transforming the circumcision ceremony created a deep division in the church, yet we are to believe the transformation of the Sabbath did not? Many claim the fact that Jesus doesn't vocally reinforce the Sabbath in the New Testament proves, from silence, that He must have not considered it important. But since He did observe the Sabbath, and because we see no Jewish outcry, the argument from silence works best the other way around. Indeed, Jesus often mentions a Commandment to add more meaning to it. It is very possible that the light on the Sabbath in the Bible is sufficient, so He saw no reason to mention it. Of course, Jesus does mention the Sabbath while defending it from legalists (Matthew 12:1–12), and He honored the Sabbath by going to the synagogue, as "was his custom" (Luke 4:16).

Would you consider yourself loyal to the government if you didn't show up to a trial where your testimony could convict a terrorist? Why then would you consider yourself loyal to God if you failed to show up on a day He specifically asks of you?

Chapter 8 Legalism: The Real Danger

You wouldn't call a police officer a legalist if he or she gave a motorist a ticket for going the posted speed limit in a blizzard. Some traffic laws might even seem strange, yet we know deep down there is a reason for them: public safety. Somehow, somewhere, somebody died or was injured, and the law was put in place. (Likewise, the details of the fourth Commandment might seem strange, we might not

understand them completely, but it is a law from God.)

Yet Christians who proclaim the importance of obeying all of the Commandments are often called legalists. And even before the discussion about grace can begin, they are said not to understand grace and are labeled Pharisees. The debate ends, and the confusing rhetoric provides more heat than light.

Still, this is an important concern, because the Pharisees treated God's law in such a way that changed its nature, and Jesus rebuked them for it. They added religious pomp and circumstance to not only gain favor or merit with God (in fact, they really seemed to merit favor with people), but also to control the religion itself and His people (Matthew 23:15).

But the Jews, or even Jesus, never questioned the Pharisees' zeal for the 10 Commandments themselves, only that they had altered their purpose; loyalty to God's law was a must for any Jew. In fact, Jesus told His followers that the standards set by the Pharisees was in fact too low to enable human access to heaven (Matthew 5:20).

He told the Pharisees that their outward obedience to the Commandments did not hide the sins in their hearts. Our outward show of obedience to the Commandments cannot disguise from God the filthy rags we wear beneath our legalistic robes—God sees the filthy rags of lust, deceit, and murder in our hearts. Jesus said that how the Pharisees behaved was altogether different from their hearts, but that their outward behavior was, in fact, appropriate. In this sense they followed the letter of the law, but forsook its spirit (Matthew 23:27).

The Pharisees changed God's law from a measuring stick to show us our need of God's empowering grace into works that could get us into heaven. But this is not a real representation of what God meant for the Jews, who were always to be saved by grace in Jesus Christ. The New Testament tells us that it wasn't works that made Abraham righteous; it was his faith in God's promises. If he didn't believe that God would do as He promised, his obedience would have been for nothing. Yet his works are considered a sign of his faith. Had he no works, no obedience, would he be remembered as the "father of the faithful"?

Was the New Testament calling Abraham a legalist? (James 2:21–22). No. It was calling him a Christian—an early version, perhaps, but still a trusting, obedient Christian.

Chapter 9 The Real Power of Grace

God has given His people the power to rebuke immorality with His law, but we should place this charge in perspective. We should not force His law on anyone—nor should any government power. Our first cause is to convince others of their personal need of Jesus, and in doing so, teach them the judgment is coming quickly.

Some believe that our relationship with God's law changed with Jesus. But He came to cleanse us of our sins and give us the power to overcome them—not give us a free pass to sin more. Grace has always been God's powerful gift, from Adam to the end of time. We should not take it for granted so easily, so cheaply.

What sense would it be for Jesus to come and explain the purpose of the law, to keep it, to die because humans broke them, only to say that the laws were no longer in effect after His death? The equation is simple: If there is no law, there is no sin. If there is no sin, there is no judgment needed. The final judgment, which all Christians believe in to some degree, makes it logically necessary to have a law! If Jesus did away with the law, at the very least those living today would not be sinners. But the Bible says we are sinners (Romans 3:23). We are all judged by a common standard; the righteous and the lost will be weighed by it. The difference: the righteous are thus because Jesus made them that way by His empowering grace.

Sometimes I am told that I don't understand grace because I choose to obey the Commandments as they are written. But my testimony is a life utterly transformed by God's grace, which has in turn made me recognize the astounding beauty and necessity of God's moral law. How could the Holy Spirit convict me of my desperate need to repent and accept God's grace without His rules spelled out in detail? It's not a long-gone artifact of faith, but an eternal testament to God's righteousness!

Realizing that my sins had been washed away, my love for God blossomed (1 John 4:19). Yet the more I studied His Word, the more I saw that sin devastated God's heart. It was an unavoidable conclusion. I didn't want to hurt Him any longer, or treat His law so lackadaisically. Grace has not only made me clean before the Father, it has enabled me to honor His Commandments so long as I cling to Jesus and His promises.

When we show God our real desire to stop sinning, real change begins. We experience true character-building—a real goal to reach for—a real purpose for living; something that grace without real responsibility won't give us. (If you give a jobless person a job and a living wage, you will see real passion! But what happens when all you do is give money and walk away?) And that is why I am so passionate for God. His law, His government, has given me purpose to live, to work, and to die for.

God loves us. God has mercy. I count on that love and have faith in that mercy. I am aware of my sinful condition, but I have assurance that He is willing to forgive and that He will complete His work in me (Philippians 1:6). But I also believe He has a big problem with those who willfully defy His Commandments and pick and choose the details they will acknowledge. Can God allow someone into heaven who continues to recklessly defy Him? I think God would never want us to conclude that we love Him so much that we won't worry about keeping His Commandments.

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12).

Conclusion

Thus, God-fearing Americans don't need the government to enforce the 10 Commandments, or have schools with prayer time. For all their days, the Jews had posted His moral law everywhere, and yet they still disobeyed and their nation crumbled. They were lost because their hearts rejected His laws, not because they didn't display them. That should tell us something: A plaque in a government hall doesn't honor God; that method was tried, and it failed.

Of course, there is a big difference between that and forbidding biblical teaching in the public domain; this is the real issue Christians should fight for. Ensuring religious liberty does not mean forbidding expressing our faith; sharing our faith is a Christian duty! Yet nor does religious liberty mean forcing the faith on someone who doesn't want to hear it. It is a sad fact that God's influence is dying in the land, but the government can't fix that. Only God can through the agency of His church.

Most Americans appreciate the safety and freedom afforded to a people living under the rule of law. By obeying the laws of our government, we contribute to the public peace. The laws of our government are a lot of “thou shall nots,” but very few people, only anarchists, grumble that they are restrictions. Why then do Christians, good Americans, treat God's government as if it is currently void of the rule of law—as if He doesn't expect future citizens of His kingdom to keep them? Why do we grumble about keeping them, as if they were terrible? If we keep them, to us they are a “law of liberty!”

Instead of a Christian-governed nation, I believe there is an even a better way to promote peace, love, and Jesus in our country. Instead of raising an alarm when they are removed from government buildings, I believe we should hang the 10 Commandments in our own homes and on our hearts. If we honored them by our actions, it wouldn't matter what the government did, because the hearts of unbelievers would be touched dramatically. Think of the stories of Joseph, Daniel, and of course our perfect example, God's Commandment Keeper, Jesus. His life of love, grace, and perfection changed the course of history—no earthly government required.

Armageddon

Joe Crews

1 ISRAEL'S FINAL WAR

The signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty on March 26, 1979, marked an emotional moment in the history of the Middle East. After years of bitter animosity punctuated by military conflict, an Arab nation and a Jewish nation embraced each other with promises of peace.

What did it signify for the little pocket of Zionism whose struggles for survival have drawn United States approval and support? Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, before his death, was unable to provide the security and permanent peace which has eluded Israel since the days of Abraham. The answer to Israel's dilemma is clearly revealed in the fantastic prophecies of the Bible.

According to the Word of God, Israel will not find true deliverance from her enemies until it is secured for her by the kings of the east. Her last war has not yet been fought. The book of Revelation describes an alliance with some powerful defenders who finally destroy the oppressors of Israel and establish her in eternal security. Those allies are given the enigmatic title "kings of the east" in Revelation 16:12. They actually intervene to deliver Israel during the war of Armageddon, described in the Bible as the final conflict to take place on this planet. All nations will be involved in this battle, but Israel will be the only victor.

Our purpose in this study is to answer a number of questions. What is the nature of that final war of Armageddon? How can all the countries of the world be involved in it? How is it possible for only one group, the people of Israel, to survive this holocaust? Who are the mysterious kings of the east that effect her victory? And finally, how is Israel delivered from her enemies by the drying up of the Euphrates River, as described in Revelation 16:12?

First of all, we need to find out if the present nation of Israel is the same Israel which is designated in the book of Revelation as the people of God. Some tremendous prophecies are found in that book, most of them concerned with saving the embattled remnant group of faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Those followers are sometimes referred to as the "tribes of Israel" and spoken of in the context of Jewish customs. Does this mean that the literal nation of Israel—the one which is fighting with tanks and bombs—will completely reverse itself and become Christians? Will they lay aside their Zionist ambitions to kill their attackers and espouse the peaceful principles of the Sermon on the Mount—the one about loving the enemy and turning the other cheek?

Millions of Bible students believe that this kind of spectacular conversion must take place in order for Bible prophecy to be fulfilled. They base their belief upon the prophecies found in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc., regarding Israel's restoration and final triumph. Are they correct? It is true that the prophets painted glowing word pictures of Israel's future and recorded scores of promises about her authority over other nations. But is the Israel of the Old Testament the same Israel of the book of Revelation? Were the promises unconditional and irrevocable? Will the literal, fleshly descendants of Abraham turn en masse to the Messiah, be restored as a nation, and saved as a people?

2 PROMISES TO ISRAEL CONDITIONAL

A careful study of the Bible reveals that those promises of the Old Testament were not unconditional promises at all. Repeatedly, the nation of Israel was warned of the dire consequences of disobedience. Both blessing and curse were set before them, depending on obedience or disobedience. Because of continued patterns of rebellion, God allowed them to be decimated and scattered into Babylonian captivity for seventy years. Many prophets were raised up by God to foretell their return from that captivity. Some modern commentators have made the mistake of applying those prophecies of restoration to some future gathering of Israel. They refuse to see that the restoration spoken of by

Isaiah and Jeremiah has already taken place.

There is neither time nor space to record here a fraction of the graphic threats of rejection made to Israel. Over and over God gave warnings like this: “And if thou wilt ... do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: *Then I will establish the throne* of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever ... *But if ye shall* at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments ... *Then will I cut off Israel* out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I *cast out* of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people” (1 Kings 9:4-7). Finally, as related through the prophet Daniel, God allotted a probationary period of 490 years for the Jewish people to see what they would do about the Messiah (Daniel 9:24). That prophetic time period of 70 weeks (a day for a year, Ezekiel 4:6) began with the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (Artaxerxes’ decree in 457 B.C., Ezra 7:11) and ended in A.D. 34. In that same year the gospel began to go to the Gentiles, Stephen was stoned, and Paul went forth to begin his unique ministry to the non-Jews. The occasion marked the formal and final separation of Israel from its covenant relationship.

Jesus had explained to the Jewish leaders in the clearest possible language that their rejection of Him would seal their own rejection as the children of the kingdom. “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43).

There is no mystery as to why the hundreds of specific Old Testament promises were never fulfilled to Israel. They utterly failed to meet the conditions of obedience. Otherwise, they would have inherited the earth, been delivered from all their enemies, and made Jerusalem the worship center for all nations.

3 WHO IS TRUE ISRAEL?

The big question is this: Will God’s promises fail just because the literal descendants of Abraham did not meet the terms of the covenant? Were the promises transferred to that other “nation” to whom Jesus said the kingdom would be given? Or must we still put our faith in some future turnaround that will restore national Israel to the divine favor? All those points will be completely clarified the moment we establish one basic rule of biblical interpretation. Without this principle in mind no one can properly understand the books of Daniel and Revelation, nor can we identify the true Israel of today.

Here is the rule: *There is a primary, local, literal application of prophecy which points to a future, worldwide, spiritual application.* By applying this principle to the Old Testament Scriptures there is absolutely no confusion as to the place of Israel in prophecy and history.

All the glorious promises were *primarily* aimed toward immediate blessings that God wanted to bestow on the nation. But in a *secondary* sense they pointed forward to a larger spiritual fulfillment on a worldwide level. Even though the local fulfillment failed when Israel failed to be faithful, the promises were never nullified or withdrawn. They will be honored, but only to that “nation” which Jesus said must replace the Jews as receivers of the kingdom. Who is that nation and people? The New Testament is saturated with the most explicit statements as to who the new Israel is.

Peter describes those “which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God” in these words: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an *holy nation*, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9, 10). Here is the new nation which replaces the nation of Israel. The Gentiles who will receive the true Messiah now enter into the New Covenant, ratified by the blood of the cross, and become the true spiritual Israel of God. They who were not God’s people become His “holy nation.”

Will they receive the very same promises that were given to Abraham’s descendants? Indeed, the Bible says that they are counted as the actual seed of Abraham. “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and *heirs according to the promise*” (Galatians 3:29). Paul makes it even clearer in Romans 9:8. “They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are *counted for the seed*.” Again, Paul wrote, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart” (Romans 2:28, 29).

Notice that true Israel will be characterized by circumcision of the heart and not of the flesh. What is

heart circumcision? “Ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Colossians 2:11). Don’t miss the significance of that text. Just as the Old Covenant was represented by the cutting off of the physical flesh, so the New Covenant would be exemplified by the cutting off of the fleshly nature of sin. In other words, all who accept Christ and are born again are the truly circumcised and the only true Jews. And according to Paul they also will inherit the promises made to Abraham.

After the crucifixion of Christ, there is not one indication that the literal Jews were accorded any recognition as the children of God. It is true that the door was left open through the preaching of the apostles until A.D. 34, the end of Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy. *But from that time on no recognition is given to Israel as a nation.* Israel henceforth is God’s people, made up of all those who accept the Saviour, whether Jew or Gentile. The Old Testament imagery and terminology is still used, especially in the book of Revelation, but Israel is now the church.

So we can see that there was no failure of the promises at all. They simply were transferred to the true spiritual Israel, which is the church, made up of all true believers in Christ. And the things that will happen to the church spiritually were foreshadowed by what happened to ancient Israel in a literal sense. Let’s look at a simple example of this principle in operation.

In the midst of Ezekiel’s portrayal of Israel’s victory over her enemies and influence over the nations, he began to describe a magnificent temple that would be built. Several chapters (40-48) are devoted to the precise measurements and physical appointments of that temple. *Yet the temple has never been built.* Other prophets referred to the program of building or restoring such a temple. Amos prophesied, “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and *I will build it* as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11).

Many modern interpreters apply this promise to some future construction of a physical temple. But the Bible principle is that there is a secondary, worldwide fulfillment which is not physical, but spiritual. The New Testament confirms this by explaining how the prophecy of Amos has been fulfilled. “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up” (Acts 15:14-16).

Please notice how the Old Testament temple prophecies apply to the living church! The physical temple has now become the spiritual temple of the church, made up of Gentiles and all true believers. No one should now be looking for any restored, literal temple to be built. The body of Christ’s church is now the temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), and we are the “lively stones” of that “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5).

Some have felt confused because much of the Old Testament terminology is carried over into the New Testament description of the church—words like kingdom, nation, Israel, temple, Jerusalem, Zion, tribes of Israel, etc. Even Christ said to the Pharisees, “The *kingdom* of God shall be taken from you, (literal Israel) and given to a *nation* (spiritual Israel) bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43). This is one reason the futurists and dispensationalists believe the book of Revelation pertains to the literal Jew in modern Israel. But there is no cause for such confusion. The explanation had been so clearly made in so many places that the New Testament writer assumed all were aware that the church now replaced national Israel.

4 THE TWO BABYLONS

As we enter into a study of Armageddon, it is tremendously important to keep this great rule of interpretation before us. The vast confusion on prophecy today stems from ignorance of this principle. Let us repeat once more that the kingdom prophecies given by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc., have a double application—one to be fulfilled locally; the other to be fulfilled on a worldwide scale in the last days. And the church takes the place of the nation as God’s true chosen people. With this background we are prepared to study the subject of Armageddon. That world-ending conflict is tied closely to the things we have just stated about spiritual Israel and a secondary application of prophecy. A most

amazing parallel exists between what happened to ancient Israel and the events concerning spiritual Israel in the book of Revelation.

Ancient Israel		Spiritual Israel
Jer. 50:33,34	Persecuted by Babylon	Rev. 17:6
Dan. 3:13	Forced to worship image	Rev. 13:15
Dan. 4:30	Called "Babylon the Great"	Rev. 17:5
Jer. 51:13,14	Babylon sits on many waters	Rev. 17:1
Isa. 44:27,28	Rescued—dried Euphrates	Rev. 16:12
Jer. 51:6-8	Called out of Babylon	Rev. 18:4
Isa. 45:1	Rescuer called the anointed	Dan. 9:25
Isa. 41:2, 25	Both rescuers from east	Mat. 24:27, Rev. 7:2

You will notice that God's people had almost the same experience in the Old Testament and the New Testament. They were forced to worship an image and were rescued by someone from the east who dried up the river Euphrates to set them free. Within this broad outline there are scores of other astonishing similarities between the two Israels—one literal and the other spiritual.

It is obvious that the church—God's people of the last days—will be persecuted and threatened with death just like ancient Israel. In the book of Revelation they are delivered from spiritual Babylon in connection with the battle of Armageddon. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ... And he gathered them together in a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Revelation 16:12-16).

These verses are filled with great meaning. They reveal that three powerful forces will be utilized by Satan in preparing the way for Armageddon. Those three—the beast, dragon and false prophet—stir up the political powers of earth to take part in that war. It is apparent that those three are religious powers, at least in their claims, because they *work miracles* to impress the governments of the earth. Miracles are only operative within the realm of religion.

Time and space does not allow us to give all the biblical evidence to show how these three symbols incorporate all the modern forms of counterfeit religion. Rejecting the authority of God's law and choosing the easy traditions of pagan worship patterns, these combined ecclesiastical systems will wield a mighty influence in drawing all the world into the battle of Armageddon.

5 ARMAGEDDON—SATAN VS. GOD

Before we try to determine the identity of the "kings of the east" and what it means to "dry up the river Euphrates," we must understand more clearly what Armageddon really involves. The Scriptures picture it as the final decisive struggle which climaxes the age-long war between Christ and Satan. The entire world is involved because the good and evil people are scattered among all nations of the earth. Armageddon represents the all-out effort of Satan to destroy the people who dare to obey God in the face of threatened torture and death.

Armageddon is but the climax of a 6,000 year program by Satan to keep God's people from being saved. As the adversary, whose self-seeking caused him to be cast out of heaven, Satan declared his purpose to overthrow God and take over His universal government. Listen to his boast in Isaiah 14:13, 14. "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."

This incredible claim of Satan exposes the heart of his plan to set himself up in place of God. To subvert the *worship* of God's subjects to himself it would seem both natural and necessary for Satan to build his appeal around *religion*. Working in the guise of counterfeit religious systems and false worship, he has woven a clever composite of truth and error down through the ages. His masterpiece of deception will occur at the end-time when he works through the beast power to enforce a mark of loyalty on every person. Those who refuse the mark will be sentenced to death, and thus, the final obstacle will be removed for Satan to claim all creation as his followers. So reads the blueprint of Satan's strategy.

6 GOD DWELLS IN ZION

Now notice, again, where Satan wanted to sit. He said, "I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, *in the sides of the north*." Why did he say that? This point is very important. The expression "mount of the congregation" is undoubtedly referring to the holy mount of God's dwelling place. Throughout the Bible it is spoken of as mount Zion. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the *sides of the north*, the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:2).

The striking thing is that God's place, mount Zion, is located in the sides of the north. Now we understand why Satan wanted to sit on the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. That is where God will gather His people, His congregation. Mount Zion is a place of safety. Satan wants to destroy the congregation or people of God. He would penetrate the very elect by his deceptions and take them, along with the throne of God. The psalmist said, "Sing praises to the Lord, *which dwelleth in Zion*" (Psalm 9:11).

Originally, Zion was the designated spot where the temple was located, in the north part of Jerusalem. Later, it came to be known as a symbol of the city of Jerusalem. It also is applied throughout Scripture to the whole of God's people. But after the Jews rejected Jesus the term Zion became the designation for the church. Thus in the New Testament it no longer identifies an earthly location, but a people—the people of the church who are scattered throughout the world, or else the spiritual place of God's presence and protection.

All through the Bible God is described as drawing or gathering His people to Zion where they can be safe with Him. "Blow the trumpet in *Zion*, ... call a solemn *assembly*: Gather the people, sanctify the *congregation*" (Joel 2:15, 16). "For in *mount Zion* ... shall be *deliverance*" (Joel 2:32). In Revelation 14:1 the redeemed are pictured as having been delivered from the beast power of the previous chapter and are safe in *mount Zion*. "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." But while God programs a gathering of His people to Himself in Zion, Satan also has a gathering program. *It is a gathering of his forces for Armageddon*. "For they are the spirits of devils ... to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.... And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Revelation 16:14, 16). This gathering is to counteract God's gathering His saints to mount Zion. Joel also speaks about that same gathering; "Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about ... Let the heathen ... come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat ... The Lord also shall roar out of Zion ... but the Lord will be the hope of his people" (Joel 3:11, 12, 16).

This is another description of that final conflict called Armageddon. The valley of Jehoshaphat is just another title for the place of battle. It will involve every nation on earth. The "heathen" is a term to describe those who are not God's people. Satan will marshal the kings of the earth and all the wicked people to oppose the faithful saints of God. The Lord will be involved in the battle ("The Lord shall roar out of Zion"), because He fights for His people. In essence, it is a tremendous contest between Christ and Satan with followers of both sides being involved. Here is where we get to the heart of the subject. The verse calls attention to the Hebrew word for Armageddon. Apparently, the word is rooted in the Hebrew term "har moed," which means "mount of the congregation" or "mount of the assembly." Do you see where this leads us? That same term (har moed) was used by Satan when he said, "I will sit also upon the *mount of the congregation*." This ties the battle of Armageddon to the

original threat of Satan to capture and destroy the congregation of God—in mount Zion.

And the final attempt of the evil one to carry out his threat reaches down to the very last events of this earth. John the Revelator described it under the sixth plague. He saw unclean spirits going out to the kings of the earth, working miracles, and gathering them to Armageddon. These are religious forces working on the political rulers and influencing them to destroy God's faithful ones.

If you want to read the thrilling account of God's part in Armageddon, study Revelation 19. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war ... And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean ... and he treadeth the *winepress of the fierceness and wrath* of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:11-15).

Several things stand out in this symbolic picture of Christ and His second coming. The armies of heaven make war and "smite the nations" (Verse 15). These are the nations which were stirred by evil spirits in Revelation 16:14. Christ prevails in this Armageddon clash. Notice that this war is described as treading the winepress of the wrath of God. In Revelation 15:1 the seven last plagues are designated as "the wrath of God." Since the battle of Armageddon is set up under the sixth plague, and the plagues are called the wrath of God; and since Christ's army makes war by treading the winepress of God's wrath, we must conclude that Revelation 19 is a clear picture of Armageddon.

Incidentally, the vials of the wrath of God were poured on the whole earth. "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." (Revelation 16:1). This is why all the nations are involved in Armageddon. The good and evil of all the world will be drawn into it. Since God's people are scattered in every country, the entire earth is spoken of as being affected by the plagues, one of which is Armageddon.

7 EUPHRATES DRIED UP

We are now prepared to examine Revelation 16:12 and let the Bible interpret the "drying up of the great river Euphrates" to prepare the way for the "kings of the east." Whatever these events are, they occur as Armageddon approaches a violent climax.

In order to understand this prophecy, we must refer to the parallel experience of ancient Babylon. Six hundred years before Christ was born, the pagan kingdom of Babylon was the great enemy of God's people. For 70 years they held the Hebrew people in subjection and bondage. Finally Babylon was overthrown by Cyrus the Mede, and the Israelites were delivered. Cyrus came from the east and captured Babylon by diverting the Euphrates River, thus getting access under the water gates of the channel. God said to Babylon, "I will *dry up thy rivers*. ... Thus saith the Lord to his *anointed*, to Cyrus ... to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut" (Isaiah 44:27; 45:1). God "raised up the righteous man (Cyrus) from the east" (Isaiah 41:2). Cyrus is referred to by God as the "anointed" and "the righteous man." According to the principle of interpretation, the *literal* account in the Old Testament must be applied in a *spiritual* sense at the end-time. Thus, we read in the book of Revelation about spiritual Israel (the church) being oppressed by "Babylon the Great" (Revelation 17:5, 6). This Babylon is not a physical kingdom but a counterfeit religious system manipulated by Satan. God's people are finally delivered from the power of spiritual Babylon by the drying up of the waters of the river Euphrates. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (Revelation 16:12).

The startling similarity to the Old Testament story is obvious, but we must remember that the secondary application cannot be literal. The immediate fulfillment is always literal and local, but the last-day fulfillment reaches worldwide and has a spiritual application only.

So we do not expect a literal Cyrus to dry up a literal river to deliver a literal Israel. We have already discovered that all God's true people are spiritual Israelites. Now what does the water represent? "The waters which thou sawest ... are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15). In this chapter Babylon the Great is pictured as sitting "upon many waters" (Revelation 17:1). The waters are identified as people and nations who give support to the

great Babylon harlot (false religion) who persecutes the true saints (Revelation 17:6).

So the drying up of the waters would represent the withdrawing of support by those people who had been followers of the Babylon system. This is one of the final events that happens just before the coming of Christ. The people recognize that they have been duped, and in a rage they turn on each other. Zechariah describes what takes place under this seventh plague as Armageddon reaches its climax. "And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem (God's people); ... And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the Lord shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and *his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour*" (Zechariah 14:12, 13).

John described the scene thus, "These shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire" (Revelation 17:16). Just as literal Euphrates in ancient Babylon was turned from an asset to a means of destroying her, so the supporting waters (people) of the spiritual Babylon turn into the means of her destruction. This drying up of support prepares the way for the "kings of the east" to come and deliver the people of God from the hand of Babylon.

8 WHO ARE THE KINGS OF THE EAST?

Who are these "kings of the east"? Here is one of the most exciting aspects of the battle of Armageddon. Just as God's place in Zion was located in the "sides of the north," so His approach is always referred to as from the east. Why? Because anciently Zion was the actual hill north of the city of Jerusalem. Anyone coming from the east had to angle north because of the impassable deserts, and come into Zion from that direction. This is why both north and east are used in the Bible for God's quarters. "And I saw another angel ascending *from the east*, having the seal of the living God" (Revelation 7:2). Christ will return to this earth from the east. "For as the lightning cometh *out of the east*, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27). The "kings of the east" are exactly the same as the armies of heaven in Revelation 19 who triumph over "the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies" (Verse 19). God's glory was described by Ezekiel as coming from the east. "He brought me to the gate ... that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east ... and the earth shined with his glory" (Ezekiel 43:1, 2).

John revealed the breathtaking majesty of Christ leading the armies of heaven to make war. "And the *armies* which were in heaven followed him upon white horses ... And he hath on his vesture and his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:14, 16). What a picture! The kings of the east riding forth against "the kings of the earth" and of the whole world. Spiritual Babylon and all the forces who followed her are destroyed by the King of kings who shall reign forever and ever.

Cyrus, the man from the east, who saved literal Israel from the hands of ancient Babylon, was a type of the "kings of the east" who would save spiritual Israel from Babylon. Just as Cyrus was called the "anointed one" and "the righteous man," so Jesus was designated by the same titles.

By now we can easily conclude that the second coming of Christ is really the only hope of Israel. God and Christ, the true Kings of the east, will burst upon this world at the midnight of man's extremity. When the mark of the beast is being enforced and every human plan of escape has dissolved, God's faithful ones will be snatched from certain death.

9 ALL EYES ON THE EAST

What a tragedy that millions of Christians are looking in the wrong direction and expecting events to transpire that can never take place. Their eyes are fixed on the east all right, but on the Middle East where hate-filled sons of Abraham try to destroy each other with American and Soviet weaponry. What kind of travesty it would be to expect those political planners and militarists to fulfill the beautiful predictions of Isaiah's "lion and lamb" world of peace. True it is that, for a moment, Isaac and Ishmael may stop fighting. It is also true that one of the signers of the agreement is called Israel. But let no one still cling to the empty hope that this Israel has anything to do with God's true people. They

have been replaced by another nation, obedient and faithful—who have come from every kindred, tongue and people. They are the true Israel. They will never take up arms to fight anyone. They will live as Jesus lived and choose death before dishonor.

The frail confederacy of peace signed March 26, 1979, would be less than futile, even if national Israel were still the chosen people of God. Years ago a similar alliance was formed and God appraised it in these words: “Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. ... For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose. ... This is a rebellious people, children that will not hear the law of the Lord” (Isaiah 30:3, 7, 9).

God is looking for those who will trust in right instead of might. To such He will provide deliverance from every enemy through the conquering kings of the east. Let us take our eyes away from the oil fields and political intrigues of the east and fix them on the eastern skies, because it is from there that our true allies will save us.

10 CLOTHED FOR ARMAGEDDON

Now we have been able to harmonize all the verses of Revelation 16:12-16 except that strange verse 15, which appears to be completely out of context with all the others. Why did the Holy Spirit inspire the placing of such a verse in the setting of Armageddon? “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” Then follow the words, “And he gathered them together into a place called ... Armageddon.”

What do proper clothes have to do with preparation for the approaching contest between Christ and Satan? And why is the wardrobe important for the ones waiting for Jesus to come? Revelation 19:7, 8 gives the surprising answer: “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be *arrayed in fine linen*, clean and white: for *the fine linen is the righteousness of saints*.” Like a searchlight these words illuminate the meaning of Revelation 16:15. Those garments symbolize the righteousness of Christ with which every soul must be arrayed who would be ready to meet the Lord. The battle of Armageddon will be fought over the issue of Christ’s righteousness. Only those who have trusted completely in the merits of Christ’s sinless life and atoning death can triumph with Him over the forces of evil. “And they overcame him by *the blood of the lamb*, and by the *word of their testimony*; and they *loved not their lives unto the death*” (Revelation 12:11).

Here is the winning combination which finally will cast down the accuser of the brethren. The saints gained the victory by their simple faith in the sufficiency of the cross. No confidence in the flesh. No faith in the works of the law to justify. His merits alone to cleanse and to empower. So the combination is threefold: 1) faith in the righteousness of Jesus, 2) fearless sharing of the “word of their testimony,” and 3) “they loved not their lives unto the death.” In other words, they would rather die than sin. When the cross has done this to a person, he can survive all the concentrated attacks of a thousand Armageddons. Demons, fallen angels and Satan himself must flee in terror before the authority of a Christ-filled life. True faith produces full obedience, and therefore, true righteousness by faith includes sanctification as well as justification. Those who would lay down their lives in death rather than disobey God will be the only ones who will refuse the mark of the beast.

Multitudes, with something less than true righteousness by faith, will not feel that obedience to all the commandments is worth dying for. Many will reason that Christ’s obedience has been imputed to them, and therefore they need not be concerned about the works of the law. Such do not understand the full gospel. It is the “power of God unto salvation”—not just forgiving power, but keeping power. We are not just saved from the guilt of sin, but from the sin itself.

So Armageddon and preparation to meet Christ focus on a personal relationship with the Saviour. Clothed in the armor of His righteousness, the saints will prevail even in the face of a death decree. If you do not have the sweet assurance of that spiritual protection now, put on His robe this very moment. Woven in the loom of heaven, it contains no thread of human devising. Shattering the authority of sin in the life, it claims the merits and the *power* of Christ’s life and atoning death. May this be your experience today.

Alone in the Crowd

Philippians 2:5

Recently I discovered some very interesting things about a little sea creature that rates rather low on the Biblical scale. The unclean shrimp has a most marvelous manner of changing clothes six or eight times a year through a process called molting. Apparently a new suit begins to grow underneath the old skin. By scraping around on the rocks, the shrimp begins to shred and loosen the older outer layer which soon sloughs off completely, revealing the classy new covering underneath.

At the time of each molting, another fascinating phenomenon occurs. In response to some built-in primitive instinct every shrimp deliberately places a grain of sand in a special place in its head. At every molting cycle the little rock is discarded along with the old skin, and a new grain of sand is put carefully in place.

Because of the unique function of those rocks, they have been named "status stones" or stones of standing. They are absolutely necessary for the survival of these hardy marine animals. Without them the shrimp would be constantly confused and disoriented. In the wake of surging tides and currents they are tumbled over and over and upside down. It is only by feeling the slight tug of gravity on the rock in their head that they can recognize whether they are upside down or right side up.

In His great love and wisdom, God provided this mechanism to enable the lowly shrimp to keep a dignified balance amid the turbulent elements of its habitat.

Since it is obvious that no shrimp confided these facts to me, you might wonder how this amazing information came to light. Several years ago a marine biologist conducted an experiment on several shrimp which had been placed in a large aquarium. In the bottom of the aquarium the scientist placed steel filings instead of sand. When molting time came, each one of the shrimp picked up a piece of steel, instead of a rock, and placed it in its head.

Then the biologist brought a powerful electromagnet and placed it over the top of the aquarium. Immediately all the shrimp flipped upside down and began to swim around in an inverted position. The pull of the magnet on the steel sliver was stronger than the tug of gravity and they believed that up was down and down was up. To make the experiment more dramatic the scientist then brought a shrimp from the ocean and placed it in the aquarium. Naturally this newcomer on the scene was paddling around in the proper upright position.

Can't you imagine the consternation that probably was provoked by the appearance of this oddball in the tank? It seems highly likely that some nasty whispers began to circulate within those troubled waters. "Who does this nut think he is? Who is he trying to impress? Does this weirdo imagine that he is going to show us a better way to swim? Why is he doing it upside down?"

You see, that steel-in-the-head, wrong-way crowd had no inkling that the recent visitor was really the only shrimp who was swimming correctly. They had always depended on two things to prove they were right side up—their feeling, and what the majority around them were doing. But now that their status stone had been tampered with, they were deceived into believing a lie on both counts.

Following Feeling Or Following The Crowd

The more I thought of that story, the more I realized that all of us are in an aquarium as we make our

way through this world. Powerful magnets of temptation are all around us trying to disturb our spiritual balance and turn us upside down. Those who trust in feeling and majority opinion are easily up-ended by the strong attraction of outside forces. Consoled by the presence of so many others about them doing the same thing, they soon begin to see everything in relation to their distorted view. They reverse all the signs in order to read them better, and develop a firm conviction that they are balanced and correct, while everyone differing from them is wrong. Eventually they see wrong as right and right as wrong. Anyone who goes contrary to their perceptions is instantly branded as a fanatic or a critical troublemaker.

This points up one great truth: We cannot measure right and wrong by our feeling or by what the majority are doing! We need something from outside ourselves to tell us where the truth lies. Our impulses may be just as real as the pull of the magnet, but they could also be just as misleading. Our numerous friends may be most respectable and religious but their status stone could be linked to the same false guidance system, cleverly sabotaged by the enemy.

There is only one true, infallible status stone for the Christian, and that is the Bible. When that Word is placed in the mind, it provides a standard of truth which is always dependable. Every impulse of feeling should be tested by it. The total lifestyle, including words, actions and thoughts must be brought under the supervision of that one great directional control center. It is no exaggeration to state that most deviations from God's will today are based upon either following feeling or following the crowd.

How important it is for us to study these two powerful weapons that Satan utilized with such devilish expertise. Both of them are rooted within man's deepest psychological needs. We often overlook the fact that our spiritual enemy has been studying human nature for almost 6000 years—quite a bit longer than the most successful psychiatrist in practice today. He has also experimented with our emotional weaknesses, using these to exploit us in our most vulnerable moments.

How many have fallen prey to his manipulative devices? One clear look at our flesh-oriented society provides the answer. Jesus saw it long before it happened and tried to warn his disciples and us about the strength of those attacks. He said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14).

On another occasion the Master asked this significant question, "When the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). In the same discourse He declared, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26).

Obviously only a small proportion of earth's inhabitants will escape from the overwhelming deceptions of the last days and be saved. A little remnant, as always, will be more concerned about doing right than pleasing self, the crowd, or some other individual. The record of history consistently chronicles the story of that small company of dissenters who dared to reject the comfortable appeal of the crowd. The majority seem never to be searching for truth so much as for a smooth, easy, convenient religion which will allow them to live as they please. To them any doctrine which demands self-denial or a disciplined lifestyle is bad news.

Is It Easy to Preach The Truth?

This is undoubtedly why there is such a one-sided gospel being preached in most churches today. It is pleasant to speak things that are appreciated and well received. No messenger of God is hesitant to declare the precious truths about justification and free grace which require only faith and acceptance. Yet there is another side of the gospel which is concerned with fruits and good works. It is called sanctification. It speaks of obedience and Christ-like behavior in every life situation. That is the aspect of righteousness by faith which is very unpopular with the masses today. It demands action and obedience.

Are some preachers afraid to deliver the unadorned truth on this subject for fear of rejection and ridicule? Have they been intimidated by seeing other faithful watchmen attacked as legalistic and judgmental? You may answer that question on the basis of your own observations. The example of the prophet Jonah provides dramatic evidence that it is not easy to tell it like it is. No one would welcome his assignment.

Is it any easier to stand before practicing sinners of every hue and variety and deliver the ultimatum of Jesus, "Go and sin no more?" As an ambassador for God, I can tell you that there is a terrible temptation to feel sorry for those drug addicts, drunkards and prostitutes, and to tone down the requirements to give up the practice of sin. We want to be easy on them. We don't want to discourage them with the thought that they must change their lifestyle. At least, not immediately. Somehow we want to keep accommodating the carnal nature just a little bit to make religion more comfortable for them.

Question: Is there any true religion that endorses the continued practice of sin in any degree whatsoever? Is there any statement in the entire Bible which conveys the thought that we should only diminish the amount of sin we commit? Can the justifying, converting grace of Christ cover the practice of any deliberate, known sin? Paul declares: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:17).

If that statement is not strong enough on the subject, read the further word of the apostle in Romans 8:13, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." There it is! We can do one or the other, but we cannot do both at the same time. We either live after the flesh or after the Spirit. Paul said, "These are contrary the one to the other." That is plain enough. There can be no sharing of authority between these two forces. We must mortify the deeds of the body or accommodate them. Which will it be? It can't be both.

But let's return to our point about following the crowd. We have discovered that the majority is usually wrong, and that they do not want to be told about their sins. We have also considered how difficult it is to tell that crowd how wrong they are. Right here it seems appropriate to read the words of Jesus, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Hazards Of The "Highly Esteemed"

The last sentence contains a priceless principle for all of us today. Jesus spoke it to the Pharisees who were shamelessly justifying their unjust ways because they conformed to the acceptable codes of the day. He clearly indicated that the majority opinion would be on the wrong side of almost every question. He already had declared that most people would enter the broad road to destruction. Their views and practices would represent those who are wrong. Those who will be lost. Yet it would be held by the largest number. A contrast to the "few" in the narrow road. The shocking thing is that those things "highly esteemed" among the majority of men are abominable in God's sight.

It is not hard to see the truth of this statement when we look at the principles upon which society operates today. Whether we are looking at dress, diet, entertainment, or educational standards, there is a vast difference between the world's ways and God's ideals. Sometimes we chafe, like the Israelites, because we cannot be like the nations around us, but God has given us a better, higher standard to live by.

Many have marveled at the almost ascetic doctrine of holiness by separation which is expounded throughout the Bible. Why did God forbid His ancient people to mingle and intermarry with the heathen nations? The New Testament writers also make repeated calls for spiritual Israel to "come out"

and be separate from a system which they called "the world." Those called-out ones are identified as "the church," which is always set in opposition to "the world." The original word for church comes from two Greek words, *ek* meaning "out of" and *kalleo* meaning "called" *ἐκκλησία*: the church, the called-out ones.

Why does God not approve a close relationship of His "few" followers with the "many there be" in the broad road? And why do the majority choose to be lost? How does Satan draw them in such masses to follow his program? The answers to those questions will also provide an explanation for the insistent call of prophets and gospel writers to separate from that majority.

Here is why so many have been captured by the evil one: his fraternization scheme is based upon a recognized law of the mind which decrees that we gradually adapt to the people we associate with. The unconscious effect of hearing and seeing their words and lifestyle is to slowly build toward an acceptance of what was once repugnant. The molding influence of such exposure breaks down the moral reserve, and eventually leads to a conciliatory attitude toward sin.

The whole scheme is deadly because the leavening process takes place so subtly. At no point is the collaborator aware that he is being imperceptibly manipulated by the people around him. No danger signals are raised. The conscience bends by degrees toward the new tolerant mindset. This is the way spiritual "status stones" have been altered. The slow shift from Bible principle to majority opinion is usually made with a minimum of spiritual conflict because of the gradual nature of the change.

Survey after survey has revealed how moral standards have been lowered under the deadening influence of environmental input. There is no way to be holy while mingling closely with the unholy. We cannot expose the mind constantly to abominations without suffering the consequences. The Spirit of God made no mistake in urging separation from the world of the flesh. Even prayer and Bible study cannot continue to protect against a presumptuous choice to watch alluring sinful scenes and listen to corrupting words and sounds.

The Fallacy Of Following Feeling

Surely we can now better understand why the lesson of the shrimp is important for us to understand. It is never safe to follow the crowd. But now let's look at the second dangerous consequence of a faulty status stone. The shrimp trusted in feelings which were produced by powerful outside forces working on the status stone. Obviously these feelings were inaccurate and undependable because the stone in its head had been changed.

Mark it down well: it is no more safe to follow feeling than it is to follow the crowd. No matter how secure the shrimp felt about the tug of that magnet, it led him to act wrongly and make a fool of himself. Satan would be delighted to lead every one of us into doing the same thing. He has already done it to the majority by causing them to trust some other "stone of standing" than the Word of God. Using the powerful magnet of a glamorous, glittering society, Satan has created some very pleasurable but deceptive feelings. Millions have been lured into a state of false security in which they feel ridiculously overconfident and safe. It is almost as though they have been hypnotized and are obeying the will of some other mind than their own.

Does most of the world actually operate under a trance condition brought on by Satan's hypnotic powers? None can doubt the ability of mind scientists to produce such a state in almost anyone who will look at them or listen to them. There is always some point of contact used in putting a subject under hypnosis. Attention must be focused upon a light or some other object as well as the words which are being spoken. Without this deliberate attentiveness no one can be brought under the power of the hypnotist.

Does Satan have to get a similar attention to order to bring anyone under his control? He also uses a point of contact, usually an indulged weakness, an appeal of the flesh, or some other area of temptation. Our only safety is to never allow ourselves to watch or listen to his appealing attention devices.

When feelings becomes the criteria of testing truth, an unreasonably defensive attitude is generated. The most sincere people are convinced beyond all question that they are right and everyone else is totally wrong. In the secure comfort of their subjective feeling they resist all logic or reason based on objective truth outside themselves.

Can such feeling or moods be dangerous for a Christian? Indeed, Satan uses them to destroy the ability to act rationally. Suppose you are seated in a small room with no ventilation. An oil burning stove has been consuming the oxygen for some time. Gradually you become so drowsy that your brain is barely able to think. You do not feel like moving from your chair. Especially, you do not feel like getting up to open a window or a door. Yet your feeling against moving is a danger sign that you must make yourself act immediately to get more oxygen into the room or you will never move again.

Have you ever been in the mood not to pray, or not to read your Bible? Of course you have. So have I. Should we yield to that feeling? Listen, prayer is the breath of the soul just as oxygen is the breath of the body. Our mood not to pray and study is a signal that we had better make ourselves do it quickly because our spiritual life is being threatened. That is the time to force ourselves into the closet, onto our knees, and as we pray, the spiritual desires begin to return. Very soon prayer is restored as a joyful, fulfilling privilege. But unless we break the hypnotic spell of Satan's "feeling" trap by acting against his point of contact, we are placed in great spiritual jeopardy. The truth is that we must act or be acted upon.

Acting Or Reacting

This brings us to the fantastic realization that every single one of us is either living a life based upon acting or reacting. We make our own independent decisions about the kind of life we will live or else we simply react to the way other people treat us. In the latter case we turn the direction of our life over to someone else and allow them to determine the kind of person we shall be.

Please take note that we are still talking about Satan's manipulation of our feelings, but in this case he is working through some other person to exercise his control. It is likely that no one is beyond being influenced to some degree by the actions of others, but the vast majority are actually the pawns of whatever circumstances happen to develop around them. Instead of basing their most important decisions upon deliberative reason or prayer, they impulsively strike out in any or all directions, depending on the way their emotions have been stirred by others.

Dr. Hunter was an English heart surgeon who was himself afflicted with coronary disease. One day he commented to a colleague, "My life is in the hands of any rascal who chooses to annoy me." His self-prophecy proved to be true. Later on someone dealt with him in a manner that made him furious, and he dropped dead of a heart attack. What an illustration that education and high intelligence cannot protect us from the folly of our fallen human nature! All his honorable degrees of learning did not give Dr. Hunter control of his own spirit. He literally allowed another individual to make the decision as to whether he would live or die.

But the doctor's mistake is miniscule compared to that of those who let others actually determine their eternal destiny. All around us every day we observe the dreadful playing out of an unnecessary drama and often church members are involved in it. People permit their volatile emotions to surge out of control in retaliation for the way they are treated, and some of the darkest sins are recorded against them in the books of heaven. Many will lose their souls because they refuse to assume the responsibility for their own course of action. In fact, they don't act at all; they merely react. We can say

without reservation that those who do not lay hold of divine power to live a disciplined, controlled life will be ruled by Satan, either directly or indirectly. Not one person has that kind of strength within himself. The ability to control one's own life by resisting every provocation of both friends and enemies must come from God's grace within.

The real secret of protection from reacting is found in Paul's counsel to the Philippians, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). No one can strike back if he is thinking thoughts of Jesus. On the cross Christ gave no sign of vengeance, irritation or retaliation. His prayer was, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Is that state of mind accessible to men in the flesh? Indeed Jesus possessed the same fallen human nature that all children inherit from their parents. Yet He never reacted to a single needling rebuff or insult. The kind of serenity that He exhibited is promised to every believing child of God who will claim it in faith. Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Let no one believe that this kind of integration with the thoughts and mind of Christ can come without both struggle and surrender. The character is conformed to the divine pattern by two things operating in conjunction with the Holy Spirit—man's will and man's actions. God will never do these two things for us. Each person must make the decision to turn from sin, and then he must begin to act against the sin. Neither of these steps would be effective were they not accompanied by the enabling power of the Spirit. No man has the power to stop reacting in anger to the way he is treated, but he does have the power to choose to stop reacting. He also has the ability to start resisting the impulse to react. Do those two steps bring the victory? Indeed, when taken after claiming the promised deliverance, they provide dramatic evidence of true faith. And faith, in turn, moves the omnipotent arm of God to intervene with shattering force against the practice of any sin.

Dealing With Offenses

Along with faith it is also very important to develop a philosophy of understanding toward those who may seem to be giving offense. Much of the problem stems from an unwillingness or inability to consider why that person is acting in such a manner.

It is a demonstrated fact that our own attitude toward the offender determines to a large degree how we react to what he does against us. Unfortunately there is very little inclination to be thoughtful and reasonable when one is under physical or verbal attack. Impulsive anger takes control and we strike out blindly in self-protection. Were we capable of keeping on top of those oversensitive feelings it would give us time to ask and answer a few questions about the other person's motives. Even a few moments of rational thought could suggest the possibility that the offender might be operating under false information, and be very sincere in what he is doing. This could certainly ameliorate our own reactions toward him.

Years ago I heard a story which has been such an inspiration to me that I have shared it often throughout my ministry. Many times I have needed to tell myself the story again to help ease through some especially difficult time of personal stress. It concerns an old Greek philosopher by the name of Philip who was walking along the street with a friend one day. It so happened that an enemy of Philip was watching him approach from an overhead window. As the two passed by he threw a bucket of water onto the wise old man. Without the slightest reaction to the outrage, Philip continued his conversation as though nothing at all had happened. His friend stopped and offered to help him find and punish the man who had treated him so rudely. Philip quietly replied that no one had done him any wrong. The friend remonstrated in amazement, "But the man threw water all over you. You are soaking wet." "No," replied the philosopher, "you are mistaken. He did not throw any water on me. He threw it on the man he thought I was."

What an attitude! And what a world of difference it would make if everyone had such a spirit of selfless regard for the feelings of others. Most of the personal alienations, racial problems and international disputes could be settled in a moment if everyone practiced the philosophy of Philip.

Sometime ago I was preparing a young mother for baptism. As I visited her for a final review of the doctrines of the church, she suddenly burst into tears. "I can't be baptized," she cried. "Last night my mother visited me and reminded me that since I hate my brother it would not be right to enter into baptism." Under my gently prodding, Carol agreed to share for the very first time why she had hated this only brother for all those years. Not even her mother knew the reasons behind that bitter spirit. When she was seven years old her teenage brother began to force her sexually and threaten her if she ever told anyone. For eight years she suffered unimaginable abuse at the hands of that cruel brother.

I could truly understand Carol's festering anger and hatred toward her brother. I was overwhelmed by her justified sense of being dehumanized and demeaned. How could I say anything that could possibly change her feelings over those deep psychological pains and scars? Then I remembered the story of the old Greek philosopher. After sharing it with her, I asked for more information about that despised brother. Was he ever a Christian? "No," said Carol, "he was the opposite of a Christian. He seemed always to be under the control of devils, and he's still the same way."

I said, "Carol, isn't it a tragedy that your brother never knew the power of God's grace in his life? He was indeed controlled by Satan in all he was doing. Without God in his life there was no chance for him to resist the things Satan was doing through him. He was manipulated and used by the devil. If only he had known the Lord Jesus, he would never have been that way. He would have treated you with love and respect. Now you tell me that he is still not a Christian. He is still being forced to do evil things and has no power to resist. What a difference it would make if he could learn about Jesus and accept Him. He would have the same joy you have found in Christ. We need to pray for him, Carol, that somehow he can get out from under this evil power that has been using him."

As I talked the tears began to flow again, but this time they were tears of sorrow and compassion for a lost brother who was more to be pitied and prayed for than to be hated. Carol ended up on her knees that day asking God to save her brother from his miserable captivity to Satan's power. Her own personal hatred was washed away in those tears and the next day I had the joy of seeing the old Carol buried in the watery grave. Her life was transformed when she began to realize that her brother did not even know her—not really. If he had been sensitive to her as a person, he would not have treated her that way. His understanding was distorted by sin.

Can we believe the same thing about people who mistreat us along the road of life? Would they act the same way if they fully understood what they were doing? Can't we assume that they don't really have the full information about us, about our feelings, and who we really are? If only we could give them the benefit of that doubt and say, "They didn't do it to the real me. They did it to the person they thought I was." Then we can feel sorry for them, because they don't know any better. And best of all we can even begin to pray for them.

So we are brought back again to the two great lessons taught by the shrimp who have rocks in their heads. We cannot measure what is right and wrong by our subjective feelings or by what the majority are doing. Our stone of standing must be the Word of God. Regardless of the crowd; regardless of our moods or feelings; regardless of the way people treat us, we must choose to order our lives on the basis of divine principle. Like Paul we say, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life I now live, I live by the faith of him who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Amazing Wonders of Creation

In spite of being marred by transgression, nature still bears an eloquent testimony to the love and power of a Divine Creator. After resting under the heavy curses of sin for almost 6,000 years, the incredible beauty of God's handiwork continues to amaze and enthrall. When we thank God for our blessings, we should never forget to mention these incomparable natural wonders which add so much meaning to every moment of our lives.

What would this planet be like without its restful carpet of living green grass and foliage? God did not have to clothe the ugly bare soil with such a covering. Functionally, there needed to be no bright colors. Human beings could have survived on a bleak planet of gray ground and colorless plants. But they could not have survived as happily. The Creator Himself was not only a lover of beauty; He loved His creatures so much that He wanted them to be happy, too. That's why He draped the earth with a half-million varieties of contrasting blossoms and leaves. And hidden inside each tiny bud, God placed secrets that would challenge the genius of Earth's greatest scientists.

How strange it is that so many of those who wrestle with those mysteries do not recognize the Creative Power which produced them. Even though many naturalists stand in awe of the creature, few seem to recognize and honor the Creator. Breathing the marvelous blend of nitrogen and oxygen which makes it possible for them to live, evolutionists refuse to acknowledge that the precise 79 percent to 21 percent mixture of gases was provided by something other than blind chance. Looking through eyes so delicately arranged that no combination of scientific genius can even understand, much less duplicate, their operation, unbelievers deny the miracle which makes it possible for them to see. Through ears, which connect to a brain more complex than the largest computer on earth, doubters listen to lectures on humanism and evolution.

Who are these people who scorn the record of God's creative power? They are only a tiny fragment of finite humanity, whose very existence, breath by breath, depends upon the operation of laws over which they have no control. Rejecting the divine origin of that for which they find no empirical evidence, many scientists ascribe miraculous qualities to matter itself. They build up theoretical creeds in which they place absolute faith, even to the point of believing that blind, unintelligent "nature" created life out of non-life.

Is Chance Precise and Predictable?

What kind of faith is required to believe that all the orderly processes of nature were produced by chance? Almost every plant and animal exhibits amazing adaptations which can be described as "miraculous." If these highly complex functions had no intelligent Creator or Designer, then our reasoning powers are staggered by the millions of "coincidences" which operate with infinite precision to produce perfect beauty, function, and reproduction on the earth.

Could they indeed be the products of accident or chance? Every law of science on the subject decrees that undirected, random nature tends towards deterioration rather than order. Surely the most persuasive evidence in favor of creationism is that of nature itself. The Bible suggests that the animals and earth should be asked about their own origin. In Job 12:7-9, we read: "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" Job says if you want to know how God operated in the work of creation, ask these various forms of life, ask the

earth, and the earth will explain how mightily God has wrought in these things.

So that's exactly what we're going to do right now. What does the earth have to say to us concerning the great power of God? Did you know there are miracles in every square inch of this earth? From the towering mountains to the vast restless ocean and throughout the limitless universe of God, there is the throb and hum of life. From the microscopic to the immense, we can discover the fingerprints of the mighty Creator who brought all things into existence.

When I look at the universe and see the amazing fact that it is in perfect balance, that life in this world has been perfectly adapted to the conditions we find here, I know that some great intelligent power is behind it, making it operate in such an accurate manner. The Genesis account of the Bible has been completely vindicated by all the findings of true science. The writings of Moses have been found to be scientifically as well as historically accurate. In this booklet, we're going to look at the water and land in particular. By studying the mysteries of land and sea, we will see how wonderfully they support the biblical story of creation.

How Did Moses Know?

Let's go back to Genesis and take a look at the story as God gave it to Moses. Genesis 1:6 says, "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which are under the firmament from the waters, which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day." Long, long ago the waters that were over the earth were actually right down here upon the surface. We know that there is a vast ocean in space, suspended in the atmosphere. We'll find out just what purpose it serves in a moment, but at one time that water was resting right here upon the earth. God divided it and lifted a part of it up into the heavens while part of it remained here.

Now look at verses 9 and 10. "And God said, Let the water under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good." How did Moses know there would be several oceans or seas? He had absolutely no human way of knowing there could be more than one body of water in all the world. He never went around to see how many oceans were in the world, but God inspired this truth in Moses' mind. He said there were seas or oceans.

Here's another good question to ask. How did Moses know that all these various bodies of water would be connected and would rest in only one bed? Now, isn't that what he said? "Let all the waters be gathered into one place and let the dry land appear."

In the next verse, he says there were seas or oceans. It is a scientific, geographical fact that all the oceans of the world are joined together, and they do all rest in a common bed. Moses could not have known that of himself. He didn't say this of dry land. No, it was divided up into continents. Part of it would be over here and another big discrete mass of it would be in another location. But concerning the waters, he said it would all be in one place, and yet it would be divided into oceans. I think it's tremendous that the Bible is so scientifically accurate as to reveal these things.

Watering the Earth? God's Miracle

Now let's see how intelligence and design came into the ratio of land and water. One-quarter of the earth's surface is dry land, and three-quarters is covered with water. In the United States alone we have three and three quarter million square miles of dry land, and all of it has to be watered and cared for. In

fact, if it weren't watered, there would be no vegetation and no growing grass or trees.

Just imagine for a moment that the ratio of land and water was changed from what it is at present. The rainfall on the earth is determined by the proportion of water and land. Suppose the ocean was only half its present size. That would mean our rainfall would only be one-quarter of what we now receive. What would that mean for the three and three quarter million square miles of land we have in these United States? All of it would be turned into a vast, dry desert! But on the other hand, if half the present land were added to the ocean, there would be four times as much rainfall as there is now, and the entire United States would be turned into a vast marshland where human life would be almost impossible. Now suppose that mankind had to water all this three and three quarter million square miles of land. How could we ever spread out that water and irrigate the land effectively? What a tremendous task that would be! "There's plenty of water in the ocean," someone might observe, "we could simply use it to water the dry land." Although it may sound reasonable, there are three problems connected with it. First, transportation. We'd have to get the water out of the ocean and spread it evenly over the land. The second problem is the salt it contains which would kill all the green plants. The third problem is weight. Water is 800 times the weight of the atmosphere, presenting the challenge of how to transport and disperse it.

God Solves the Weight Problem

How has God solved the weight problem? First, He uses heat. We know heat expands things and cold contracts them, and that water is the material most subject to expansion. In fact, when turned into steam, it becomes 1,600 to 1,700 times its original volume. Remember, though, this water is 800 times heavier than the atmosphere. But God simply sends down the warming rays of the sun, turning the water into a vapor which is 900 times lighter than water. Now it is one-eighth times lighter than the atmosphere. So this vapor is easily lifted up out of the ocean, carried into the sky?perhaps miles into the air?and formed into great cloud masses.

The second problem is deadly salt, but God simply evaporates the water and leaves all the mineral deposits and impurities behind. Taken up into the clouds, the water is sweet and soft, perfectly adapted to irrigate the earth.

No Sprinkler System Like This

What about the third problem?transportation? The water that is lifted up is still hanging over the ocean, which doesn't need any more water. God sends along winds to blow the clouds and spread them out over the dry land area where it is needed. But how to get all the water down out of the clouds? Here is another wonderful miracle. Cold will contract, of course, so when the clouds pass over the mountain peaks, the cold air reaches up and begins to cool those clouds, turning the vapor into a condensation of moisture.

Now consider what would happen if the clouds gave up all the water they contain at one time?it would flood the entire surface of the earth with three feet of water! Therefore, the cooling process must be gradual. For example, if the temperature of the cloud is lowered by nine degrees, it will drop half its water! So God arranges for a gradual cooling process to let the rain come down in gentle-to-vigorous showers to provide the amounts needed to revive the earth. What an incredible process! Of course, some of it rains back into the ocean, but it is needed there to provide the necessary amount of oxygen for fish living in salty ocean beds.

Did you know that these great facts of nature were all known and understood long before the scientists and naturalists discovered them? Ecclesiastes 1:7 is a most interesting verse. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full." Why not? The text continues to give the answer. "Unto the place from whence the river comes, thither they return again."

The Bible says the reason the seas do not overflow is that the water is taken up again and returned to where the rivers come from. And so there is a constant movement of water going up from the ocean in vapor form, carried as clouds over the land, and brought down again as rain which forms rivulets that find their way back to the sea. Even though the great naturalists felt they had made a new discovery when they found out about the cycles of clouds, they could have known it all by reading the Scriptures.

Why Clouds Don't Break

Another text with scientific information is Job 26:8. "He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them." This is a beautiful text, explaining that the clouds don't break and spill all their water at once, even though millions of tons of water are drawn up from the oceans into the clouds. And, of course, Job was correct. We've just found that God has a process of gradual cooling which releases the water little by little as it is needed to irrigate the surface of the earth. God revealed it to Job long before mankind figured it out.

I'm sure all of us know that water has weight, and that its pressure increases dramatically as the depth increases. Certain fish that exist in the very bottom of the ocean are especially engineered by God to withstand this tremendous pressure. If brought quickly up to the surface, they practically explode. The pressure that God put into their muscular structure is still there on the inside when they are brought up where the pressure is not exerted from the outside.

This is a wonderful fact, but do you realize that we, too, live in the bottom of an atmospheric sea, which also has tremendous weight? At sea level we are living down at the bottom of a very heavy, dense covering. As the ocean is to the fish, so the atmosphere is to us. Every moment we live, a pressure of 14 pounds per square inch is exerted upon our body structure, and that's pretty heavy. We think a man is strong if he can carry 200 pounds on his back. In fact, the strongest man that ever lived put only 415 pounds over his head. Yet, every single form of life in this world, whether it's a 90-pound woman or a burly man, has a constant pressure of over 15 tons at sea level pushing and pressing upon them from every direction. That's 30,000 pounds!

Even the filmy, gauzy insects have been designed by God to withstand their proportion of this pressure. That little gnat, so light and frail that it seems anything could crush it, is built by God to withstand the weight of the atmosphere. Can you think this happened by mere chance? Consider Job 28:25. "To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure." The Bible says the wind has weight.

The air, in other words, is heavy. The atmosphere has weight. If you climb a mountain, the higher you climb, the thinner the atmosphere becomes, and you feel distressed and uncomfortable. Why? Because the pressure is not as great. You see, God has built in a certain amount of pressure that balances that on the outside at sea level. If you went high enough, you would be just as stressed as the fish brought up from the ocean depths. How wonderful that God has designed all living creatures to be perfectly comfortable in its own environment.

Lucky Accident or Design?

Now consider another, even greater, miracle. The atmosphere around us is made up of two main ingredients?nitrogen and oxygen?whose mixture is always the same, whether at the highest

mountaintops or in the deepest caves. The perfect balance is 79 percent nitrogen and 21 percent oxygen. You might ask, "Why is it this way?" Is there some particular reason for it? Is it important that we have this exact mixture of nitrogen and oxygen?" Yes, I can assure you it is most important. If the nitrogen were increased, our life processes would slow down and we would die. If the oxygen were measurably increased, our life processes would be rapidly increased. Our pulse rate would just run away and soon we would wear out and die. But God made it just right.

Suppose, for example, it was two-thirds nitrogen and one-third oxygen. If that proportion prevailed, and an electrical reaction caused the elements to combine, do you realize that the whole world would be turned into laughing maniacs? Everybody would be laughing because that would produce the laughing gas, N₂O, the same kind dentists sometimes use when extracting teeth. Or, suppose it was divided half and half. That would produce nitric oxide, which is quickly fatal to all forms of life.

Was it just a lucky accident that it came out like this? Did some blind happenstance of nature produce this exact mixture that is necessary for life support? Or, was there an intelligent design? This world would become chaotic if this atmospheric mixture slipped out of control for just a single instant. We would see one of the most tremendous of all explosions, because nitrogen is the basic component of gunpowder; and oxygen, of course, makes for rapid combustion. It would be "Goodbye, world!"

And yet some day, apparently, there is going to an explosion like this. Some day the elements are going to melt with fervent heat, the Bible says. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:10 that "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." I don't know how God will arrange that, but I do know that some great fire one of these days is going to burn, and the earth will be purified by this strange fire of God. And the elements will be involved in it because the elements are going to melt. Maybe God is going to change just very, very slightly the present proportion of nitrogen and oxygen, causing this great conflagration to take place. I do know this?we must be ready for that day when it comes. The Bible indicates it is near at hand.

Another of the mysteries of nature was described in the Bible long before it was investigated by science. We read about it in Job 38:8-11. "Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?"

What beautiful, poetic language we find here to describe the creation of the ocean. It speaks of it as being born and coming forth from the womb. God says that the cloud was the garment of it and a thick darkness was a swaddling band placed around the ocean at its birth. But then God added, "Here ye may come but no further; here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

The scientists of this world have been amazed in learning the secrets of the tidal actions. They still don't understand all the deep underwater cataclysmic actions that affect the tides and wave patterns. No naturalist on the face of the earth has figured out all the secrets of these swift tidal waves as they move to and fro in their own mysterious ways.

God's Heating System?The Gulf Stream

By the way, these tides and movements of water have been in perfect balance to contribute to mankind's comfort. I think of the mighty Gulf Stream, for instance. We don't know everything about it, but we do know life in the United States would be almost impossible were it not for the fantastic influence of this great stream. It comes out of the Gulf of Mexico, goes along the eastern seaboard, and up into the northern sections of the world. It is like a river, flowing through the midst of the sea and can

be seen distinctly from high above because of its different color.

In fact, this river is about 70 miles wide and nearly 3,000 feet deep. When it leaves the Gulf of Mexico, the water temperature is 84 degrees, and off the coast of the Carolinas it is still a warm 80 degrees. This warming influence actually makes the northern coastal regions of America and Europe inhabitable; otherwise, they would be frozen wastelands.

Now notice what happens as this warm river reaches the entrance of the Arctic region at Baffin Bay, where it meets a frigid polar stream that is rushing southward. As a result of the titanic collision of these two giants, the polar stream is forced to dive down thousands of feet where it continues its southward course, coming up finally in the West Indies during their hottest season, thus cooling down the terrible tropical heat. The Gulf Stream gets deflected eastward, going up along the British Isles making these habitable.

It was in God's plan for this to happen. I don't believe for a moment that all this happened by chance or accident. Without that deflection of the Gulf Stream, some of those northern lands would be locked in eternal winter. Surely God was behind the entire plan.

Goggles and Bifocals

Let's hurry along now and take a quick look at the creatures of nature and see how intelligence and design came into the picture. Think for a moment of the fish that inhabit the oceans. They are constantly subject to attack from their enemies from above?like the gulls that swoop down to make their meals off marine life. Do you know that fish have specially constructed eyeballs enabling them to look almost instantly in any and all directions? They see behind, below, above and on the sides; furthermore, their eyes are designed to take into account the refraction of light.

Yes, fish can see 30 percent farther than other visual instruments because God designed the eyeball of the fish to take into consideration the refraction of light. We tend to think it's a wonderful accomplishment when the oculist manufactures special goggles for divers that compensate for refraction in the water, yet God did it for fish long before. Goggles could never have come into existence by chance, yet evolutionists contend that a fish's specialized eyeballs just happened.

In the waters of Malaya lives a fish with bifocal lenses built right in its eyes. This little sardine-sized fish is prized for food by the seagulls especially. They are constantly swooping down to gobble up this little fish if they can. So the little fish has to watch carefully for this approaching danger. It must have good far-vision, but since it feeds on the microscopic larvae that abounds in the water, it must have very good near-vision as well. And do you know the Creator provided a little membrane that comes halfway up on its eyes, giving it bifocal vision? That little fish can look up and see the gulls coming or look down and see those nearby bits of life that it can feed on!

We think it wonderful that the skilled optometrist and oculist can perfect glasses permitting us to see near and far away, yet here is a fish that has been around for thousands of years?and God made it that way from the beginning. It did not just develop blindly; it had to be created. Intelligent design was behind it.

Birds and Bees

Now let's examine two Pacific coast water birds. I can find no stronger evidence of design in nature than with the Ousel, a very friendly little bird that lives near mountain streams. It can usually be found where the water is swift flowing and splashy. This buoyant bird will be floating along, apparently

weightless, then suddenly sink to the bottom like a piece of lead. There he walks around picking up bits of food on the streambed. After taking his fill, he goes over to the bank, shakes himself, and mysteriously sets himself afloat again like a wisp of smoke.

It has been discovered that this strange bird has some special equipment? a muscular apparatus which can instantly exhaust every bit of air from its body, letting it sink down; then when it walks out, it can take in air again and float off once more. Now, that's special creation, isn't it? The evolutionists would say, "Well, it needed to have this bit of apparatus, so nature provided it." Of course, they don't say what nature is, but maintain that it just grew by some accidental development. The truth is that God provided it. He made this particular bird as He did because He saw that it needed this for survival.

Another kind of bird found on the Pacific coast lives on a diet of large worms which live in holes in the sand. Because this worm is down at the very bottom of its hole, the bird must go down to get the worm out. It so happens that, although its beak is exactly the right length to reach into the hole, the narrow hole keeps the beak squeezed shut. What a predicament? to be able to see and reach a luscious worm but not be able to open his beak to pick it up! Do you know what God arranged for this particular bird? He created a tiny flap much like a surgeon's forceps at the bottom of the beak. With this special organ the bird can pick up the worm, back out of the hole, and gobble it down!

Isn't it wonderful that God thought of a little bird and made something special so it could get its food conveniently? If He so loves the little birds and provides the things to make their existence comfortable, don't you think He's willing to provide everything that we might need? He loves us even more. Remember, He knows when the sparrows fall.

Some years ago, a scientific magazine published an article by a clever biologist who did not believe in evolution. In *Evolution Goes to Pieces on a Bee's Knee*, the author first reviewed the evolutionist's teaching that when the need for a certain organ develops in any creature, the organ is produced in response to that need. Nature itself or some blind chance supposedly comes along and produces the necessary organ to fit the creature for survival. Then he cited the example of the bees. When bees crawl into pollen-filled blossoms, their breathing apparatus gets all stopped up with pollen. In fact, they can't even breathe while they are inside gathering their pollen.

Now it so happens that every bee has a special brush located on its knees? a stiff brush? that it uses to clean out its breathing apparatus when it comes out of the flower so it doesn't suffocate. This biologist noted that if it were true that these insects develop special equipment in response to a need, the very first bee to exist did not have those brushes on its knees. When it went into the flower, it would have suffocated; consequently, the whole bee family would have become extinct right then and there. No, rather than these brushes developing slowly through the ages in response to a need, they were provided by God to meet the need and save the very first bee that was made.

The conclusion is that God anticipated the needs of His creatures and made them with every necessary apparatus. How thankful we ought to be that God can supply all our needs in advance. The Bible says the fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God." Only a God of love and power could have made the marvels we see about us. And if He cares for the tiny animal world, He cares for us, too. He loves us even more than He loves that little bird out on the West Coast, and He wants to save us. He wants to take us at last to a place where nature will be in perfect balance again and where all of the curse of sin will be forever removed.

And He Loves Me

Can we doubt the love of God who makes such infinite provision for everything He created? Nothing

has been left alone to suffer extinction or deprivation. Only man's bungling interference with the delicate balance of nature has brought sorrow and tragedy. If God cares for the needs of the tiniest cell of the smallest plant or animal, don't you think He loves us enough to care for us?

One of the most thrilling facts I learned about the miracles of nature concerned the lowly cocklebur. Surely it is one of the most despised of all plants due to its clinging, pricking nature. Yet consider the marvel of its reproduction. Every pod of the cocklebur has two seeds inside to guarantee its survival. But during the first year only one of the seeds will begin to grow. The other seed waits till the second year to start growing in order to perpetuate two seasons of growth. But if something happens to the first seed so that it does not grow and produce, the second seed begins to grow immediately instead of waiting for the next year. What built-in wisdom of God communicates to that waiting seed that it should begin to grow when the first seed is destroyed? No evolutionist has been able to harmonize miracles like this with their theories of naturalism and chance.

Surely we can see that God's care extends to the meanest and lowest order of growing things. Are we not more precious to Him than the cockleburs? If He works miracles to safeguard a clinging, contrary cocklebur, will He not guide the ways of those for whom He gave His life? May God open our eyes to the wonder and wisdom of His great work of creation. Tonight when you kneel to pray, remember to thank God for the landscape of beauty which always lies beyond the man-made mess of human obstruction.

Anything But Secret

Revelation 1:7

In the early 1500s, the Aztec empire was one of the most powerful and sophisticated civilizations in the western hemisphere. However, within one year's time this mighty nation of over two million people was conquered and enslaved by just six hundred men. How did it happen?

The Aztecs had a prophecy about Quetzalcoatl (k ʷ s ʷ ko- ʷ al), a legendary feathered god-king who was light skinned and bearded. It predicted that he would return to Mexico from across the sea and that he would come in the clouds from the east to save them.

Well, in 1519 Spanish galleons arrived in Mexico carrying a group of conquistadors led by Hernando Cortez. When the Aztecs saw these ships with their billowing sails, they thought it looked like clouds. Cortez heard about the Aztec legend from some Indians who lived on the shore and decided to use the situation to his advantage. He astutely assumed the mantle of deity to befuddle superstitious King Montezuma II.

While the king was waiting to receive him with honor, Cortez marched his army right into the center of the Aztec capital. By the time the people realized that Cortez was not the savior they were expecting, it was too late. The conquistadors proceeded to plunder, enslave, and kill the Aztec people. An entire nation was deceived and destroyed-in part because the prophecies of their god's return were so ambiguous that almost anyone could have served as a counterfeit.

In the near future, Satan will attempt to personate Jesus and counterfeit His return to earth. But God's people need not be deceived. When the disciples asked Jesus for the sign of His coming and the end of the world, the very first thing He told them was to be on guard against impostors. He said, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Matthew 24:4, 5.

Christ then proceeded to give His followers a wealth of information about His second coming so there would be no doubt as to how He would return. Jesus not only wants us to know that He is coming and that He's coming soon; He wants us to understand the manner of His coming.

The reason this is so important is because Satan will soon attempt to personate Jesus and counterfeit His return. And to pave the way, Satan has introduced a strong delusion to the Christian world that has been almost universally accepted in mainline churches. I am speaking of the popular teaching regarding a "secret rapture."

The secret rapture theory was designed to lull God's people into a false sense of security and to prepare them for this final master deception. Jesus warned, "If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matthew 24:23, 24.

Satan's deceptions will be strong and convincing, but Christ has given us ample information to help us discern truth from error.

Not a Secret

Will there be a rapture? Yes. Will it be a secret? NO! Rapture means "to be carried away with power," and it is true that when Jesus comes we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). But many have come to believe that this rapture will take place quietly-that faithful Christians all around the world will suddenly disappear and that life here on earth will continue for a seven-year

period of tribulation. During this time, they say, many will be converted and have a "second chance" at salvation before Christ's final coming.

Although the secret rapture scenario may appear comforting at first glance, there is absolutely no scriptural support for it. The Bible plainly teaches that when Jesus comes again, every one of our senses will be bombarded with evidence!

His Coming Will Be Literal

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:9-11.

Heaven-sent messengers told the disciples that Jesus would return to this earth in the same manner He left. Christ left in the clouds, and He will come back in the clouds. He was visible when He left, and He will be visible when He comes again. He had a real body when He left, and He will return the same way.

His Coming Will Be Visible

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." Revelation 1:7.

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:27.

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Matthew 24:30.

When Christ comes, it will not be merely a local sighting or an isolated event. It will be visible across the entire world.

His Coming Will Be Audible

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

"The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout." Jeremiah 25:30.

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." Psalm 50:3.

Christ's second coming will be loud! There will be shouts and trumpets and all kinds of noise. No one will accidentally miss it or be able to read about it in the newspaper the next day.

His Coming Will Be Emotional

"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Luke 21:26, 27.

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Isaiah 25:9.

When Christ returns, it will be an emotional day for the wicked and righteous alike. The lost will experience indescribable fear and anguish, while the saved will experience the perfect joy of eternal

salvation.

His Coming Will Open the Graves

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." John 6:40.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23.

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

This is the Bible's description of the rapture. The dead in Christ will rise by His power and will meet Him in the air. Afterward the faithful who are still alive will also be caught up. It will not be a secret!

His Coming Will Destroy the Earth

"The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again." Isaiah 24:19, 20.

"And the heaven [sky] departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." Revelation 6:14.

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." Revelation 16:18-20.

This world will be uninhabitable by people after Christ comes. His coming will shake the very foundations of the earth.

b>His Coming Will Mean Final Judgment

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." Matthew 16:27.

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12.

It is at Christ's return that we will receive our final reward. Each person's decision will have already been made; there will be no second chance to convert. The time to make a decision to follow Christ is now!

Basis for Confusion

With so much evidence in the Bible as to the manner of Christ's coming, where do people get the idea that the rapture will be a secret event?

As with most deceptions, the secret rapture theory is based on a few texts which have been taken out of context. There are two main concepts in Scripture that have been used to substantiate a "secret" rapture.

The primary one is that Jesus will come as "a thief in the night." The secret rapture theory assumes this means that Christ will come secretly to steal away the righteous and carry them quietly to heaven.

Christ's coming is described as "a thief" several times throughout the New Testament. Let's look at one of these passages and see if it describes a secret rapture. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in

the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." 2 Peter 3:10. That doesn't sound like a secret event to me!

In describing His return as a thief, Christ did not intend to show that it would be quiet, but that it would be sudden and unexpected-that the wicked would be taken by surprise. He said, "If the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." Luke 12:39, 40. Likewise, Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." 1 Thessalonians 5:4. God does not want His followers to be surprised. He wants us to be watchful and ready.

The second concept used to support a "secret" coming is found in Luke 17:34-36: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

Secret rapture proponents say this passage proves that the saints will suddenly disappear from the earth when Jesus returns. But let's take an honest look at the evidence and see what these verses actually teach.

In Luke 17:34-36, Jesus employs some of His favorite symbols to illustrate a simple point. At the end of time, there will be just two groups of people living upon the earth-the lost and the saved.

- Two men in one bed. A bed generally connotes sleep, and Jesus used sleep as a symbol of death. He said to the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." John 11:11, 14. In the resurrection at the last day, there will be two kinds of people sleeping in the grave-the lost and the saved.
- Two women grinding together. In Bible prophecy, a woman is a symbol of a church (Jeremiah 6:2). Grinding grain represents working with the Word of God. When Christ comes in glory, there will be two kinds of churches-the false and the true. Both will be outwardly doing the same thing, but only one will be redeemed.
- Two men in the field. The field represents the world (Matthew 13:38). When Jesus comes again, there will be two kinds of missionaries laboring out in the field-the false and the true. This is why He said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:22, 23.

The Devil's Hidden Agenda

The devil knows that Jesus is coming back and that his time is short (Revelation 12:12). He has been sharpening his skills of deception for 6,000 years, and his last masquerade will be his masterpiece. One day soon, Satan is going to attempt to personate Christ Himself. And Jesus warns that he will do such a convincing job that, if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived. "For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect." Mark 13:22.

Satan is not an ugly, grotesque, bat-winged creature wearing a red leotard. He's an angel-a beautiful, powerful angel. And the Bible makes it clear that he is able to transform himself and appear in different forms. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14. We must not underestimate how convincing and overpowering Satan's final deception will be. I'm sure

he will even quote Scripture, as he did while tempting Christ in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-6).

The devil also has the ability to create the illusion of miracles. You will remember that when Moses went in before Pharaoh to plead for the children of Israel, the magicians of Egypt were able to duplicate the first few signs from God (Exodus chapters 7, 8). Satan is in the business of deception. And we know that he is saving his greatest deception of all for the last days. We need to know how Jesus is coming, or we will be deceived.

The Bible is very clear that when Jesus comes back, His feet never touch the ground. It says the righteous will be caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is why Jesus emphatically warns us, "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." Matthew 24:26, 27, NKJV.

Satan cannot replicate a worldwide, cataclysmic event the magnitude of the real second coming. But if he can seduce Christians into believing the secret rapture theory, he won't have to. He can simply show up around the world in various places, perform great miracles, make TV appearances, and thereby deceive the entire world.

Every general knows that the key to victory in battle is to maintain an element of surprise. Many battles have been won because of a clever diversionary tactic. While one army was distracted and looking at the diversion, the enemy came up from behind to conquer them. In the devil's final assault, he will do the same thing. The archdeceiver has always wanted to be God. Now he knows that he is doomed, but his last taunting gesture against heaven will be to personate Jesus and receive the worship of a lost world.

Sadly, the devil is not the only one who likes to masquerade as God. Many people who claim to be Christians have never come to the place where they are willing to make a complete surrender and allow Jesus to be Lord of their lives. They still want to be in charge. They call him, "Lord, Lord," but do not obey Him.

Friend, is Jesus your Lord? Are you submitting to His will now, or are you masquerading as your own master? No man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). It must be Jesus or yourself. He will soon come in glory for all to see. Will you give Him the crown, throne, and scepter of your life now?

Baptism – Is it Really Necessary?

Joe Crews

1 Introduction

Suppose you could survey the people who live in the hundred homes nearest to your own house on the subject of Christian baptism. What kind of answer would you get in response to this question: “How should a person be baptized in order to meet the Bible requirements of salvation?”

It is likely that you would get a dozen different answers, and possibly even a hundred. Some would say that they don’t believe it is necessary to be baptized at all to be saved. Others would answer that true baptism is to go forward three times completely under the water. Some would contend that a few drops of sprinkled water on the head would constitute a valid baptism, while others would insist on pouring the water over the candidate. A few would strongly hold that a proper baptism consists of a single immersion backwards into the water. Somehow, the subject of baptism has spawned a plethora of ideas on how it should be administered, and to whom. Yet, all believe that their method is based on the one book of authority—the Bible. How could this confusion of conviction result from reading the same book?

One man in Hollywood, California, insisted on being immersed in a huge tank full of rose petals. And if you think that’s bizarre, consider the two latest incidents involving men of the cloth. One preacher gathered his new converts in a Baltimore Street and turned the fire hose on them, declaring them now baptized. Another minister met a lady in the grocery store who wanted to be baptized, and he sprinkled her right there on the spot—with a bottle of Coca-Cola.

In spite of all claims to the contrary, it is obvious that all of these people had made a very shallow study of the Word of God concerning this subject. Their radical modes of seeking salvation were based largely on pagan tradition or ignorance of the Scriptures. We, however, are not interested in such human inventions. It is in the testimony of the Bible alone that we find the real truth about the meaning and method of true baptism.

2 Two Requirements for Heaven

We first turn to the teaching of the Master Himself as He defined the terms for entrance into His Kingdom. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” John 3:5. This statement is probably the most definitive and assertive that Christ ever made on any subject. His words are too clear to be misunderstood—that there are two absolute requirements for entrance into heaven. Every one of us must pass through these two experiences in order to be saved.

But what did Jesus mean by that statement to Nicodemus? What does it mean to be born of the Spirit? And what does it mean to be born of the water? The context of the conversation with the rich Pharisee leaves no doubt as to what the Master meant by those words. In verse 3 He described the spiritual birth in a very simple way: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” So to be “born of the Spirit” clearly refers to conversion. Then Jesus continued in verses 7 and 8 to describe the mysterious, silent work of the Spirit in its transforming mission.

Now we will show that being born of water refers to baptism. These two things are often closely tied together in the Scriptures. Conversion is the powerful inward change, and baptism is the outward physical sign that the change has taken place. Notice how Christ repeated the two conditions for salvation on another occasion, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:16.

This believing unto salvation is the equivalent of being born of the Spirit, and it is coupled with baptism in the same way Jesus did it while talking to Nicodemus. It is faith in the saving merits of the cross that produces the miraculous change that baptism by water symbolizes.

Someone, at this point, might argue that because of the thief on the cross, baptism could not be one

of the strict requirements of salvation laid down by our Lord. Did Jesus not promise that vile criminal a place in the kingdom? And he was certainly not baptized!

It's true that we have no record of the thief being baptized, for he certainly had no opportunity to do so after accepting Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. He could not come down from the cross where he was being executed by the Roman authorities. Had he been able to descend from that cross, he would have done many things. He would have turned from his life of crime, made restitution for all he had stolen, and walked in full conformity to truth he now understood. But since it was physically impossible to do any of those things, the obedient life of Jesus was imputed to him. That is why God could accept him and Jesus could give him such a glorious assurance of salvation. The baptism of Jesus was credited to him—an act that would have been required of the thief had he been able to fulfill it.

By the way, the same transaction would take place today if the circumstances were similar. Suppose a man should approach me this very day, requesting baptism. His desire is so urgent and compelling that he begs me to do it immediately. We get in my car to drive to a nearby lake where there is a convenient place to conduct the service. But on the way to the lake, there is a terrible accident. My passenger is killed in that accident. Would he be lost because he had not yet been immersed with his Lord? Of course not. He had made the decision and was in the process of obeying the Lord when he died. God never requires the impossible from anyone. However, based on what we have learned from the lips of Jesus, one can confidently conclude that if a person has the opportunity to be baptized and *refuses* to be, that man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

3 How Many Modes of Baptism?

Are there many acceptable modes of being baptized? Not according to the apostle Paul. He wrote: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Ephesians 4:5. Even though there are numerous counterfeit faiths, gods, and baptisms, there is only one that is true. How can we determine the genuine amidst all the claims of modern religionists?

The answer lies in the Word of God, and in the actual symbolism of the act. In other words, the *mode* of baptism is dictated by the *meaning* of baptism. Look carefully at Paul's description of the beautiful ceremony and what it actually represents: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life...knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Romans 6:4-6.

Do you understand the significance of what Paul is saying? There has been a death of the old life of sin, which is identified as the "old man." Now that body of evil must be properly disposed of, and Paul says baptism is the occasion for "burying" that crucified nature. By going into the water to conduct a spiritual funeral and to celebrate the new life which has been begotten in the candidate through the Holy Spirit, Paul says we are also memorializing the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Himself. What a meaningful act on the part of newly converted believers! They are giving public witness to the inward transformation that has taken place in their life and are symbolically walking forth into the joys of a new life of obedience and victory.

Let me ask you something. How could one ideally symbolize this entire experience of death to sin, burial with Jesus, and rising to a new life? Think about it for a moment. There is no more perfect way to represent all those steps than to have the eyes closed, breath suspended, hands folded, and to be lowered gently beneath the water.

Does this not also explain the reason for such a finely detailed account of the baptism of Jesus? Even though He had been filled with the Spirit while still in His mother's womb, Jesus urged John to baptize Him anyway. He said: "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." Matthew 3:15.

Notice how the ceremony was carried out there in the Jordan River. "And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him." Mark 1:9, 10.

Contrary to the distorted depictions of the Hollywood movie version, the scene unfolded in the Jordan River and not nearby on the bank. The specific words are very important here. Mark describes their “coming up out of the water” after the baptism. Jesus was totally immersed in the water in order to “fulfill all righteousness” and to set a perfect example for His followers ever afterward.

Did His disciples continue this heaven-appointed way of baptizing their candidates after Jesus went back to heaven? In Acts 8, we read how the faithful Philip dealt with the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert. An angel commanded Philip to travel south into the Gaza desert, where the prominent government leader was sitting in a chariot. There the Spirit told Philip to join the Ethiopian treasurer, who was reading from the book of Isaiah. When the man confessed that he did not understand what he was reading, Philip began to preach to him about Jesus, who fulfilled the messianic prophecy of the submissive Lamb.

Then we have this interesting conversation, recorded for us by Luke. “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:36-39.

It almost seems that the Spirit of God anticipated the uncertainty that some would feel about the manner of baptism, and therefore He moved upon Luke to repeat the words: “they went down *both* into the water, *both* Philip and the eunuch.” Here we have positive evidence that the early church practiced total immersion, just as John and Jesus had so clearly demonstrated for them. In fact, in all the inspired accounts of apostolic evangelism and church activities, we have no indication that this practice ever varied from the pattern established by the two cousins at the Jordan.

Sometimes it was difficult for John the Baptist to carry out his special ministry because of the scarcity of water in that dry area. We are told that “John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.” John 3:23. Again, the Bible includes this interesting bit of inspired information to show us that there is only one proper way to wash away sin and enter the body of Christ. John could not take a jug of water and fulfill his appointed ministry by sprinkling or pouring. He was compelled to remain in cities along the Jordan River where there was sufficient water for total immersion. The people had to come to him in order to have their old sinful lives “buried” in the waters of baptism.

But now let’s look at the strongest possible evidence of Christ’s position on this subject. In every instance where Jesus referred to baptism, He used the Greek word “baptizo” from which we derive our English word. Scholars and language experts have traced the history of that word through two thousand years of usage. They discovered that every possible branch of learning and communication has used it, and never once deviated from its original root meaning of burial or being totally covered up. Dr. Conant summarizes the conclusions of the researchers who did the exhaustive study. Concerning the word “baptizo,” he said: “In all, the word has retained its ground meaning without change. From the earliest age of Greek literature down to its close, a period of nearly 2,000 years, not an example has been found in which the word has any other meaning. There is no instance in which it signifies making a partial application of water by affusion or sprinkling, or to cleanse or purify, apart from the literal act of immersion as a means of cleansing or purifying.”

It is extremely significant that our Lord chose to use that word “baptizo” for baptize. There were other Greek words that could have been used which signify either sprinkling or immersion, but Christ did not ever employ such terms in describing baptism. He always used the only word which reflected the full symbolism of that solemn ceremony—death, burial, and resurrection.

4 Who Qualifies for Baptism?

In the light of this information, can we now determine who is an eligible candidate for Christian baptism? The Bible lays down three pre-conditions for anyone contemplating this step. Jesus said, “Go

ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19, 20.

Since baptism is the outward witness of conversion, it is immediately clear why Jesus commanded that all should be taught before qualifying for that sacred rite. Without an understanding of the plan of salvation, none could participate in its bountiful provisions. Christ stipulated that every candidate should be instructed in His basic doctrines before entering the water of baptism. They would need to fully understand the meaning of what they were doing. He further emphasized the urgency of this preparation work when He said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Mark 16:16. No sins could be forgiven and no conversion effected without personal faith on the part of the candidate. Otherwise the physical act of baptism would be an empty mechanical ritual. The inspired Peter, on the day of Pentecost, gave support to the words of Jesus by adding a third prerequisite for baptism. He said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Acts 2:38.

Now the picture is pulling into sharp focus. All the elements of accepting Jesus and being born again must be present before any person is spiritually prepared for baptism. Instruction, faith, repentance, and true conversion will always precede the public renouncing of the old life of sinful bondage.

Immediately we can see that infants do not qualify for this unique ceremony. It is impossible for a baby to meet the conditions laid down in these Scriptures. An infant cannot be taught and it is too young to be aware of sin or to repent. Therefore, we must conclude that all the ritualistic sprinkling of water on gurgling infants at christening ceremonies has absolutely nothing to do with Bible baptism. We can dedicate tiny newborns to God and pray for them and for their parents, but it should never be a substitute for Bible baptism.

Most people do not realize that even the Catholic Church baptized by immersion until the tenth or eleventh century. I’ve seen the ancient cathedrals in the East with large baptistries to accommodate several people at the same time. Those facilities gradually fell into disuse as the shift was made to receive every member of the family into fellowship of the church. Because tiny babies could not safely be put under the water, they were exposed first to maximum dousing, then ample pouring, then liberal sprinkling, and finally a touch of wetness between the eyes. Like many other divine ordinances, this one suffered and died slowly under the relentless pressures of cultural compromise and convenience. The pagan custom of sprinkling not only pervaded the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, but passed finally into the various Protestant persuasions as well.

Several years ago while living in Bangalore, India, I was aroused from my bed early one morning by a loud and persistent knock on my door. My caller that day was a stranger to me, but his urgent appeal arrested my attention and sent me scurrying to get dressed. He desperately needed a minister, and I was the only one he could locate. He was an Indian Christian whose next-door neighbors had lost their little baby during the night. “Now” he told me, as we hurried to his house, “the pastor of my neighbor’s church will not have anything to do with the family or the funeral arrangements, because for some reason they had failed to have the baby sprinkled as an infant. I want you to visit them and offer comfort and encouragement.”

I found the devastated family almost in a daze. The father was trying to construct a casket for the child from some rough boards. The grieving mother was weeping as she clutched the dead baby in her arms. As I helped the father finish the handmade coffin, he explained in more detail what his own pastor had told him about the baby. Because they had neglected to have an official baptism for their child, it was now supposedly doomed to a fiery punishment in hell, and the pastor would neither officiate at the funeral nor grant them a consecrated place of burial in the cemetery.

After we had placed the little body in the box, I gathered the family in a circle and conducted the most unusual funeral service of my life. After sharing words of comfort, I assured them that their failure to have a few drops of water sprinkled on their baby would have nothing to do with its salvation. In my outrage at the actions of their pastor, I made the statement that the little infant had much more

assurance of salvation than the priest who had refused to be present that day.

Afterwards I took the box and the family in my van to a spot of “unconsecrated ground” where we laid the little baby to rest. What a pagan concept it is that man can sanctify the very ground that God cursed in the beginning because of sin! Such are the extremes to which empty traditions will carry people.

5 Is God Particular About the Mode?

There are many in the world today that sincerely feel that it is a moot point as to whether one is sprinkled, poured, or immersed in baptism. “What difference does it make? It’s only symbolic anyway,” they contend. “God is not that particular about the way we do it.” But we should carefully consider the question of how particular God really is. There are many dramatic stories in the Bible that prove that God is indeed very particular about His commandments. Consider, for example, how many of the 600,000 Hebrews who left Egypt actually entered the Promised Land. Or perhaps we should note how many did not reach their destination. The Bible reveals that 599,998 died before they could cross the river into their promised possession. Caleb and Joshua werethe only survivors of the wilderness trek to complete the total journey from Egypt to Canaan, and the Scriptures say that it was only because “they followed the Lord fully.”

But let’s consider for a moment whether the symbolic nature of the practice makes the mode of baptism irrelevant. We cannot deny that there is a deep spiritual meaning attached to each stage of the physical event of being gently lowered beneath the water. But is there not a similar foreshadowing of spiritual truth in the communion bread and wine? In fact, that service points to the very same events in the life of Jesus that baptism commemorates. Yet how many of us would condone the blasphemy being practiced by a contemporary underground church of young people who have substituted Coca-Cola and hamburger for the elements Jesus offered His disciples on that Thursday night? No matter that it all merely represented something; we believe it is vitally important to utilize the very same symbols that our Lord used when He introduced the service. Then why should we not feel the urgency to maintain the same symbolic form that Jesus used when He introduced baptism at the Jordan River long, long ago?

There is yet another text of the Bible which lends powerful support to the chain of evidence already presented. Paul wrote, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:12. The recurrence of that word “buried” is a striking common denominator among the descriptive phrases about baptism in the New Testament. In order to represent the various aspects of what Jesus did for us, baptism must include a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. Those are the major events connected with the atonement, and not one mode of baptism except immersion even approaches the required symbolic elements.

Why should anyone reject the only form of baptism that incorporates every feature of the plan of salvation, when Jesus Himself gave a practical demonstration of it as our perfect example? It must be emphasized again that there is no magical or miraculous change in the life of a person at the moment of baptism. The death of that old man of sin must precede the funeral service and burial. Even the proper form of administering the ordinance does not guarantee the slightest change in the life of the candidate. That change must take place before the testimony of it can be truthfully expressed. The very worst sinner could be coerced into the baptistry and immersed 50 times with absolutely no effect. He would go down a dry sinner and come up a wet sinner. Unfortunately, religious leaders and pastors long have buried large numbers of people alive before they had met the requirements of being dead to sin.

Sometimes people ask if being immersed in baptism will bring them relief from satanic attack and make their daily life more pleasant and comfortable. I wish it were possible to give assurance that it would remove obstacles and resolve all problems, but that is not what the Bible portrays. Immediately after His baptism Jesus was driven into the wilderness where He experienced the awful encounter with Satan. It may well be that every newly baptized Christian will have to suffer similar struggles with the powers of darkness. The devil is enraged by the total commitment of those who choose to be baptized.

Is it intimidating to know that these harassing attacks may increase upon those who follow Jesus fully? Indeed, it should not be a frightening prospect to a single person, because special spiritual resources are bestowed upon each one who accepts the covenant of baptism. Every candidate walks out of the water in the strength of a new relationship that guarantees protection against all attacks of the enemy. The power that existed only in promises begins to flow into the daily life experience of these fresh young Christians. Paul wrote: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13. What an amazing assurance we have in that promise! No child of God will be left to fight the battle alone. All the confederacies of Satan may be arrayed against us, but they cannot contrive a strategy that will separate us from the angelic legions that are assigned to defend us. God assumes the responsibility for creating an escape route by which we can elude the cleverest snare that Satan can design.

6 Is Rebaptism Ever Right?

There is another aspect of this subject that should be explored, and it has to do with rebaptism. Is it a denial of the original commitment if a person chooses to enter the water of baptism a second time, or perhaps even more? For what reason, if any, would it be important or even necessary to be baptized again? Does the Bible provide an answer to these questions? It does indeed. The very same inquiries apparently were raised in the early apostolic church, and Acts 19:1-5 explains how Paul dealt with it in Ephesus. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Observe carefully that John had already baptized these Christians at Ephesus. Not only was it a legitimate baptism, but also they had accepted Christ as the Messiah from John's careful instruction. But under Paul's questioning, they confessed to a lack of knowledge regarding the Holy Spirit. The message that Paul shared with them on this subject was of such a nature that they felt it necessary to be baptized again. With this Bible example before us, let's consider possible reasons for modern disciples choosing to be baptized again. Obviously if one discovers that his first baptism was not in harmony with the example of Jesus, he should submit to the proper form in order to fulfill "all righteousness". Sprinkling, for example, although performed under the name of baptism, could never meet the required symbolism of death and burial. This means that babies, regardless of the sincerity of their parents or godparents, must be considered unbaptized until they take the step after their own spiritual awakening at a responsible age. Sometimes it is difficult for sprinkled adults to grasp the idea that they have never really been baptized at all and should arrange for a true immersion baptism as soon as possible.

I once asked a man if he had ever been baptized. His reply was, "I don't know, but I'll ask my mother and let you know." There can be no doubt that this man needed to be baptized again, regardless of what his mother said. Sometimes people tell me that they were baptized in their early years before they had really entered into the new birth experience. Thus, it had been merely a formal ritual done to please some friend or family member. Such persons, after entering a true conversion, should follow the meaningful burial-baptism to commemorate the death of sin in their lives.

What about the Christian who slips away from the faith and reverts to his former life of sin? It is without question that public apostasy, marked by open disobedience to God's law, should be just as openly renounced by a renewal of the baptism experience. The personal witness of a turning around in the lifestyle is one of the important aspects of being baptized.

Another reason that some might feel the need for rebaptism is related to the experience of the Ephesian believers. Apparently they believed that the greater light of truth shared with them by Paul

was of such a life-changing nature that they felt it necessary to be baptized again. Many may feel the same today as they learn new biblical teachings that revolutionize their way of believing and worshipping God. Some indeed discover that their previous Christian walk, though sincere, was actually violating some very important principles of Scripture. None should feel that they are denying their earlier experience by choosing to wash the past clean through a renewing of the baptismal experience.

With such an irrefutable array of reasons for making the decision for baptism and church membership, why do so many people hold back and procrastinate in taking the step? For many years, I have listened to excuses offered for not going all the way with Jesus, and particularly for not yielding the life in baptism. One of the most common expressions I've heard is this: "I'm afraid I can't hold out, and I don't want to be a hypocrite." Surely, this cannot be a valid argument for anyone who has met the prerequisites of faith, repentance, and conversion. Such a person is very aware of the weakness of the flesh and the impossibility of measuring up to God's standard in human strength. Everything depends upon prayer and a constant, intimate relationship with Jesus. Is it possible for that prayer and faith life to weaken, plunging us into defeat? Of course, we can choose to neglect those spiritual exercises at any or every moment of our lives. Should that possibility discourage us from dedicating our lives in baptism? Not at all. Only if we are making plans to live for self would we be fearful of making those solemn baptismal vows of eternal faithfulness. But the truly con-veiled step out by faith in that public commitment, trusting fully in God's power to uphold them. They recognize the possibility of stumbling as they grow stronger day by day, but they know the loving Jesus will be there to pick them up, forgive, and surround them with encouragement if they make a mistake. Those who are too fearful and faithless to begin the Christian journey are simply confirming their spiritual unpreparedness for the baptism experience. Let them wait until their faith is more firmly fixed upon Jesus than upon self.

How then can people really be sure that they are ready for baptism? Should they wait until they feel absolutely certain they will never make a mistake? Definitely not. In fact, feeling has nothing to do with their readiness. But they must be perfectly settled in their innermost soul that Christ has performed the new birth miracle in their lives. They must be able to comfortably put their own name into the beautiful messianic promise of Isaiah 53. Each proper candidate for baptism should be able to read verse 5 like this: But he was wounded for *my* transgressions, he was bruised for *my* iniquities: the chastisement of *my* peace was upon him, and with his stripes, I am healed.

Some may be reading these words right now who have been lingering long over the decision to follow Jesus into the watery grave of baptism. Have you been afraid of disappointing your Saviour by some possible misstep or failure? Turn this very moment from such groundless, self-centered fears. Your walk with Jesus does not depend on your ability to overcome temptation and human weakness. If you think in terms of what you are able to do, you may remain in the twilight zone of indecision forever. You must focus every thought upon the strength and power of the One who invites you to be His friend forever. It is the unfailing nature of His promises that can give you perfect trust in living the Christian life.

Even the Philippian jailer was so moved by conviction and faith in God that he insisted on being baptized in the middle of the night with all his family. Paul, though a prisoner himself, performed the baptism for the eager new converts.

Ananias expressed the same urgency in his appeal to the newly converted Saul. He said, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts 22:16.

Is that the appeal that the Holy Spirit is pressing upon your heart this very moment? You love the Lord, and recognize that He has died for your sins. By faith, you have accepted His atoning death in your behalf. The transforming grace of Jesus has brought peace and assurance into your life for the first time. If all this is true, you need to make the most important decision of your life. The Spirit inquires, "Why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized."

Baptized Paganism

Psalm 119:34

So new to the world, so unaware of the danger, the tiny newborn is secure, nestled in the warm cradle of his mother's arms. Yet now he senses a strange tenseness in her body. Tightly, ever so tightly she clasps him to her breast as they approach the sacred grounds. He has never heard the rumble of so many voices or the mystical sounds of the chants. His mother's arms have begun trembling and drops of tears mixed with sweat are dampening the swaddling cloth that covers him. Wild sounds of flutes and timbrels begin to echo down the mountain into the valley below. His mother's grasp weakens and suddenly the large, strong hands of a man garbed in white lift him into the night air and lay him high upon a hard, metallic surface. Insecure, the baby whimpers, seeking the comfort of his mother's arms. His eyes are not yet strong enough to focus upon the large, bronze calf's head above him. His whimpers turn into cries as smoke stings his eyes and the sculpted bronze hands supporting him become unbearably hot. His mother's cries join his but are soon muffled by thundering of drums and the rhythmic shuffling of ten thousand feet. Suddenly he is pushed, and slides down the sloping arms into the fire below. He gives a painful shriek. His mother's hysterical cries only add to the discordant shrillness of the flute and timbrels as the dance becomes more frenzied. When only the crackling of the fire and the mournful, lonely cries of the mother can be heard, the priest announces that the sun-god is pleased.

Throughout history the practice and horrors of sun worship have reached every region of the world. The Babylonians called the sun-god Shamash; the Egyptians, Ra; the Assyrians, Baal; the Canaanites, Moloch; the Persians, Mithras; the Greeks, Helios; the Druids, Hu; and the Romans, Sol Invictus-the Unconquerable Sun. The list continues down through history and encompasses cultures as diverse as the Hindus, the Japanese, and the Aztecs and comes as close to home as virtually every Indian tribe in North America. Most scholars trace the beginnings of sun worship to Babylon.

Babylon, the first metropolis, was founded by Nimrod soon after the flood (Genesis 10:8-10). There were giants walking the earth in those days, ancient men of renown from the earlier world; but as they slowly died, the new race seemed markedly inferior. Nimrod, however, retained all the physical and intellectual earmarks of his ancestors. At first Nimrod had been only a hunter but in the passing of time his escapades became the stuff of legend among his followers. Countless recitations of his mighty exploits elevated his status to superhuman proportions, and the rapidly expanding society at his feet finally began not only to honor him as their king, but to worship him as their god.

Nimrod's arrogance was ultimately surpassed only by that of his wife, Semiramis. Notoriously beautiful and cunning beyond imagination, she wielded her own power with an iron hand. Like Nimrod, Semiramis was deified by the common people. To the superstitious minds of a race that had separated itself from worship of the one true God, Nimrod and Semiramis in their terrible strength and beauty were exalted as the sun and moon in human form.

Though historical accounts of Nimrod's actual death are vague, it is certain that he left Semiramis with a large dominion and an equally large dilemma. How was she to maintain her hold on the empire he had built? There was but one solution, and she pursued it with diabolical zeal. Nimrod's spirit had ascended into the sun itself, she claimed. With breathtaking eloquence she described to the people his new and elevated role as their benefactor and protector. Each morning he would rise, bringing light and life to the land as he traveled across the sky. In the evening he would plunge below the edge of the earth to battle the subterranean evil spirits and demons that would otherwise crawl over and annihilate mankind. At times the battle would be bloody, and the red-streaked sky bore witness to the fray. Each morning the people were to lay their offerings before the rising sun and worship it as their departed

leader and victorious protector.

The plan was only too successful. In their self-imposed isolation from the worship of the living God, Nimrod's followers had also forfeited the only living link with the knowledge of their ancestors. Left with nothing but their physical senses to inform them, they readily accepted the preposterous fabrications of Semiramis. Unbeknownst to them, they had become pawns in the sinister plan of Satan, the archdeceiver, as he laid the common foundation for every heresy of paganism.

It was decided that the first day of the week would thenceforth be dedicated to the worship of the sun-god, and in like manner the rest of the weekdays would be dedicated to worship of the lesser heavenly bodies. Remarkable enough, though Mithraism later reshuffled the order of several, our own weekdays today retain the Tuetonic names of these same planetary deities. The first day of the week remains Sunday; Monday commemorates the moon; Tuesday, the planet Mars (Tiu); Wednesday, Mercury (Woden); Thursday, Jupiter (Thor); Friday, Venus (Frigg or Freya); and Saturday is obviously named for Saturn.

As generations passed, religious leaders began to add doctrines and ceremonies to sun worship. They declared that if the sun gave life, it must require life in order to strengthen it in its journey across the sky. In response, hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children were sacrificed to the sun-god. Of such worship, God declared through Moses, "Every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods." Deuteronomy 12:31. Deceived by self-serving leaders and knowing no other religion than their own, the people blindly adhered to the doctrines of devils.

One spring not many years following Nimrod's death, the voluptuous Semiramis was found to be with child. Calling the scribes of Babylon together, she issued a most remarkable press release. Nimrod had impregnated her, she claimed, through the lively rays of the sun. As the offspring of the sun-god, the anticipated child would itself lay claim to deity, and by proxy, she, Semiramis, would henceforth be the "mother of god." Such blasphemy seems transparent in our day, but to a nation that had departed from the living God the absurd became commonplace. The superstition of the masses was fertile ground for Satan's deceptive schemes and like noxious weeds, they flourished.

On December 25 Tammuz, the child of the sun-god, was born. His birth was hailed as a great miracle. Falling as it did during the slowly lengthening days immediately after the winter solstice, it was also seen as an omen of the sun's rebirth and was heralded by tumultuous rejoicing. December 25 was thereafter observed as the birthday of the son of the sun-god, and became a yearly feast day throughout the kingdom.

Like his supposed father Nimrod, Tammuz was reputed to have been a great hunter. Perhaps his greatest conquest of all, however, was his mythical union with Ishtar, the mother goddess who embodied all the reproductive energies of nature. Also variously regarded as the moon goddess and the queen of heaven, Ishtar was the principal female deity of the Assyrians. This same goddess, with certain variations, can be identified in other cultures as Ashtoreth (Phoenecian), Astarte (Greek and Roman), Eostre (Teutonic), and Eastre (Saxon). Her counterpart in Egypt was Isis, wife and sister of Osiris and mother of Horus. Rabbits and eggs were both symbols of life and fecundity that early came to be identified with Ishtar. The yearly celebration honoring her took place around the first full moon after the spring equinox, when all of nature seemed to be bursting with reproductive vitality.

Unfortunately, the youthful Tammuz (also known as Adonis, meaning "lord," in classical mythology) met an untimely death at the tusk of a wild boar. Here legend overtakes history altogether. Some accounts say that after three days Tammuz miraculously resurrected himself; others say that the grief-stricken Ishtar journeyed far into the netherworld to find him. After many days she succeeded, but during her absence the passion of love ceased to operate and all of life on earth languished in mourning. By all accounts, when the lamenting was over, Tammuz was firmly ensconced as the new

god of the sun, and his renown eventually exceeded even Nimrod's.

Every year following Tammuz' tragic death and presumed ascension to the sun, the forty days preceding Ishtar's festival were set aside for fasting and self-affliction to commemorate his suffering and death. (It was this practice, "weeping for Tammuz," that God called an abomination in Ezekiel 8:13, 14.) At the end of this period of mourning the people would waken early on the first day of the week and travel to the highest hills near their homes. There they would present their offerings of wine, meat, and incense and prostrate themselves before the rising sun, exclaiming "Our lord is risen!" Then would commence the festivities of Ishtar, queen of heaven and goddess of fertility. In preparation for this high celebration, the people would make small cakes, inscribing them with a cross (a pagan fertility symbol), for baking in the sun and eating as part of their ritual. The day would conclude in orgiastic revelry of a most debasing sort, and often included human sacrifices.

The practice of these ancient perversions was so widespread that even the nation of Israel, a people sanctified by worship of the one true God, did not escape their baleful influence. Ever compromising with their pagan neighbors, the Jews allowed their own pure worship to be adulterated with one heathen custom after another until at a last it was almost wholly corrupt. In Jeremiah 7:17-19, the prophet revealed God's clear displeasure at the idolatry of His people. "Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto their gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?"

Indeed, confusion was the inevitable result of every compromise by God's people with the ways of the unsanctified world. And confusion was the legacy left to the generations who came after.

It may be unsettling to learn that virtually every religious holiday now observed throughout Christendom originated in paganism, many hundreds of years before Christ, but ancient history proves it beyond a doubt. The birthday of the sun's child, Tammuz, became the alleged birthday of the Christ child. The season of mourning for Tammuz became Lent, and the resurrection legend of Tammuz conveniently lived on as the resurrection story of Christ. The cakes to the queen of heaven became hot cross buns, and the disgraceful fertility rites of Ishtar evolved into the celebration of Easter, (Incidentally, Easter is still a movable festival that finds its date each year from the cycles of the moon. It is always celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.)

Even the lesser pagan holy days, or "holidays," were absorbed into Christian culture. During autumn, the season of decay, spirits of the dead were believed to be hovering nearby. If they were not prayed for and provided with adequate food and shelter, the people feared they would remain and haunt them with misfortune. In other words, trick or treat. Today we are left with All Soul's Day; the evening before is called Eve of All Hallows, or more commonly known as Halloween.

St. Valentine's Day is what remains of Lupercalia, an early spring purification rite in which the priests would run through the streets with whips made from strips of goatskin. With these whips they would strike women, insuring them of fertility for the coming year. Matchmaking between young people would occur later in the day by random selection of names. The goatskin whips evolved into little arrows shot by Cupid, and matchmaking today occurs through the more purposeful exchange of Valentine cards.

Many other examples might be given, but suffice it to say that our religious and secular culture today is littered with pagan traditions, large and small. How did it happen? After all, we are a Christian nation in an enlightened age, aren't we? The first question is probably easier to answer than the second.

Life was difficult at best during the early years of the Christian church. The pagan world was ruthless and powerful, and it sought to stamp out the little sect of worshipers who revered Jesus Christ as their

Lord and Saviour. But the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church, and as time passed it became clear the Christianity would prevail.

When Satan failed to destroy the church by violence, he resorted to a new strategy—he would join the church himself, and corrupt it from within. This proved to be a far more successful plan. By the fourth century A.D. the Roman Empire had invested the growing church with its own wealth and a large degree of political power, thinking to extend its own domain. Unfortunately for the world, this blend of religious and temporal power was an intoxicating mix that forever changed those who tasted it. No longer the meek and harmless body of Christ, the church devoured the hand that fed her, and in 538 A.D. Emperor Justinian decreed that the Roman Church now ruled the world. Henceforth, its reign would be known as the "Holy Roman Empire."

The world staggered under the oppression of the Roman Church during the dark ages that followed. In her thirst for ever greater power and domination, she absorbed all other religions into herself and adulterated the pure doctrine of Christ with an amalgam of superstitions and heresies. This characteristic itself was typical of all the pagan nations, which by conquest perpetually added to their list of deities. Says Durant in *The Story of Civilization*: "There were gods who presided over every moment of a man's life, gods of the house and garden, of food and drink, of health and sickness." The Roman Church gathered these gods into her bosom and gave them saints' names. Prayers for the dead, instead of ascending to Cybele were now offered up to the Virgin Mary. The use of idols and amulets was preserved, as were offerings of appeasement (penance and indulgences). The pagan kings were believed to be incarnations of the sun-god, and the Roman Church had its counterpart in the pope as the vicar of Christ.

The earliest Christians had denied all compromise with false doctrine and had gladly suffered horrible martyrdoms for refusing even to place a pinch of incense at the feet of pagan altars. Yet in just a few generations of time, a curtain of moral blackness shrouded the church. Ever anxious to assimilate and conquer, she integrated virtually every feature of sun worship into her own rites. To spite the Jews whom they hated and to accommodate the legions of sun worshipers that were entering the "faith" through conquest, church leaders very early presumed to transfer the sanctity of the Sabbath to the first day of the week. Sunday was proclaimed a holiday in honor of Jesus' resurrection, a cunning perversion that eventually brought scorn upon God's great moral law, the Ten Commandments. In time this master stroke also effectively obliterated the worship of God as the literal Creator of the universe, which in turn prepared a wide path for the emergence of evolutionary philosophy, centuries later.

Today evolution is only the tip of a massive, many-headed iceberg. From the words we use down to the way we wear our clothes, our culture is thoroughly steeped in pagan traditions. Stripped of their original significance, however, many of these customs appear to be relatively harmless and some, updated with their Christian dressings, seem actually wholesome. But how should the Christian of today relate to Christmas, or Easter, or Sunday keeping? Not many people are really aware of the history of these things, so should we even be concerned?

These questions are reasonable, and they deserve thoughtful consideration. The best place to begin looking for answers is in the Bible itself. God strictly commanded Israel, Saying "Take heed to thyself . . . that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God." Deuteronomy 12:30, 31.

Why were God's words so strong? Because He was utterly unlike the heathen deities, whom the people regarded as capricious and in need of continual appeasement. God Himself was just, loving, and above all, holy. He required a different, higher kind of worship, based on a holy relationship with His people. The very forms of sun worship and idolatry precluded any kind of relationship between God and His people, and degraded their conceptions of Him. Moreover, these forms encompassed the most debasing practices, including human sacrifices.

We must ask then, is there anything wrong with commemorating the birth and resurrection of Jesus? Of course not. These events are filled with deep meaning for every true Christian. The only problem is that neither the Bible nor history has preserved the dates of these events for us. Consequently, there is no biblical command to observe them on any particular day of the year. God in His wisdom left us free to remember them any and every day of the year, including December 25 and Easter Sunday.

At this point it should be evident that Heaven places no religious significance on Christmas or Easter. The selection of these days was based solely on pagan considerations; men later contrived the means by which to incorporate them into the Christian religion. It is impossible simply to ignore the holidays that have become such a staple in our own culture, yet we should not invest them with a sacredness that they do not deserve. At least we may be thankful that these days do not seek to displace or nullify any part of God's holy law.

But now how about Sunday keeping-isn't that a legitimate commemoration of Christ's resurrection? Ah-here is where Satan's plot has been leading all along. Sunday observance is the fox that slipped into the chicken coop along with the pigeons. The pigeons may not be real chickens, but it's the fox who will destroy the whole brood if he stays.

What in the world does this mean? In Romans 6, the Bible gives us the symbol of Christ's death and resurrection for the Christian, and it isn't Sunday keeping. It is baptism and a subsequent "walk in newness of life." Verse 4. But most importantly, Sunday keeping is the one remnant of paganism that is placed in direct opposition to God's authority. We have not been told merely to pick one day out of seven for worship. Rather, we are told that God specifically blessed the seventh day and made it holy-a fact we dare not disregard.

The Sabbath is a sacred memorial of the creative power which distinguishes God from all false deities. God has always required His people to put a difference between the sacred and the profane, between the holy and the common. Satan has unceasingly sought to blur this distinction. His final goal is to make sin appear righteous, and righteousness to appear profane. Has he succeeded? Look at modern Christianity and decide for yourself.

Nowhere in the Scriptures is any mention made of transferring the Sabbath's sanctity to another day. Nowhere does the gospel of Christ nullify any portion of God's law, though the gates of hell have raged against it. It was only by hiding the change within a mass of pagan ritual and "baptizing" the whole lot, that Satan succeeded in causing the entire Christian world to break God's holy law while thinking to honor Him. Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, author of "The Baptist Manual," made this candid admission before a group of ministers:

There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday. Earnestly desiring information on this subject, which I have studied for many years, I ask, where can the record of such a transaction [change of the Sabbath] be found? Not in the New Testament, absolutely not. There is no scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week. Of course I know quite well that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history. ... But what a pity that it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by papal apostasy and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism! (In a paper read before a New York Ministers' Conference, November 13, 1893.)

There is a serpent hidden in the bundle of colorful customs handed to us from paganism. Satan well knows that sin is the only thing that can separate us from the joys of eternity with Christ, and thus he has laid his snare. Will we be taken in the net of our adversary? Or will our prayer, like David's, be "Give me understanding and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight"? Psalm 119:34, 35.

Can a Saved Man Choose to Be Lost

Hebrews 10:38

The power of choice is a wonderful gift from God. Yet there is one choice God never allowed man to exercise. No one can choose whether or not to be born with a sinful nature. The decision which affects our lives the most was made long, long ago by our forefathers. We have absolutely no choice about the kind of nature we possess at birth. It is a sinful nature. If unchanged it will lead to eternal death.

But even though we are born with a fallen nature, God gives us a choice about changing that nature. It is a personal, sovereign choice that no one can take away from us. Without doubt it constitutes the most important decision that any person faces during his lifetime. The choice is whether we yield to that sinful nature and die eternally, or receive a new nature through faith in Christ and live eternally.

Much disagreement exists over the kind of choice offered to each one of us. Millions believe that God opens the door for only a once-in-a-lifetime decision and then closes that door forever. It is as though God says, "I'm going to give you only one decision about changing over from your doomed condition. Once you decide to be saved you can never choose to be lost again. When you accept Jesus as your Saviour, it will be the final choice you will ever make about your eternal destiny. If you change your mind later and repudiate your decision, it will be too late. No matter how deeply and sincerely you desire to be lost and repent of your repentance, you cannot escape from eternal life. No amount of bitter rebellion, deliberate blasphemy, or iniquitous living can change that once-for-all decision to be saved. I will not allow you any further choice after you accept Jesus as your Saviour."

Basically, this is the belief of a large segment of Christians who advocate the doctrine of eternal security. Another equally sincere group of Christians believes that God leaves the door open for us to change our minds at any time. They believe that salvation is not predicated upon only one irrevocable act or choice of the past, but upon a continuous, personal relationship of the believer with Christ. When the decision to break the love-relationship is made by willful disobedience, the believer ceases to be a true believer and forfeits any assurance of salvation.

Millions of Souls at Stake

The fantastic implications of this issue are overwhelming. If there is an unconditional future security for all believers, it has to be the most wonderful doctrine in existence: but if it is not true, it surely is one of the most dangerous heresies in the world. Millions could be saved or lost over the decision they make on this one point.

Let me give you an example of how it influences the destiny of people day by day. At one of my crusades there were more than one hundred people attending who had been steeped in the belief of eternal security. They were thrilled by the revelation of Bible truth as they listened. The seventh-day Sabbath particularly excited them because they had never before understood it. All were completely convinced that Saturday is the true Sabbath of the Scriptures, and they eagerly accepted the great prophetic doctrines also. But of those hundred people only a very few made any decision to obey the truth. Practically all of them had Sabbath problems connected with their jobs. It would have meant inconvenience, economic hardship, and possible loss of employment for them to follow the truth all the way. Each one who rejected the message gave me the same explanation - "We are already saved," they said, "and we cannot be lost. Why should we run the risk of losing our jobs by keeping the Sabbath? We would not be any more saved by keeping the Sabbath than we are right now, and we certainly cannot be lost by breaking the Sabbath."

Do you see how their argument was consistent with their doctrine? To them salvation was not connected with obedience, or advancing in spiritual growth. It all focused on a past moment when they made a decision for Christ. Whether they obeyed or disobeyed any subsequent revelation of truth could have no influence whatsoever on their final destiny. They could break the fourth commandment, the seventh commandment, or all of them, and still feel eternally secure in the promise they had claimed "when they were saved." To be sure, these people believed that their disobedience might affect the joy and peace of their relationship, but never the assurance of ultimate salvation.

Obviously, this doctrine needs to be deeply examined. Too many eternal consequences hinge upon its acceptance or rejection. We need to answer questions like these: Can we change our minds about being saved? Do we give up our power of choice when we are converted? Does salvation consist of one grand, holy moment of decision, or must we continue in the saving grace of Christ after that decision? Can God take defiling sins into His holy kingdom? Fortunately, the Bible has hundreds of beautiful, clear texts to answer these questions. We will look at them together, and also examine a few texts which have been interpreted to uphold the doctrine of "once saved, always saved."

No Sin in Heaven

Speaking of the New Jerusalem, John said, "There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth." Revelation 21:27. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8. Paul repeatedly wrote about the exclusion of sinners from heaven. Sin is the only thing that defiles in the sight of God, and no one who willfully practices sin will ever enter into His kingdom. Paul wrote, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, . . . nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

Nowhere in the Bible is entrance into God's kingdom tied to a momentary - or even temporary - faith experience of the past. Salvation is a dynamic, growing relationship with the only One who has eternal life to bestow. It requires continuing contact in order to receive it. The very life of God can be shared with men but NEVER APART FROM A LIVING UNION WITH CHRIST! "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:12.

Just as the constant creative energy of God is necessary to sustain the universe and to hold atoms together, so His divine power is constantly needed to maintain spiritual life in the soul. When a person willfully chooses to separate from God, the contact is broken, and the spiritual life ceases to flow. God will not violate the will of anyone in making that choice either. For proof that Christians can lose their connection with Jesus and be lost, read John 15:1-6. There Christ explains one of the great mysteries of eternal life. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Verses 5, 6.

The Secret of Continued Life is Continued Abiding

Notice that the secret of continued life is continued abiding. If a person does not abide in Christ, he withers, dies, and is finally burned up. This proves that the relation of a believer to Christ is never a static thing based only on a past experience. It is a current, mutual sharing of a common life which is drawn from Him "who is our life" (Colossians 3:4). When the branch is separated from the vine, the source of life is gone, and only death can result. These words of Jesus are too clear to be misconstrued. Even believing, trusting Christians who are connected to the living vine may choose to separate from the vine. When they do, they die and will be cast into the fire and burned. Nothing can wither and die that has not previously been alive.

Security is eternal only for those whose faith is eternally fixed on Jesus, and whose life is connected to the one who is our life. Obviously, we can choose to be lost no matter how saved we once were. Everything depends on maintaining the divine connection with the true vine.

Jesus taught the same solemn truth about losing eternal life in the parable of the sower. In explaining the seed which fell among the thorns and the rocks, Jesus said, "Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should **believe and be saved**. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which **for a while believe**, and in time of temptation fall away." Luke 8:12, 13.

There are several things to note about this parable. First, only one class will finally be saved - the ones who brought forth much fruit. The groups represented by the wayside and rocks will not be saved. In verse 12, the wayside hearers did not have a chance to "believe and be saved," but in the next verse the stony ground hearers do "for a while believe." What kind of "believing" is this? According to verse 12, it is the kind that saves. *So the ones who believed for a while were saved for a while*, but in time of temptation they fell away. Eventually, of course, they were lost along with all the others, except the fruit-bearers. Here is an unequivocal teaching of our Lord that people can have a saving faith for a while, and yet lose it and be lost.

Security is Eternal Only for Those Whose Faith is Eternally Fixed on Jesus

Those who read the record of the Gospels carefully will find repeated authority from Jesus to renounce the doctrine of eternal security. In Luke 12:42-46 Christ described in another parable how a faithful servant could turn into an unfaithful one. After asking, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household . . . ?" Jesus answers His own question: "That servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing . . . he will make him ruler over all that he hath." Then Christ explains how that servant could lose his reward. "But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."

Here is a perfect example by the Master Teacher as to how a faithful and wise servant can be punished with the unbelievers. Jesus was talking about a man whom He had seen faithful enough to trust with heavy responsibilities. Undoubtedly, this servant represents those who carefully served the Lord as true believers. But what happened? That very faithful servant departed from the path of faithfulness and reaped eternal ruin and death. Does this not also remind us of the words of Hebrews 10:38, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." The servant in the parable, who **was** a believer, is now punished **with** the unbelievers. The faithful can draw back to perdition.

Salvation Can Be Forfeited

One more parable of Christ spotlights the fact that continued forgiveness is conditional for the believer. The story is found in Matthew 18:21-35, and revolves around the forgiveness of God. A certain king responded to the pleas of his servant and forgave him a large debt. That servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a small amount and showed no mercy, throwing him in prison because he could not pay. When the king heard what had happened, he rescinded his cancellation of the large debt and had his servant thrown to the tormentors till he paid in full.

No one can deny the obvious teaching of this parable. Even though God graciously forgives those who apply for it, that forgiveness is not without conditions for the future. We can lose that forgiveness by

being unmerciful to others. This is in harmony with the words of the Lord in Ezekiel 33:13, "When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it." The principle is repeated in verse 18, "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, **and committeth iniquity**, he shall even die thereby."

The secret lies in maintaining the righteous relationship with the Source of salvation. Jesus said, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Matthew 24:13. No one will be saved finally who does not hold out against a course of deliberate sin in the power of God. Those who do not endure to the end will have their names blotted out of the book of life. Advocates of eternal security deny it could ever happen, but read the frightening possibility for yourself in Revelation 3:5, "He that overcometh . . . I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." The implication is clear that those who are not overcomers - who do not endure to the end - will have their names blotted out.

All these verses are really saying the same thing. Willful sin shatters the relationship by which eternal life is obtained. There is an eternal "if" in every consideration of eternal security. "IF we walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. "IF that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." 1 John 2:24. "IF any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Hebrews 10:38. "IF a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch." John 15:6. "IF a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." John 8:51. "IF thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Romans 11:22. "IF ye do these things, ye shall never fall." 2 Peter 1:10. "For we are made partakers of Christ, IF we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." Hebrews 3:14. "IF we endure, we shall also reign with him: IF we deny him, he also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12 (RSV). "IF we sin willfully . . . there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Hebrews 10:26. "IF any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15. "Ye are my friends, IF ye do whatsoever I command you." John 15:14. "IF ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." Romans 8:13.

Danger of Being a Castaway

Paul recognized the fearful possibility of being cast out of God's presence in the end unless he curbed the fleshly propensities to sin. Said he, ". . . lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." 1 Corinthians 9:27. The word Paul used - castaway - is very interesting. It is the Greek word "adokimos," which is translated "reprobate" in other places. In fact, 2 Corinthians 13:5 declares that Jesus Christ cannot dwell in the heart that is reprobate (adokimos). Titus 1:16 speaks of the abominable and disobedient who are "unto every good work reprobate (adokimos)." Surely Paul had nothing else in mind but that he could be lost if he allowed sin to recapture his life.

Paul also speaks of the possibility of born-again believers suffering damnation because they receive the Lord's Supper unworthily. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." 1 Corinthians 11:29. No one can deny that these people were committed Christians partaking of the symbols of their redemption. Could they fall into damnation and be lost? Paul said they could. What is damnation? The same Greek word (krima) is found in 1 Timothy 5:12. "Having damnation (krima) because they have cast off their first faith." How plain it is that believers can "cast off their first faith" and go into final damnation.

I have listened many, many times to an explanation of eternal security based upon the analogy of sonship. "My child is born into my family and he will always be my child. He cannot be unborn. Whether obedient or disobedient, he will always be my child." This reasoning avoids the central issue. The question is not whether a child can be "unborn," but whether it can sicken and die. No doctor admonishes new parents about the dangers of the baby getting unborn, but he has much to say about proper care to keep it from dying. In fact, if the baby is not fed, it will soon die. In the same way, Jesus said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, **ye have no life in you.**" John

6:53. What was He talking about? In verse 63 He explained, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and **they are life**." Unless the Christian lives by the Word of God, he cannot continue to partake of the spiritual life derived from Him.

Have we clearly established that continued obedience is necessary to ultimate salvation? Paul wrote, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" Romans 6:16. When a man chooses to obey Christ no longer and obeys the devil instead, he no longer belongs to Christ, but to Satan. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous . . . He that committeth sin is of the devil." 1 John 3:7, 8.

The writer of the book of Hebrews gives scores of specific admonitions against falling away from the faith. Hebrews 10:23 opens up a line of argument against the once-saved, always-saved position that no one can refute. The passage begins this way: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." And after that, admonition is given those who might be tempted to absent themselves from the assembly of the believers. Apparently, this is one of the first signs of slipping backward. The author of this epistle, and I think it was Paul, includes himself in the warning. He writes, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, **wherewith he was sanctified**, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" That is from verses 26 through 29. The people described here had been sanctified by the truth, but fell away into willful apostasy.

Now the last few verses of the chapter warn against the casting away of their confidence. Notice this carefully! "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. . . . Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." Verses 35 to 39. Now how could anybody state any more clearly the fact that one's eternal salvation is conditional on his remaining steadfast to the very end? Unless there were a possibility that one might cast away his confidence, that he might draw back unto perdition, why would this man of God sound such a warning as he did?

In Hebrews 6:4-6 we find another striking statement. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, **If they shall fall away**, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Now I think it would be very difficult to describe more fully a person who had been born again but who later rebelled against God and rejected Christ and spurned the Holy Spirit. He has placed himself out of God's reach by his own actions. Therefore, there is no possibility that such a man can be saved as long as he continues to crucify Christ by his disobedience.

Branches Can Be Cut Off

In the eleventh chapter of Romans, Paul is discussing the fact that many of the physical seed of Israel rejected God's Son and were thus cut off. The illustration is used of an olive tree. The branches were the children of Israel, but because of their unbelief, they were broken off, as you will read in verses 17 to 20. Then, some wild olive branches were grafted in, which represents the Gentile Christians. Now note this admonition: "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, **If thou continue in his goodness: otherwise, thou also shalt be cut off.**" Verses 21 and 22. Please note that any security for those branches depended entirely upon their connection with the tree. The security was conditional.

Let's see whether Peter agrees with these sentiments of Paul. In his second epistle, the first chapter, are listed a number of virtues which should be manifested in the life of every Christian. These are mentioned in verses 5 to 7, and notice that he is writing to "them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Verse 1. Then they had been given "all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Verse 3. It is very apparent that Peter is addressing these remarks to those who have been converted. But notice the warning he gives: "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Verses 9 and 10. Surely this indicates that Christians can fall from grace. They can turn back from following Jesus. They can even become apostates in the truest sense of the word. Then in the third chapter, Peter goes on to say, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Verse 14. "Seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." Verse 17. So we see that Peter does agree with Paul that Christians need to be on guard constantly lest they be led astray, and he indicates the sad fate of those who turn back into sin after they are converted.

One of the strongest texts in the Bible that proves a person can turn away from Christ and be lost even after he has made a profession of being saved is 2 Peter 2:20-22: "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." The lesson here is obvious.

Now, those who take a position for unconditional security say that God's sons cannot be represented by dogs and sows. Well, maybe they can't, but Peter did - and it is the most apt of illustrations. The proverb is painfully plain. They had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They had been converted. They had joined Christ on His side. They had turned their lives over to Him, but they remembered the world and the "wallow" of sin. Like the Israelites coming out of Egypt, they remembered the "flesh pots," the "leeks and onions." They remembered the pleasures of sin; so, leaving Christ they went back into the world like the hog returns to its wallow in the mire. Certainly no Christian should imitate the habits of a hog, but Peter's proverb shows that it is possible.

The Spirit of God is not silent on this point. Listen: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times **some shall depart from the faith**, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Timothy 4:1. When will this happen? When will some depart from the faith? In the latter times. That would be right now, wouldn't it? That would be the times in which we are living and the times immediately before us. If you haven't thought of it before, these are dangerous times. And if you are still unconvinced, thoughtfully read the headlines of tomorrow's newspaper.

On this point "the Spirit speaketh expressly." Just what does that mean? It means the Spirit speaks plainly, clearly - so clearly it is impossible to misunderstand. All right then, what would some do? Some would depart from the faith. So, it is possible to leave the faith, isn't it? Some do it. They have been in the faith, they have worshiped with the brethren, they have attended church and prayer meeting. They have been actively promoting the gospel, they have given of their means, they have been pastors, officers of the church, and leading laymen; nevertheless, they leave the faith. They are not steadfast and faithful. In the last days come perilous times, with persecutions and serious difficulties, and some do not stand. They are tempted by the things of the world and are seduced by spirits of devils. Sad to say,

they give up their allegiance to the Man of the cross. They were on Christ's side, but now they side with His enemy.

But listen - if you do want unconditional security, you can have it. It is in Christ, on a day-by-day, moment-by-moment basis. When you take Christ and stay by, you will persevere. There is, and can be, no failure on Christ's part. He will not fail - He is faithful. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." Psalm 55:22. He will stand by you as long as you stand by Him. Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6. And John wrote of the Lord, "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:11, 12.

Many non-Christians think they have security. They will tell you they believe God will admit them to heaven. They will say, "I am as good as people in the church," or "I feel I will be saved without going to church." But the truth is, no man is saved on the basis of his feelings. He may be sincere, but his sincerity will not save him. He may be honest, truthful, moral, and a first class citizen, but that won't save him. He may be liberal, a supporter of the church and a giver to the needy, but neither will that save him. No man is saved by his works, good as they may be.

Remember this, and please never forget it: Christ is the Saviour, not your gifts, not your works. He offers you salvation as a free gift. It is in Christ, and when you receive Christ, you have salvation. "He that hath the Son, hath life." 1 John 5:12. But if you don't have the Son, you don't have life, and you cannot have eternal security until you have and keep Christ the Son.

What Does It Mean for the Christian to Leave His "First Love"?

"Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy FIRST LOVE. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Revelation 2:4, 5.

For the Christian to leave his first love, is to backslide, to fall away, to leave the Lord and His service, and to go over to the service of sin, Satan and the world. The Lord calls upon all such to repent and do their first works (the fruits of love), or else - else what? "I will take thy candlestick out of his place." This is an ultimatum from the Lord. If the sinner responds, repents, returns to his first love, and does his first works, all is well and good - he will be saved. But it is his to choose. If he does not do this, his light is removed, goes out, and the backslider is lost.

Does the Backslider Always Return to the Lord Before Death?

No, far from it. That was the case of the first king of Israel, Saul. It is written of Saul that he was "turned into another man." "And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be TURNED INTO ANOTHER MAN." 1 Samuel 10:6. Yet Saul backslid from his high and exalted position, disobeyed the Lord, and at last took his own life (1 Samuel 31:1-6). It cannot be said in this case that Saul was not converted, because God says that he was - yet, he took his own life with no opportunity of repentance.

No Man Can Pluck Out

Finally, let us look at the text which has probably been quoted more than any other to support the doctrine of eternal security. Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." John 10:28, 29.

What a tremendous promise this should be for every trusting child of God! At first glance, it does seem to guarantee some sort of immunity against spiritual loss, but we have not read the entire text. Verse 27 is an integral part of the thought, and it lays down a specific condition for the fulfillment of the promise in verses 28 and 29. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto

them eternal life." Please notice that it is only God's true followers who nestle safely in His protecting hand. He gives eternal life only to the faithful sheep who hear and follow Him. It is this hearing and following which provides immunity against being plucked away by the devil or his agents. The protection is from enemies without who seek to carry off the sheep, but not from unfaithfulness of the sheep who might choose not to follow any longer. No one can pluck them out of the Father's hand, but they may choose to jump out at any time. God never even hints that He will interfere with the freedom of choice of His followers. **Christians can choose to be lost just as surely as sinners can choose to be saved.**

Just think how useless would be all the hundreds of biblical warnings against apostasy if it were impossible to experience it. Why would the Spirit have led Paul, Peter, and all the others to pen such solemn threats and admonitions against eternal loss if they were in no danger of suffering it? And if it is true that the once-saved are eternally secure, surely the devil would know it. Therefore, he would never waste any time on believers, knowing how impossible it would be to cause them to be lost. Yet, we all know by experience that Satan works even harder to pull away the saints from following Christ.

We have to conclude that salvation does not consist of a single, irrevocable commitment, whether past or present. Being saved is the experience of living Christ's own life by divine imputation and impartation. It is never a reality except in continual, dynamic relationship with Jesus, the source of eternal life. Being saved must be spoken of in all three tenses of time in order to be completely biblical. It has happened, it is happening, and it will happen. Perhaps, this illustration by Glenn Fillman will help explain it.

Saved - Past, Present and Future

Bill Jones is fishing several miles out in the ocean. His boat capsizes and sinks to the bottom. He is unable to swim to safety. Just then, another fishing boat comes along, but it is so heavily loaded that it is impossible to take on another passenger. Because they want to rescue the doomed man, however, the crew throws him a rope. "Here, take this rope," they say. "We will tow you to shore." As he takes the rope, Bill Jones says, "Thank God, I am saved!" And he is saved, as long as he holds on to the rope. Salvation is his, but he has a part to play in it. If he should at any time release his grasp on the rope and refuse to take it again, he would be lost. So it is with a person who has been rescued from sin. He remains saved as long as he holds on to the hand of Christ. If he should decide to release that hand and clasp the hand of the devil, he would be lost. His salvation depends on his decision and his action.

Actually, one can properly speak of salvation in three tenses - past, present, and future. He can say, "I have been saved" when he takes the rope, "I am being saved" as he is being towed to shore; and "I shall be saved" when he plants his feet firmly on shore. A converted person **has been saved** from the penalty of sin. We call that justification. He **is being saved** from the power of sin, and we call that sanctification. He **shall be saved** from the presence of sin when Christ comes, and that will be glorification. All three of these tenses are used in the Bible in connection with being saved.

In Romans 8:24 is the expression, "We are saved by hope." Weymouth is a more accurate translation. He says, "We have been saved," past tense. The Revised Standard Version correctly renders the phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:18 as "To us who are being saved." Then Acts 15:11 states, "that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved." So you see past, present, and future.

Now let's make sure that no one gets the wrong impression from our illustration of the man being rescued from drowning. Does the fact that he must cling to the rope to be saved, mean that we can earn our salvation by our own works? Absolutely not, a thousand times No! Remember that he was being towed by a power other than his own. He was merely cooperating with that power. He was holding on to the rope. He had to do that in order to be pulled to safety. As Christians we must confess our faith in Christ, we must remain steadfast to Him, we must bring forth the fruits of obedience; that is our part in holding on to Christ. He will never let us go. The only way we can separate ourselves from Him is to

cut ourselves off deliberately and disconnect ourselves from Him, but we have the power to do that. We are still free moral agents. Our will has not been removed merely because we have become Christians.

At any point in our Christian life we can decide to turn back, to choose the things of the world rather than the things of God and heaven. We are saved only through faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. However, we show our faith by our works. It is a manifestation of our love for Him. Keeping God's commandments and doing right are merely the result of His Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart. These are the fruits of the Spirit. We do these things, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved, and as long as we love the Lord with all our heart, we are going to be obedient to Him. We will not let go of the rope. We will continue to cling to Christ as our only hope.

Captured By Tongues

Mark 16:17

An Amazing Fact:

Legend has it that when the Greeks were unable to capture the city of Troy even after imposing a 10-year siege, they finally resorted to a clever stratagem. The Greek army pretended to sail away and left on the shore a huge, hollow wooden horse as an apparent victory gift. However, the gift was actually filled with several armed warriors! Sinon, a Greek spy inside Troy, persuaded the Trojans to bring the horse within the city walls, saying that to do so would mysteriously make Troy invincible. That night Sinon released the troops hiding in the gigantic horse. After killing the Trojan guards, they opened the gates to the waiting Greek soldiers, and Troy was captured and burned.

A gift from an enemy can be very deadly. The underworld has successfully dispatched many human targets by beautifully wrapping a bomb as a gift with an ornate bow and paper that explodes when opened. Today the devil is using a counterfeit gift of the Spirit—a pagan form of the gift of tongues—to gain access to the church of God and destroy it from within.

Shortly after becoming a Christian, I was hitchhiking from Palm Springs to Los Angeles to visit my mother. About halfway to my destination, I caught a ride with a kind, middle-aged Pentecostal lady who was very pleased to hear of my recent conversion. As we drove along, she asked, "Have you received the Holy Ghost yet?"

I was a little surprised by her question, because no one had ever asked me that before. "Well, I think I have," I said slowly. "I've certainly felt God's Spirit in my life. The Lord is helping me make so many changes—you know, like giving up drugs, stealing, lying, cursing, and much more."

"No, that's not what I mean," she said, looking a little frustrated. "Have you received the baptism of the Holy Ghost? Do you speak in tongues?"

It struck me as odd that she seemed far more interested in whether or not I had experienced an ecstatic utterance than she was in the fact that I was having victory over the sins that had long held me captive!

Even still, this kind lady was convinced that I was missing out on a primary element of the Christian experience. And not wanting to be deprived of something so important, I began a very deep search into the controversial subject of tongues. The first few churches I attended were all charismatic, which means they believed in speaking in ecstatic tongues—an experience often described as glossolalia. Most of my new friends at our Bible study group "spoke in tongues," so the information I am about to share is the result of firsthand experience as well as years of research.

I need to address some unpopular facts in this study, and I must begin by saying that although I disagree with some of the teachings of my charismatic brothers and sisters, I firmly believe that God has thousands of His children in these fellowships. I also recognize that even among charismatics there are vast differences of interpretation regarding the gift of tongues, so forgive me if I generalize at times. The war I wage is not against people, but against error. The same truth that at times can hurt will also promise to set us free (John 8:32)!

The Genuine Gift of Tongues

Let's begin with a definition. The word "tongue" in the Bible simply means "a language."

God gives all the gifts of the Spirit to fill a practical need. What was the need for tongues?

Jesus told His followers, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matthew 28:19. This command posed a problem. How could the apostles go out preaching to all the world when they spoke only one or two languages? After all, Jesus' disciples were very bright, even though most of them were not formally educated. In order to fulfill the great commission, He promised to give them a unique gift from the Holy Spirit. It was a miraculous, supernatural ability to speak foreign languages they had not formerly studied or known for the purpose of spreading the Gospel.

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; ... they shall speak with new tongues." Mark 16:17.

The fact that Jesus said these new tongues, or languages, would be a "sign" indicates that the ability to speak them would not come as the result of normal linguistic study. Rather, it would be an instantaneous gift to fluently preach in a previously unfamiliar language.

There are only three actual examples of speaking in tongues recorded in the Bible (Acts chapters 2, 10, and 19). If we look at these three cases, we should find a clearer picture of this controversial gift.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven [divided] tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:1-4.

Fire is a symbol for power. God sent this gift in the form of tongues of fire so they would know that He would empower their feeble tongues in the same way He strengthened Moses to go before Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10-12) and touched Isaiah's lips with a coal from the heavenly altar (Isaiah 6:6, 7).

Why did the Lord wait until Pentecost to bestow this gift? Acts 2:5-11 sets the scene: "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? ... We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God."

The day of Pentecost was a Jewish holy day that fell 50 days after Passover. Devoted Israelites would come from all over the Roman empire to worship in Jerusalem. God chose this timely opportunity to bestow this gift of tongues upon the disciples so they could preach to the visiting Jews in their native languages. At least 15 different language groups were represented in the crowd that day (Acts 2:9-11)! As a result, thousands of these visitors were converted. Then, after Pentecost, they in turn carried their new faith home to their respective countries.

From this example it should be very clear that the gift of tongues was given to communicate the gospel in different existing languages of the world.

Some have mistakenly suggested that the miracle on Pentecost was a gift to hear and understand different languages. It was not a gift of hearing given to the listeners, but rather a gift of the Spirit given to enable the believers to speak (Acts 2:4). It is not called the gift of ears for the listeners, but the gift of tongues for the speakers. Furthermore, the sign was not ears of fire on the listeners, but tongues of fire on the ones preaching.

It is also sometimes suggested that the gift of tongues is a "heavenly language" understood only by God or those with the gift of interpretation. The Bible is clear in Acts chapter 2 that both the disciples and those listening understood what was being preached-"the wonderful works of God." Verse 11.

Let's look now at the second example when Peter preached to Cornelius and his household.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." Acts 10:44-46.

Acts 10:1 tells us that Cornelius was Italian, while Peter was a Jew and spoke Aramaic. History also tells us that the servants in a Roman home could be from anywhere in the world. Because there were obvious language barriers at this meeting, Peter likely began to preach through an interpreter. But when the Holy Ghost fell upon Cornelius and his household, the Jews with Peter could understand the Gentiles speaking in languages other than their native tongues. The record is that the Jews heard them "magnify God" in these languages. When later reporting this experience to the church leaders, Peter said, "The Holy Ghost fell on them, *as on us at the beginning*." Acts 11:15, emphasis added.

Peter here plainly tells us that Cornelius and his family received the same gift of tongues in the same way the disciples did on the day of Pentecost. In other words, they spoke languages they had not formerly known in a way that could be understood.

The third and final example of speaking in tongues is when Paul preached to 12 Ephesian disciples. Acts 19:6 records, "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

Paul was the most educated and widely traveled of the apostles, and he spoke many languages (1 Corinthians 14:18). When the Holy Spirit came upon these 12 Ephesian men, Paul recognized that they were prophesying, or preaching, in new languages. Most likely they spoke in languages common throughout the Roman Empire, since that would be practical for spreading the Gospel. Luke does not say that they received a form of tongues different from the first two examples, so we must assume that it was the same type of gift given at Pentecost.

You'll find that the only times the gift of tongues was associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is when people from more than one language group were gathered together, thus creating communication barriers.

Notice that in Acts chapter 4 you have a repeat of the experience described in chapter 2. The place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, but because there were no foreigners present, the gift of tongues was absent. Acts 4:31 says, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."

The purpose for the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not to mutter or babble unintelligible sounds, but rather to have power for preaching. This is why Jesus said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8.

The Message to Corinth

Of the 14 New Testament books written by Paul, 1 Corinthians is the only one in which he deals with the subject of tongues. The Corinthian church obviously had a specific, temporary problem because Paul's second letter to Corinth never even mentions tongues.

The ancient city of Corinth was famous for its two international seaports. Because the Corinthian church was a melting pot of many different nationalities, its services often became chaotic and confusing. Evidently some of the members would pray, testify, or preach in languages unknown to the others present. This is why Paul commanded that if they spoke in a tongue unknown to the majority, they should remain silent unless there was someone there to interpret or translate (1 Corinthians 14:28). In other words, it's not polite to speak in a language that your audience cannot understand. Listen to

these plain statements from the apostle: "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. ... Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. ... If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." 1 Corinthians 14:6-9, 19, 27, 28.

It is truly amazing that some people take this passage and use it as an excuse to babble during services! The consistent message of Paul throughout Scripture is the very opposite. In 1 Timothy 6:20, he specifically mentions "avoiding profane and vain babblings." And in 2 Timothy 2:16, Paul repeats that counsel: "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness." In other words, the very purpose for the gift of speech is to communicate your thoughts. If those present do not understand your communication, then keep silent.

Heavenly Prayer Language?

Many of my charismatic friends would agree that the tongues spoken in the book of Acts were normal languages of the world. But they quickly add that there is a second gift—a heavenly prayer language. This gift, they say, is to express the Spirit's "groanings which cannot be uttered." Romans 8:26. The purpose, they say, is so the devil cannot understand our prayers. But nowhere are we taught to hide our prayers from the devil. He trembles when he hears Christians pray!

This doctrine of a prayer language is based mainly upon 1 Corinthians 14:14, where Paul says, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful."

They interpret this to mean that when Paul prayed in the Spirit, he used a "heavenly tongue" and did not himself know what he was praying. This theory raises an important question. How would the supplicant ever know if his prayer was answered?

So what is Paul really saying in 1 Corinthians 14:14? The problem in understanding this verse comes largely from the cumbersome translation. Please allow me to rephrase the verse in modern English: "If I pray in a language those around me do not know, I might be praying with the Spirit, but my thoughts would be unfruitful for those listening." Paul is adamant that if we pray out loud, we should either pray so others around us can understand or else keep quiet! Notice the next few verses: "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?" 1 Corinthians 14:15,16. According to this text, who has the problem with understanding? It is the listener and not the speaker as is commonly taught. If you have ever prayed with someone who is offering a prayer in a language unknown to you, then you know what Paul meant when he said it is difficult for you to say "Amen" (meaning "so be it") at the end of the prayer. Without an interpreter, you have no idea to what you are assenting. You may have just asked a blessing on the devil as far as you can tell!

It is obvious from the context of 1 Corinthians 14 that the purpose of speaking in tongues, or foreign languages, is to communicate the gospel and thereby edify the church. If the listeners do not understand the spoken language they cannot be edified. Consequently, if there is no interpreter, the speaker is simply speaking into the air and the only ones present who know what is being said are God and himself. This is the clear meaning of the often-misquoted verse 2. "For he that speaketh in an unknown

tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."

Paul emphasizes again that the languages spoken need to be understood by the hearers or else the one who wants to share the mysteries of the gospel needs to sit quietly in meditation between himself and God. "So likewise ye; except ye utter by tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air." "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." Verses 9, 28. Clearly, the entire purpose of tongues is to cross language barriers and communicate the gospel!

Some have asked, "Didn't Paul say he spoke with the tongues of angels?"

No. Paul said, "*Though* I speak with the tongues of men and of angels ..." 1 Corinthians 13:1, emphasis added. If you read this verse in its context, you will see that the word "though" means "even if." For example, Paul also said in verse 2, "*Though* I have all faith ..." He did not have all faith. And verse 3 adds, "*Though* I give my body to be burned ..." Paul was beheaded, not burned. So we can see that Paul here used the word "though" to mean "even if."

Right Priorities

I believe that all the gifts of the Spirit, including the true gift of tongues, are needed and available to the church today. But the Scriptures teach that some of the gifts are more important than others and that we should focus on the most important ones. "But covet earnestly the best gifts." 1 Corinthians 12:31.

In fact, when the Bible lists spiritual gifts, tongues is usually found at the bottom of the list. "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." 1 Corinthians 12:28. "Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues." 1 Corinthians 14:5.

Yet some charismatic preachers have turned the list upside down and made the gift of tongues the primary emphasis of their preaching. They would have us think that a Christian who does not speak in tongues is a second-class citizen. But Paul makes it clear that different gifts are given to different people, and no one is expected to have all the gifts. He asks in 1 Corinthians 12:29, 30: "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" The answer is obviously NO!

The Bible says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance." Galatians 5:22, 23. But these same preachers would have us believe that the fruit of the Spirit is tongues or that every person who is filled with the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues. Yet out of more than 50 examples in the Bible where God filled His people with the Spirit, only three times is tongues connected with the experience.

Furthermore, Jesus is our example. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, yet He never spoke in tongues. John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15), but there is no record that he spoke in tongues, either.

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, only three make any reference at all to the gift of tongues. There are about 39 Bible authors. Of the 39, only three—Luke, Paul, and Mark—mention the subject of tongues. In other words, we should put the emphasis where God puts the emphasis.

Creative Counterfeit

The genuine gift of tongues is a powerful tool for the proclamation of the gospel. But remember, the devil has a counterfeit for every truth of God.

Glossolalia (glŏ'se-l,'lê-a) is the word often used to describe the popular experience found in most

charismatic churches. It is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary as: "fabricated and non-meaningful speech, especially such speech associated with a trance state or certain schizophrenic syndromes."

Contrast that with the same dictionary's definition for a language: "The use by human beings of voice sounds, and often written symbols representing these sounds, in organized combinations and patterns in order to express and communicate thoughts and feelings."

By any definition, the disjointed sounds of glossolalia are not a language.

Believe me, I have seen this practice many times. In one charismatic church I used to attend, the pastor and his wife were a "tongues team." Every week in the middle of the pastor's sermon, his wife would jump to her feet, throw her arms in the air, and break out in ecstatic utterance. But she always said the same thing. "Handa kala shami, handa kala shami, handa kala shami... ." Over and over again. This instantly seemed suspicious to me because Jesus said, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do." Matthew 6:7.

Each time this happened, the woman's husband would stop preaching and provide a dubious English translation for her so-called message. Usually it began with "Thus saith the Lord." Yet in spite of the fact that she always repeated the words "handa kala shami," the pastor's vague interpretation was different each time-and sometimes three times longer than the utterance. I used to wonder why, if this was a message from God, wouldn't He give it to us in English the first time.

Baptized Paganism

My exposure to this charismatic "tongues team" reminded me of some things I had read in my history books growing up. This modern manifestation of tongues finds its roots not in the Bible, but rather in ancient pagan spiritualistic rituals. In the sixth century B.C., the Oracle of Delphi was housed in a temple built near the foot of Mt. Parnassus. Delphi was also sacred to Dionysus, the god associated with wine, fertility, and sensual dance, and to the nine Muses, patron goddesses of music.

While exhilarating music was played, the chief priestess named Pythia would breathe intoxicating vapors, go into a frenzied trance, and then begin jabbering. The weird sounds the priestess muttered were then interpreted by a priest, who usually spoke in verse. Her utterances were regarded as the words of Apollo, but the messages were so ambiguous that they could seldom be proven wrong.¹

While living with the Native Americans in New Mexico, I witnessed a similar ritual several times. The Indians would eat the hallucinogenic peyote, then sit in a circle and chant and pound drums for hours. Before long, several were spasmodically muttering as they experienced their tormenting visions. Today the charismatic churches are by far the most popular among the Native Americans because it is such an easy and natural transition from their old religions.

Among many heathen African tribes, in order to invoke the blessing of their gods, the people would sacrifice a chicken or goat and then dance around a fire for long hours, chanting songs to the hypnotic rhythm of a pounding drum. Eventually some of the people would become possessed by their gods and begin speaking the eerie languages of the spirit world. Then the local witch doctor or priest would translate the messages. This ritual is still practiced today among the Voodoo Catholics in the West Indies.

This pagan practice first found its way into the North American Christian churches in the early 1800s. Many of the African slaves who were brought to America and forced to accept Christianity were unable to read the Bible for themselves. Even though they came from a variety of tribes in Africa, one practice most tribes held in common was the "Spirit Dances" with the "spirit-possessed" person muttering.

The slaves mistakenly associated this with the Christian "gift of tongues" and began to incorporate a modified version into their meetings. These frantic services, which were accompanied by heavy

rhythmic music, began to spread at first only in the South and the participants were mocked by the mainline denominations as "Holy Rollers." Some even went so far as to grab venomous serpents during their possessed trances as a means of proving that they had the "spirit." (This was a misuse of Mark 16:18, which says, "They shall take up serpents," in reference to the time Paul was accidentally bitten by a serpent but was unharmed by the venom. See Acts 28:3-6.) For people to hunt down and pick up deadly snakes in order to prove that they have the Holy Spirit is, in reality, tempting God!

The national expansion of the Pentecostal movement among Caucasians began in Los Angeles at the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission on Azusa Street in 1906. The leader was a black former holiness preacher named William Seymour. From there, leaders continued to refine the doctrines and make them more attractive and palatable to other mainline Christians.

"Then in about 1960 the charismatic movement began attracting followers within traditional denominations. From then it continued to have explosive growth until now there are several million charismatics in Protestant and Catholic churches throughout the world."²

It is important to note the prominent role music plays in all the pagan religions that practice glossolalia. This counterfeit gift of tongues first found its foothold in mainline churches through "baptized" pagan music and worship styles. The dominant, repetitious rhythms and syncopated beat disarm the higher reasoning powers and put the subconscious mind in a hypnotic state. In this vulnerable condition, the spirit of ecstatic utterance finds easy access.

Now the devil is using this counterfeit gift of tongues, like a Trojan horse, to introduce pagan worship styles into Christian churches with a frightening degree of success. Satan wants to shift the attention of Christians from faith to feeling. Some of these charismatic churches go so far as to say that the Bible is the old letter, and that messages which come through tongues are fresh revelations of the Spirit and therefore more dependable.

So now the stage is set for Satan's final performance!

How God's Spirit Affects Us

The concept that a person who is "slain in the spirit" should fall to the ground and wallow and mutter is an insult to the Holy Ghost. The reason God gives us His Spirit is to restore in us His image-not to rob us of all dignity and self control!

On mount Carmel, the pagan prophets of Baal jumped on the altar and shouted and moaned. They prophesied and cut themselves. By contrast, Elijah quietly knelt and prayed a simple prayer(1 Kings 18:17-46).

"For God is not the author of confusion." 1 Corinthians 14:33. If God is not responsible, then who is?

The idea that we lose control when we receive the Spirit is not consistent with Scripture. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." 1 Corinthians 14:32.

Here's another case in point. After Jesus saved a berserk, demon-possessed man by the sea, the healed man was seen "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind." Luke 8:35.

The invitation of God is "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." Isaiah 1:18. He wants us to use our heads.

Some of you reading this study are no doubt thinking: "How dare you say these things? I have spoken in tongues for years and know it is from God!"

As Christians, we should never base our conclusions on how we feel. After all, the devil can certainly make us feel good. Rather, we must base our beliefs upon the sure Word of God.

A friend of mine was an active charismatic who often spoke in tongues. When he studied these things, he began to question if this "gift" was from the right spirit. So he sincerely prayed and said, "Lord, if this is not Your will and if I am not experiencing the true gift of tongues, then please take it away!" He told me that from that day on, the experience of glossolalia never returned. A true Christian should be willing to surrender every cherished view and practice on the altar of God's will and forsake any practice that may be questionable-no matter how popular, accepted, or beloved among other Christians. There are some things that are highly esteemed among men but are an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15).

Babbling in Babylon

Why is understanding the subject of tongues so essential for us today? I believe the modern charismatic movement was foretold in Bible prophecy.

Revelation chapter 18 verses 2 and 4 state: "And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. ... And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

We must remember that one of the principal characteristics of ancient Babylon at the tower of Babel was a confusion of tongues (Genesis 11:7-9). Revelation is telling us that in the last days, God's people are to be called out of Babylon and its confusing counterfeit religious systems.

"And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." Revelation 16:13. The phrase "out of the mouth" represents speech, and please don't miss the fact that a frog's main weapon is its tongue. Unclean tongues? Perhaps God is trying to tell us something.

Remember that the confusion of tongues at Babel was not a blessing of the Spirit, but rather a curse for their rebellion. In fact, we get our modern word "babbling" from the story of ancient Babel. At Pentecost, the curse of Babel was reversed so others might understand the gospel.

Given to the Obedient

I have met people who told me they've had the baptism of the Holy Spirit because they spoke in tongues; yet they held a cigarette in one hand and a can of beer in the other. Now let's get something straight. There are some basic requirements for receiving this most precious gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth." John 14:15, 16, 17.

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, *whom God hath given to them that obey him.*" Acts 5:32, emphasis added.

A few years ago several famous TV evangelists fell by the way. They all claimed to be filled with the Holy Spirit and have the gift of tongues. But they were living in gross immoral disobedience. They would speak in tongues on TV, then leave the studio to live a compromising life. Something just wasn't right. These men also caused me to wonder, "If this is the genuine gift of tongues, then why do these charismatic evangelists need an army of interpreters to translate for them when they preach overseas?"

Why does God give the Spirit? "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." Acts 1:8. God does not give us the Spirit to babble, but as power for witnessing!

How can we receive the genuine gift of the Holy Spirit? Totally submit to God, be willing to forgive others, obey Him, and *ask*. Luke 11:13 says, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Christ's Human Nature

Revelation 7:12

The most dangerous counterfeit is the one which most nearly resembles the true. This is why religious counterfeits are so deadly and are often tolerated rather than identified and exposed. Christians in general are afraid that they will be misunderstood if they attack something which looks so much like the finest thing in religion. Since there is often only a thin line separating the best from the worst, they fear being charged with attacking the genuine if they oppose the counterfeit.

Has Satan fabricated some look-alike perversions of the most sacred doctrines in Christianity? Indeed he has, and the delicate distinctions have made even theologians and scholars very reticent to oppose them openly.

Many sincere Christians argue that the parallel views are so close together that no issue should be made over them. Others believe that the difference is largely semantical and involves only shades of meaning in the use of the words.

Is it possible that our mighty psychological adversary has actually anticipated these predictable human reactions and has skillfully created subtle deviations from the truth that will seldom be recognized and resisted? Indeed, I believe he would be foolish not to exploit his six thousand years' expertise in the mind sciences. This is why the path of error lies ever so close to the path of undeniable truth. Satan has gambled that the average Christian will be reluctant to take a stand against something so close to truth, especially if that truth happens to involve the work of the Cross, or the spotless life of the Son of God. Who wants to appear to be in opposition to these holy realities? It seems much safer simply to tolerate the deviant position than to risk being misunderstood in attacking the near-perfect counterfeit.

I am convinced that Satan has cleverly produced and popularized a disguised error which has led to a network of related errors. And they all circulate around the most sacred subject dear to the heart of a committed Christian - righteousness by faith, the incarnation of Jesus, and the victory over sin.

There can be no doubt that the series of erroneous views are related to each other by a convincing chain of human logic and reasoning. If one point is true, then all the other points must necessarily be true also. But if one point is in error, the other points lose their credibility as well.

ORIGINAL SIN

It is very likely that the chain was started by the interjection into early church theology of the doctrine of original sin. Beginning with the valid biblical position of man's inherent carnal nature, which predisposes him to sin, the idea gradually evolved that Adam's *guilt* was also imputed to his descendants. Augustine was responsible more than any other for propagating this view of transmitted guilt. Through Luther and the reformers it found its way into many of the Protestant churches.

Although the doctrine created a tremendous controversy in the early church, most modern Christians seem to accept the majority view today without much deep thought or question. It is easy to see there is only a marginal difference between the two views, both then and now. Adam's weakened, sinful nature was passed on to his children through the laws of heredity, making it impossible for them not to sin as long as they remained in an unconverted state. Since their sin was the result of Adam's sin, it was easy for them to slip into the error of believing that they shared his guilt.

But there is a very important difference between the inclination to sin and the guilt of sin, and it is that small degree of difference which has triggered a series of other doctrinal errors. Said the prophet, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." Ezekiel

18:20.

INFANT BAPTISM

As a logical outgrowth of believing in original sin, the Catholic Church developed a strong doctrine of infant baptism. Only by their sacrament of sprinkling could the curse of Adam's guilt be removed from the baby. Since the child's salvation hinged upon a proper baptism, absolute priority was assigned to that ritual. If a choice had to be made between the life of the mother and the life of the unborn baby, the mother was sacrificed. Catholic doctors and nurses were instructed in the art of baptizing a fetus in the womb if there was some question about a live birth.

The original sin doctrine also gave rise to the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary. If every baby was born with guilt on its soul, then something would have to be done to preserve Jesus from that guilt - else He could not be a perfect sacrifice for sin. The Catholic solution assigned Mary a miraculous conception also, which preserved her from the effect of original sin. Thus Jesus would be born of a human mother without partaking of the supposed guilt of Adam.

As an extended consequence of their view of Jesus as altogether different from man, the Catholic church also introduced the illegitimate system of human priesthood. If the Son of God did not dwell in man's fallen nature, then the ladder had not been let down from heaven to earth. The gulf still had not been bridged between a holy God and fallen humanity. Therefore, some further means should be provided to complete the connection.

First, it was assigned to priests on earth which are known to have sinful flesh. Then, a mediatorial role was claimed for those who had dwelled in sinful flesh but had been canonized by the church as saints in heaven. Finally, angels and the mother of Jesus were accorded intercessory status between man and God.

Already we can begin to see the chain-reaction consequences of a small deviation from the true doctrine.

FALLEN OR UNFALLEN NATURE?

Now let us look at the effect of original sin on the churches of Protestantism. How could they avoid the dilemma of their belief as it related to the nature of Christ? Although they rejected the Catholic tradition of the immaculate conception, they invented a doctrine which was equally unscriptural and which removed Christ totally from the fallen family of Adam. This view declared that Jesus was incarnated in a special manner that preserved Him from partaking of the nature of Adam's descendants. Instead, He was born with the unfallen nature of Adam and lived His holy life in the uncorrupted state of sinless humanity.

Again, we are struck by the marvelous duplicity of the counterfeit. He did come in human nature, they say, but it had to be in Adam's unfallen nature in order to protect Him from the pollution of original sin.

Is this a serious digression from truth? Does it make any difference whether we believe He possessed pre-sin humanity or post-sin humanity? Many sincere Christians believe that it is a minor, moot point that carries no significance in practical application.

The truth is that this small deviation has laid the groundwork for a series of other false conclusions which strike at some of the most cherished truths of Protestantism.

In the first place, such a doctrine is diametrically opposed to the clear teaching of the Bible. At least six times we are assured that Jesus had a human nature exactly like ours. In Hebrews 2:11 we read, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Brothers are of one flesh and family nature. Christ is the one who sanctifies, and we are being sanctified; and we are all of one flesh so that He can call us His brothers. This establishes

the point beyond any question.

"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." Hebrews 2:16. How could He partake of Abraham's seed if He took on Him the nature of unfallen Adam? The emphasis here is that He did not take on some exotic, sinless nature such as angels or holy Adam might have had but the same nature that Abraham's children possessed. They had sin-weakened bodies and minds. So did He. This does not involve guilt. To be subject to sin is not to be guilty of it. He was tempted in the same way we are, yet He never once yielded to or entertained sin. He never developed any propensities toward sin by giving way to it. He remained undefiled by sin and was always totally pure and holy.

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God." Hebrews 2:17.

WHY HUMAN NATURE?

Why was He born in the same flesh and nature we have? So that He could be understanding of our weaknesses and inclinations toward sin, and be a merciful High Priest for us. Do the words "in all things" really mean "in all things"? Of course.

Paul declared that Jesus "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." Romans 1:3. It would be contrary to reason for these words to be interpreted to mean that Christ inherited a holy, unfallen nature from Mary. Whatever David's seed was like after the flesh, our Lord partook of the same. All of those descendants of David, except one, yielded to their hereditary inclinations and committed personal sins. Jesus, like all others, inherited the nature of David after the flesh, but He did not yield to the inherent weaknesses of that nature. Although tempted in all points like we are, He did not respond by a single degree of indulgence to any of those temptations. His life was a constant fortress of invincible spiritual power against the tempter.

By relying wholly upon His Father's ever-present strength, He demonstrated the victory which is possible for all of David's seed after the flesh to experience.

Again, we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." Hebrews 2:14. Notice how the inspired writer emphasized the sameness of the body of Christ with man. HE - ALSO - HIMSELF - LIKEWISE. These four words are used consecutively even though they are repetitive and redundant. WHY? In order to impress us that Jesus really did enter into the SAME nature man possessed. Just like children partake of the same flesh and blood, HE ALSO HIMSELF LIKEWISE took the SAME! How can anyone be confused by this unambiguous language?

JESUS HAD HEREDITARY WEAKNESSES

Incidentally, these inspired words definitely tell us that Christ took part of the same nature as the children who "are partakers of flesh and blood." Doesn't this tell us without question the kind of nature Christ possessed? Did Adam have any children born before he sinned? Not a one! The fact is that all the children who have ever been born in the world have inherited the same fallen nature of Adam, because they were all born after Adam sinned. The book of Hebrews declares that Jesus "himself likewise took part of the same." The same what? The same flesh and blood as children inherit from their parents. What kind of flesh do children inherit from their parents? Only sinful flesh. Has any other kind of flesh except sinful flesh ever been known among the descendants of Adam? None whatsoever. If Jesus partook of the same flesh and blood as the children, it *had* to be sinful flesh and blood. There is no other conclusion to be drawn. Yet, He Himself was sinless!

One writer, recognizing this clear Bible position, described it very succinctly in these words:

It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when

Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life. The Desire of Ages, page 48.

This statement described the working of hereditary laws and is in perfect support of Paul's declaration that Jesus partook of the same flesh and blood as children receive from their parents. That is referring to heredity also. If Christ had been born with Adam's unfallen nature, the very suggestion of hereditary influence would be ridiculous in the extreme. There could be no place for any kind of inherited tendencies in a holy Adamic nature which had never known either birth or ancestry. If He had no inherited weaknesses, why would the writer of Hebrews say that He partook of the same flesh and blood that children receive from parents? Certain it is that the Creator did not incorporate any inherent weaknesses into the original creation. Adam had no battles to fight against hereditary tendencies. He had the power in himself to choose always not to sin.

Did Jesus as a man claim to have that kind of power? No. He said, "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." John 8:28. Repeatedly, Christ spoke of being dependent on His Father for what He said and what He did.

Does this mean that He possessed no deity and omnipotence as the Son of God? On the contrary, He was truly and wholly divine, just as He was truly and wholly man. But those two natures apparently were not amalgamated into some hybrid personality which stood apart from either God or man. He was fully God and He was fully man. He could draw upon either of these distinct natures while living here in the flesh. But the really important thing for us to remember is that He did not exercise His divine power to save Himself from the weaknesses and temptations inherited from His human ancestry. He chose to live His life here as a man in the same way we have to live it. To save Himself from sin and the perils of the flesh, He depended constantly and solely upon the power of His Father. It was in this way that He overcame the devil, closed every avenue of temptation, and lived a life of perfect obedience. By never yielding to the inherent appeal of the flesh, He set an example of the kind of victory which may come to every child of Adam through dependence on the Father.

Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to use His divine power to satisfy His agonizing hunger. Satan knew that Jesus had the power of deity to work that miracle. His hope was that he could provoke Christ to draw upon His divinity for relief. Why would that have been such a triumph for Satan? He could have used that to sustain his charges that God required an obedience that no man in the flesh could produce. If Jesus had failed to overcome the tempter in the same nature we have and by the same means available to us, the devil would have proven that obedience is indeed an impossible requirement. Satan understood very well that Jesus could not use His divine power to save Himself and to save man at the same time. This is what made the test such a severe and agonizing experience for Christ.

If Jesus actually inherited the compromised nature of Adam, then why didn't He sin like the rest of Adam's descendants? Because He was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb and possessed a fully surrendered will and sanctified human nature. May we partake of that same power to keep us from sinning? Yes. Jesus, in living His life of victory over sin, did not utilize His divinity but confined Himself to the same power available to us through conversion and sanctification.

CHRIST OVERCAME IN OUR OWN NATURE

Had He not won the victory over Satan in the same nature we have, what encouragement could we draw from His victory? I did not need to be shown that it was possible for Adam not to yield to sin. I already knew that. What I need to know is that I can overcome sin, my nature being what it is.

Satan charged God with requiring something that couldn't be done. The reason fallen man could not

produce obedience is clearly described in Romans 8:3, 4: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

These verses are simplified when we ask a few questions: What could the law not do for us because we were too weak in the flesh to keep it? It could not save us.

Because we could not keep it due to the weakness of the flesh, what did God do? He sent Jesus to obey the law perfectly in the flesh. He condemned sin in the flesh by total victory over it.

What did His victory in the flesh make possible for us? "That the righteousness (just requirement) of the law might be fulfilled in us." It enabled us to obey.

How did His victory in the flesh make it possible for us to obey? By the miracle of conversion which changes our walk from the flesh to the Spirit. Then Christ in us, through the Spirit, imparts victory over sin to our lives.

These obvious truths point up one of the great problems in holding to the pre-fall human nature of Christ. If His victory over Satan, in the flesh, was for the purpose of enabling me to fulfill the requirements of the law, how could His victory help me at all if it was obtained in some other flesh than mine? Here is where this false doctrine strikes at the beautiful principle of righteousness by faith.

Righteousness by faith is the imputing and imparting of the results of His sinless life and atoning death. It includes both justification and sanctification. He imputes, or credits, to us the merits of His sinless experience to deliver us from the penalty of sin. This is justification. To deliver us from the power of sin, He does not merely reckon us as righteous, but He actually imparts the strength to overcome sin. In either case, He can only bestow upon us what He attained through His own incarnate experience as the Saviour of the world.

Some might claim that since justification only involves an imputing of Christ's sinless record to our account, it could be done in any kind of body. But is that true? The purpose of the incarnation was to redeem fallen man and not sinless man. To do so He had to "condemn sin in the flesh." Romans 8:3. Our sins which proceed from the flesh had to be condemned by Him, and the only way this could be done was to conquer that sinful flesh and submit it to the death of the cross.

Jesus came to take away the sin of the world, as John declared. How could He take away sin that was not even there in the flesh He assumed? To be more precise, how could he "condemn sin in the flesh" in a sinless flesh?

Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ." Galatians 2:20. Why does he further state that we "were baptized into his death"? Romans 6:3. Every sinner must pass, by faith, through the crucifixion and resurrection experience with Christ. In order to pass from death to life, every one of us must identify with the One who represented us as the second Adam. Our sins were in Him. When He died, we died; and the penalty against our sins was satisfied and exhausted.

Can't you see that He had to carry our own fallen nature to that cross in order to make it possible for our sinful nature to be put to death? Anything less would have failed to satisfy the justice of God. Christ had to surrender condemned humanity to the full wages of sin on that cross in order to make atonement possible for us. Otherwise, we could not identify with Him or be crucified with Him. Obviously, redemption requires that Jesus live and die with the nature of fallen man in order to provide the vital link of justification.

Now let us look at the requirements of sanctification.

PARTICIPATING

IN CHRIST'S VICTORY

Sanctification is not a mere crediting or accounting. It is the imparting of something to us. Just as He *imputes* justification to deliver us from the guilt of sin, He now *imparts* sanctification to deliver us from the power of sin. What is the sanctification He imparts? It is our actual participation in the victory of Christ over sin. By faith we enter into and appropriate the strength of the victory He experienced in the flesh. In other words, He is able and willing to live out in us the same overcoming life which He lived as a man on this earth. He will reproduce in us His own sinless experience. This is sanctification.

If Jesus came into the world with Adam's unfallen nature in order to manifest a sinless life, how could that unfallen nature be reproduced in me? Fallen men are not sanctified by participating in Adam's unfallen experience. They are sanctified by overcoming sin in their fallen nature through the same power Jesus used in overcoming sin. There is no way for us to participate in the unfallen experience of Adam. If that is the means by which Jesus overcame Satan, there is no way for Him to impart it to me. But if Jesus gained the victory over Satan in the fallen nature of Adam's descendants, then I can participate in it with Him. That kind of victory can be superimposed upon my own life, because it was gained in the same nature I possess.

A sinless experience lived in some alien, unfallen nature could not be credited to me, nor could it ever be possessed by me. Fallen nature can never, in this life, be restored to the state of unfallen man. But we may receive the victory over sin which Jesus gained in the flesh as one of us.

TWO EXTREMES

In this connection it is interesting to study the short-lived history of a group of Christians in Indiana who claimed to have holy flesh. Around the year 1900 a rather large body of conservative church members became obsessed with the idea that Jesus lived His sinless life in the nature of unfallen Adam.

Assuming, correctly, that His victorious experience in the flesh could be imparted to every Christian through faith, they began to teach that the very same untainted life of sinless Adam could be lived out by fallen man. This fanatical view led them to believe that they could reproduce the absolute holiness and perfection of unfallen Adam. This is just one well-documented example of the ramifications of this false teaching.

The other extremity to which men are led by accepting the error of Christ's pre-fall nature is exactly the opposite of the "holy flesh" theory. They simply assert that since Jesus overcame in Adam's sinless nature, we cannot possibly hope to share His victory while still in bodies of sinful flesh. Christ could only impart what He had to give, and since He had no victory over sin in our fallen nature, He could not share it with us. Therefore, it is impossible to overcome as Christ overcame.

Thus, we can see how the beautiful, basic truth of sanctification is down-graded and removed from the experience of righteousness by faith. Already we have seen how the "original sin" error has generated two other perversions; namely, that Jesus had the unfallen nature of Adam, and that sanctification cannot be imparted to man by Jesus. In fact, most proponents of original sin do not even believe it is possible to overcome all sin in this life. They deny the repeated assertions of Scripture that fallen man can actually partake of the divine nature of Christ. Somehow they cannot perceive and accept the heavenly mystery, so often affirmed in the Bible, that Jesus took man's fallen nature upon Him and, yet, was never guilty of sin. To them the inherited guilt of Adam is so pervasive in human nature that it can only be overcome when translation takes place at the coming of Christ.

LIVING WITHOUT SIN

Is it hard for us to believe that Jesus in His humanity could maintain an absolutely pure, sinless mind during His 33 1/2 years in this world? Is it possible for anyone in human flesh, even under the power of

God, to reach such a point of victory over sin? The Bible answer is clear: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God)... Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

This promise is made concerning sinners in the flesh who turn to the delivering power of the gospel. How much more would our blessed Lord, with no acquired propensities for sin, be able to claim His Father's enabling strength to keep from sinning! The Word of God assures us that we may partake of the divine nature of Jesus and have the "mind of Christ." His sinless experience in the flesh is a guarantee that any of us may have the same victory if we will depend upon the Father as He did.

This means that in overcoming sin He had no advantage over us. He fought the enemy in the same nature and by the same spiritual weapons which are available to us. If He had any advantage over other men it was simply that His inherent human nature was never further debilitated by personal indulgence in sin.

Can we equal the perfect pattern of Jesus' sinless life? No. All of us have degraded human nature further by giving way to the flesh. Not only have we brought the curse of death upon our-selves by breaking God's law, but we have made ourselves more vulnerable to Satan by cooperating with him. Jesus never responded to a single sinful stimu-lus and Satan could find nothing in Him. He lived all His life with the surrendered mind and will of the fully sanctified. He committed no sins to be atoned for.

But even though we cannot equal the pattern, we should seek earnestly to reflect that holy life of Jesus as fully as possible. By the grace of God, we may put away every known sin and be perfect in our sphere with no consciousness of cherished wrong doing.

Does that mean we will be boasting about living without sin? On the contrary, the closer we come to Christ, the more we will sense our unworthi-ness. Those who attain the standard of Christ will be the last ever to recognize it, much less boast of it. Is it important that God have an obedient people at the end of time that He can point to as a vindication of His character? The Bible reveals that the whole cosmic conflict between God and evil can be traced to Satan's original desire to take God's place and rule the universe. It was his program of false accusation which stirred up rebellion in heaven and alienated a third of the angels. Satan misrepresented God's character and charged the Creator with making unreasonable and impossible demands.

How could the devil be proven wrong? God had to provide a demon-stration that would forever silence the adversary. It was a long, painful demon-stration that led the mighty Creator God to step down into a human body of fallen man and, within the limits of that nature, to overcome everything Satan could hurl against Him. Had He utilized any divine power to overcome sin that was not available to others in the flesh, Satan would have used it to bolster his claims that no one could keep God's law.

At the cross, Jesus demonstrated to the entire universe that Satan was wrong. He had proven that it was possible, in the flesh, to be obedient through dependence on the Father. The final step of vindication will take place when the character of Christ has been reproduced in that persecuted little remnant who remain faithful through the firestorm of Armageddon and beyond. Long after Satan's knee has bowed to acknowledge the righteousness of God and eons after he and his followers have tasted the eternal consequences of their sin, the 144,000 will still be bearing witness to the honor and integrity of God's government. As their new song of victory and deliverance is heard by listening angels, unfallen worlds and the unnumbered multitude of the saints, all will unite in an oratorio of praise, saying, "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." Revelation 7:12.

It is easy to understand why that little group who sing the song of Moses and the Lamb will be so signally honored as they stand nearest to God's throne. It is through their experience that God's

character will be vindicated at last.

In summary, we can see how the ancient error of Adam's imputed guilt has led to a chain of related deceptions. The most significant truths of salvation have been cleverly counterfeited. The humanity of Jesus has been denied, the imparted righteousness of Christ has been challenged, and the possibility of victory over sin has been ridiculed. It is only as we recognize the basic falsehood that we can avoid the perversions which follow. May God give us the wisdom to stand firmly upon the word alone and to reject every doctrine that is not rooted in Him.

Colorful Cosmetics and Jewelry

Ephesians 5:10

A FIRE ESCAPE RELIGION One of the most frequent and mistaken complaints that people make against religion is that it is too restrictive. In this permissive age when all the emphasis seems to be upon "doing your own thing," an unreasonable attitude of self-will has developed. This attitude has even intruded into religion. Church members and non-members seem to be in quest of the same thing: a religion which does not interfere with personal rights and freedom. Suspicion is aroused instantly against any doctrine which demands the "giving up" of anything.

As this liberal spirit has grown stronger, many church members have turned more and more critical of the high spiritual standards upheld by the church. Obviously embarrassed by the widening gap between the church and the world, and unwilling to meet the social stigma of being a "peculiar" minority, these members have sought to justify their compromise in the area of Christian standards. They often argue that the church is being narrow and legalistic and that many fine people are being discouraged from joining the church by this "arbitrary imposition of rules."

If these complaints are valid, then some basic changes surely need to be made in the doctrine of the church. If they are not valid, then we desperately need to know how to present the standards of Christian conduct in their true biblical setting. In other words, we must definitely establish whether these rules were made by God or by the church. We must also find out if they are arbitrary prohibitions or God's loving regulations for our own happiness.

In contrast to the popular revolt against any absolute law of individual conduct, we must consider the Bible facts about the Christian life in general and morals in particular. How compatible are these modern demands for personal freedom with the standards of God's Word? Let us suppose that the true biblical position could be presented with all the love and persuasion of an angel from heaven. Would the truth be easy for anyone to accept?

Let's face it. The path to eternal life is not a soft, flowery way of ease. Jesus laid such emphasis upon this in so many texts that we cannot be blind to it. He said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matthew 7:14. One of the very first principles of being a Christian is self-denial. Christ said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23. To be a Christian involves complete surrender. Our Lord's parable of the pearl and the merchantman reveals that we must be willing to invest every single thing we have in obtaining that tremendous prize of eternal life. If we allow one thing or one person to come between us and doing the will of Christ, we cannot be saved.

Have we been guilty of discounting the price of discipleship so that people will not feel that the path is too narrow and restrictive? Jesus said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:33. The rich young ruler was told by Jesus that he lacked only one thing in his preparation for heaven, but that one thing he was not willing to do. He would have to surrender his wealth in order to be saved, but he was not willing to give it away. He loved something more than he loved the Lord, and he went away sorrowful and lost. The position of Christ was so strong on this point that He even said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Matthew 10:37.

Now, I believe that we should search for the kindest, most tactful and loving way to present the claims of Christ to men and women. But I also believe that it will make little difference how it is presented if individuals have no love for the Lord Jesus. The fault does not lie with the message; some of the fault

lies with the preachers in the way they present it, but much of the fault lies in the attitude of the complaining Christian who feels rebellious against the truth because it requires a degree of self-denial.

Let me illustrate how personal feelings and attitude can make all the difference in the world. Marriage is the most restrictive experience that any human being can voluntarily assume in this world, aside from his spiritual commitment to Christ. The man promises to surrender many of his former attachments and practices. He yields up his freedom to date other girls, and solemnly binds himself to that one-and-only for the rest of his life. The bride also makes similar restrictive pledges, and agrees to forsake all others in her devotion to the man at her side. The wedding vows are undoubtedly among the most narrow, rigid commitments any human being can make in his lifetime. If restrictions and rules are the cause of so much misery, then weddings should be the most miserable, unhappy experiences for all concerned. But not so! They are the happiest events. Why? Why is the bride so radiant as she stands up to pledge her very life away to the groom? How can the man be so happy to make the promises which will inhibit his activities for the rest of his life? The answer is simple. They love each other. It is their attitude and feeling toward each other that makes the restrictions a joy to accept.

Have you ever heard a bride complaining after the ceremony? Probably no one has ever heard her say bitterly, "Now I can't date Jim and Andy anymore. It's not fair. The State is forcing me to be faithful to my husband. This married business is too restrictive." No, you've not heard that. Neither have you heard a new bridegroom complaining that he is now compelled to give part of his salary to support his wife. True, the law demands that he do it under penalty of imprisonment, but he is not even conscious of the law. Public opinion is ready to condemn the bride if she commits adultery, but she doesn't even think of such a possibility. They are in love, and love changes everything. They are not being faithful because of fear of punishment or reproach. They are being faithful because they want to please the person whom they love so deeply.

The most miserable men and women in this world are the ones who are married and no longer love each other. Here is almost literally hell on earth. They chafe and complain about the restrictions and impositions upon them. Similarly, the unhappiest church members in all the world are those who are married to Christ through baptism, and yet do not love Him. They are often bitterly blaming the church and their instructors for imposing upon them their narrow, restrictive religion.

But is it the religion or the pastors who are at fault? The sad fact is that those people have never entered the personal love-relationship which is the cornerstone of all true religion. Many of them have learned the right texts for the Bible study course and are quite able to explain the order of last-day events, but they have had no personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Somewhere, and perhaps everywhere, along the lines of the indoctrination they were not taught, or did not choose to accept, the true basis of heart religion. It is not a set of rules or a list of doctrines, but a deeply personal involvement in a love affair with the man Jesus Christ.

The difficulty with millions of Christians is their motive for being church members. They have a fire escape religion. They do certain things only because they are afraid of the fire at the end of the road. They serve the Lord fearfully because they tremble at the thought of being cast into the lake of fire. No wonder they are long-faced and miserable! What a perversion of the truth! Christians should be the happiest people in the world - happier even than the newlyweds as they leave the wedding chapel! The Christian should love the Lord even more than he loves his own wife and family.

Do you think a home could be happy if the wife prepared her husband's favorite dish each day because she feared he might divorce her? Earthly relationships would collapse under this strain. She prepares that dish because she loves her husband and wants to please him. When his wife's birthday approaches, a loving, Christian husband often watches and listens for an indication of what his wife would like to have. And usually she doesn't have to hit him over the head to let him know! He gladly buys her the gift because he loves her and wants to please her. In the same way the Christian will be searching the

Bible daily to discover ways of pleasing the Lord. He will constantly be looking for signs and indications of how to please the One he loves supremely. In the Twentieth Century translation of the Bible, we read these words, "Always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord." Ephesians 5:10. What a motto for every Christian! Indeed, this is the supreme desire of those who love the Lord sincerely. No wonder Christ summarized the first table of the law in these words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." Matthew 22:37, 38.

The real reason some Christians chafe and complain about the rules and the strictness is because they have only enough religion to make them miserable. The scope of the Christian "experience" is based upon a constant struggle to live up to the rules - an effort to keep the law. Now certainly there is nothing wrong with obeying the commandments of God any more than there is with a husband obeying the state law to support his wife. But if the demands of the law are the only reason for obeying it, then something is seriously wrong with the Christian and with the husband. Love lifts the legal load and makes delightful what could be a burden and strain.

A mother of three boys was having a terrible struggle trying to enforce the laws of good grooming and cleanliness. Like most little boys, these three resisted the rules about washing ears, combing hair, and shining shoes. It was a daily battle which mother won only through the long arm of authority and force. But one day the oldest boy, in his early teens, walked out of his room looking the model of impeccable neatness. Every hair seemed to be in exactly the right place, and the shoes below the well-turned cuff were shining to perfection. The mother almost fainted. Hardly able to suppress her surprise and delight, she wisely decided to wait and watch for the answer to this turn of events. The solution to the puzzle was not long in coming. The very next day Mother learned that a new family had moved in down the block, and there was a girl in the family. Perhaps the girl had not seen Johnny, but he had already seen her and it had profoundly affected him. We'll not say that it was love which changed his attitude toward the laws of good grooming, but he definitely wasn't cleaning up from fear of mother's enforcement any longer.

The point is that the Christian life is not composed of just "do's" and "don't's." There are restrictions, to be sure, in this spiritual marriage, just as there are in physical marriage. But those restrictions are imposed by love which seeks always and ever to please the object of the affections. Those Christians who are in love with Christ are exuberant, beaming witnesses that this is the way of true happiness. Unfortunately, there is a larger group of church members who are miserably enduring what should be blissfully enjoyed. They are bitter and complaining about not being able to eat what they please or dress as they wish to. They blame the church for their being forced to "give up" so many things. Their religion seems much like the man with a headache. He didn't want to cut off his head but it hurt him to keep it. Their joyless attitude seems to assume that their religion is the product of some committee of gloomy preachers bent on including all the prohibitive rules that could make men, women, and young people unhappy.

But is this true? What about the spiritual principles which make up the doctrine which we call Christian Standards? Is it an arbitrary church law that one should not attend the theater? Is it God's decision or man's decision that dancing is improper for a Christian? And what about the use of colorful cosmetics and jewelry - is it pleasing to God or displeasing? The truth is that every point of our faith and doctrine should be based soundly upon the principle of doing God's will as revealed in the Bible. Love for Him will always provide the question, How can I always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord?

The answer to that question is found in scores of Bible texts which give indications and clear signals on how to please Him rather than ourselves. This is the only really relevant question concerning any activity or practice. What does God think about it? It doesn't matter what this preacher or that preacher thinks of it, or what this church or that church believes about it. The great, all-important question is this: Is it pleasing or displeasing to the Lord? If we find texts which reveal that God doesn't approve,

there should be no further debate with the genuine Christian. We love Him too much to risk displeasing Him. Our delight should be to find and execute those things that please the One we love and to eliminate from our lives those things that displease Him.

When people are in love they do not need to threaten each other or lay down ultimatums. They constantly search for ways to show their love and to please one another. Those who fulfill the first and great command of Christ will not feel it a burden to obey. God is searching for those who will be sensitive to the slightest indication of His will. He is not pleased by those who must be constantly prodded into line by fear of punishment. God says: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: *I will guide thee with mine eye*. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." Psalm 32:8, 9.

Many Christians are "bit-and-bridle" followers. They respond only to threats and obey because of fear of punishment. God says, "I want you to be corrected by a look from me." Only those who love Him supremely and are watching for indications of His pleasure will recognize the loving glance of correction. Searching the Bible with one purpose - to discover what pleases Him - they will immediately obey the slightest revelation of His will. *This is the essence of true Christianity - ordering every level of life in harmony with His revealed will, because of love.*

COLORFUL COSMETICS AND JEWELRY

With this little background on how to make love the motivating factor in setting up Christian standards, we are now prepared to illustrate how the principle operates in practice. Although any one of the "conduct" standards of the church could be used, let us choose one which has evoked considerable complaint - colorful cosmetics and jewelry. Multitudes of sincere members have laid aside the use of these artificial adornments "because the church says so." This is a poor reason for doing anything in the Christian life. Hopefully, after reading this chapter, the explanations about arbitrary church rules on the subject will give way to personal conviction based on loving and pleasing the Lord.

Repeatedly, pastors have faced the questions: "What is wrong with my little wedding ring? Do you think God will leave me out of heaven just because I wear this bit of jewelry?" My own heart has been dismayed and troubled on many occasions over this negative approach to Christianity. Please note what the question implies. The questioner is obviously seeking to know how much he can get by with and still make it to heaven. His attitude reflects a legalistic desire to do only the things which are laid down as divine "do-it-or-else" laws.

But this approach is wrong, wrong, wrong! The true Christian will not ask, "How much do I have to do in order to remain a child of God?" but rather, "How much can I do to please Jesus whom I love?" This is the positive approach based on seeking God's will on the question and loving Him enough to obey His will happily as revealed in the Bible. Once this open-hearted, loving premise is accepted, it remains only to search through the Scripture to find indications of God's will concerning the use of colorful cosmetics and ornaments. This we shall now proceed to do.

In Genesis 35:1-4, Jacob was told by God to take his family to Bethel where they were to be presented at the altar of the Lord. This was a very sacred spot to Jacob - the place of his conversion in earlier days, after seeing the heavenly ladder in his dream. But before they could be consecrated at that holy spot, Jacob told his household to "put away the strange gods that are among you." Verse 2. Apparently the family had picked up some of the heathen customs in their tarrying in the land. There were certain objects which had to be laid aside before they went up to the altar, because they were pagan objects. Please notice, in verse 4, what these objects were: "And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all the earrings which were in their ears: and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." In Judges 8:24, we are assured that earrings were worn by those who were Ishmaelites. The context strongly implies that they wore ornaments as a mark of their apostasy

from the true God. Genesis 34 reveals that Jacob's sons had committed some grievous sins, and Jacob was coming before God to make a solemn atonement for them and for his family. It was a time of heart-searching and repentance. Everything was done to make wrong right and to open the way for God's blessing to come upon them. The custom of wearing heathen ornaments was given up, along with the strange gods. The earrings were laid aside.

Under similar circumstances a reformation took place in Exodus 33:1-6. A terrible apostasy had developed in the previous chapter while Moses was in the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. A large number of the Israelites had worshipped the golden calf, bringing plague and destruction which threatened the nation. Moses called for them to repent in these words: "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day." Exodus 32:29.

In the next chapter, Moses went up to the tabernacle to plead with God for the people, who were still adorned with their heathen trappings from the day of indulgence and sin. The instruction God gave for the restoration of Israel included a change of dress, just as it had earlier in the case of Jacob and his family. God said, "Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiff-necked people; I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the Mount Horeb." Exodus 33:5, 6.

We are left in no doubt as to the attitude of God concerning the wearing of those ornaments. God, who changes not, told them to take off those things and present themselves for judgment, to answer for their apostasy. It is of more than passing interest to note that this prohibition was laid down in connection with their going into the promised land. God said, "I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite ... for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people." Exodus 33:2, 3. It is significant that they were required to strip off the ornaments before they could enter the promised land. Does this have anything to do with us? Indeed it does. Paul assures us in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." He likens their Red Sea experience to baptism in verse 2, and in verses 7 and 8 he refers to the great apostasy experience of Israel in Exodus 32, when they made their golden calf. Then immediately he explains in verse 11 that these things which happened to them were for "our admonition." This can only mean that God's dealing with them over their apostasy is to teach us something. His command for them to remove the ornaments before going into the land of Canaan applies to us before going into the heavenly Canaan. The parallel is obvious in the context.

The earliest record in existence concerning the use of colorful cosmetics is found in 2 Kings 9:30. Many have questioned the origin of the expression "painted up like Jezebel." The answer is found in this text. "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out a window." The history of that infamous heathen queen, who put hundreds of God's prophets to death is well known to Bible students. To trace the biblical origin of the custom to Jezebel certainly casts an unholy shadow over the practice. But we shall see in a moment that the use of colorful cosmetics was a consistent mark of heathen women and unfaithful women throughout the Bible record.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God sent one of the most scathing denunciations of jewelry that can be found anywhere in the Bible. Nowhere do we find a more direct and unequivocal revelation of God's feelings toward the wearing of ornaments. In Isaiah 3:16 God does not generalize about ornaments, but gives a long list of specific articles which were being worn by the "daughters of Zion." Now, let's notice whether God, the same yesterday, today, and forever, was pleased with the wearing of these things. "Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet ...

in that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, ... the chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, ... the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, The rings, and nose jewels." Isaiah 3:16-21.

Let's pause in the midst of this recital and ask the question, how will God take away these things? In the next chapter, verse 4, we read, "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion ... by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." Don't overlook the fact that God refers to all these objects of adornment as "filth." He further describes most graphically the ones who survive the "washing away" of the ornament, "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem." Isaiah 4:2, 3.

In bold, clear strokes the prophet reveals the abhorrence of God for the manifestations of pride in wearing ornaments. After the washing away of those artificial baubles, God describes the women as being "comely," "holy," and "beautiful." Apparently, He does not appraise beauty in the same way that we do. The women put on all their jewelry to make themselves beautiful, but God said it was filthy. When it was all washed away, He said they were comely and beautiful. Do not miss the extreme significance of this truth. God uses that word "comely" to describe His Bride, the Church. "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman." Jeremiah 6:2.

As if to reinforce His assessment of the inordinate pride displayed in His people, God made the following observation: "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves." Isaiah 3:9. No question is permitted to remain about the shamefulfulness of outward adornment.

It will be well to take note at this point that God identified rings as part of the "filth of the daughters of Zion." What kind of rings was he talking about? High school seniors will answer immediately, "My class ring is symbolic of my being a senior. It's not worn as an ornament. God was talking about other kinds of rings." The Mason will defend his masonic ring in almost the same words: "God wasn't talking about my ring. It simply represents my belonging to the Lodge." And then there are the birthstone rings, the engagement rings, and the wedding rings - they also have symbolic meanings. How easy to justify the one we happen to be wearing, and to claim that God was not talking about that one. But how do we know God wasn't talking about the very one we are wearing? Would it not be presumptuous to feel that God makes an exception for the one we are wearing, just because we don't want to give it up?

What did God mean when He said "rings?" Did He mean only certain kinds of rings?

I asked my mother a similar question one day. You see, she had forbidden me to take any icing off the cake after it was frosted. I was permitted to "lick the pan" by scraping up all that Mother left in the bottom of the container, but it was a law of the house that I could not remove any from the cake.

But one day Mother went to the store and left me alone with a beautiful, fresh-made chocolate cake in the middle of the table. I watched the luscious icing ooze down the side of the cake and collect on the rim of the plate. The temptation was too great, and I quickly scraped up all that excess icing on my finger - but not quickly enough. Just at that moment Mother walked through the door.

Believe me, Mother hauled me off to the bedroom very quickly while I tried to forestall the inevitable. I still remember the crux of my fast talk to escape punishment. Mother said, "I told you never to take any icing off the cake." Triumphant I replied, "But you didn't say chocolate cake."

Somehow my wise Mother was not the least impressed with that bit of sound juvenile logic. I wonder how it might sound to our all-wise heavenly Father when we say, "But you didn't say wedding ring." And that is true. Mother just said "cake," and God just said "rings," and to quibble over what kind is but a childish attempt to justify our obvious violation of God's revealed will.

After all, why are we searching the Bible on the subject? Are we not trying to find out what best pleases the Lord? We are not seeking for ways to get around what pleases Him. Our sole purpose is to find His will in order to do it. We love Him too much to risk displeasing Him. This is why the true Christian will not quibble over the kind of ring, or seek a rationalization in going contrary to God's will. Lay aside all rings. Isn't it patently obvious that if one symbolic ring can be defended, then all symbolic rings can be defended? In no instance do we find any biblical precedent for wearing a physical sign of marriage. The history of the wedding ring is tainted with pagan sun-worship and papal superstition. Not one argument put forward in its favor carries any weight in comparison to the one great fact that *it is not pleasing to the Lord!* A carnal Christian could argue that it is not clear that one will be lost for wearing a ring. But the Christian who loves God supremely will answer that it is enough to know that it displeases our Lover and Friend.

Incidentally, history gives us a very clear picture of the relationship between early church apostasy and the introduction of the wedding ring. The famous Catholic Cardinal, John Henry Newman, described it in 1845 in his monumental book *Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 373: "Constantine, in order to recommend the new religion to the heathen, transferred into it the outward adornments to which they had been accustomed in their own. It is not necessary to go into a subject which the diligence of Protestant writers has made familiar to most of us. The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints ... incense ... candles ... holy water ... processions ... *the ring in marriage*, turning to the east, images at a later date ... are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church."

The prophet Jeremiah, like so many other Old Testament writers, added more counsel concerning the type of people who wore artificial ornaments. God moved upon those holy men to represent the church prophetically as a woman. When God's people were backslidden, they were portrayed by the prophet as a harlot or an unfaithful wife. Thus we read texts like the following: "And when thou are spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life." Jeremiah 4:30.

Through Ezekiel, God symbolized His apostatized people, Judah and Israel, by two harlots named Aholah and Aholibah. His description of their bold ornamentation matched the lewdness of their conduct. "And furthermore, that ye have sent for men to come from far, unto whom a messenger was sent; and, lo, they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments." Ezekiel 23:40.

Hosea expresses the same thought when he describes the hypocrisy of Israel. Again, the unfaithfulness was well dramatized by a decorated woman. "And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord." Hosea 2:13.

Over and over again, the Bible connects the wearing of colorful cosmetics and jewelry with sin, apostasy and heathenism. When they turned away from the Lord they put on the ornaments which, as Isaiah said, "declare their sin." There is no lack of texts which spell out the truth clearly and without equivocation - the great God of heaven was displeased with those things, and used them to symbolize departure from His will.

Turning to the New Testament, the picture comes into even sharper focus. John, in the book of Revelation, describes the scarlet woman of sin (symbolizing the false church) as "decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication." Revelation 17:4.

In contrast, the true church is depicted in Revelation 12:1 as a beautiful woman clothed with the glory of the sun. This woman is called the bride of Christ in Revelation 21:9. Notice that no ornaments are worn by the bride of Christ. These types of the true and the false religious systems also point out the

estimate God places upon the use of artificial adornment.

Two final texts from the writings of Peter and Paul will reveal the firm, consistent views of the early church concerning this practice. Both of these stalwarts occupied positions of influence among the disciples, and their Spirit-filled letters represent the unchallenged view of the apostolic church. Paul wrote, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works." 1 Timothy 2:9, 10.

Peter wrote in much the same manner, except that he especially addressed Christian women who had unbelieving husbands. "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." 1 Peter 3:1-4.

These words of Peter contain counsel for every Christian wife in the church today, and they deal with one of the most perplexing problems that faces Christian women whose husbands are not with them in the faith. How far should the believing wife go in trying to please her unregenerate husband? To what degree should she compromise the truth of God in little things to keep things smooth at home and possibly to help win her husband? Peter's advice is simple and clear-cut. Don't compromise truth and principle at all. Even if the wife is not permitted to speak about her faith, she can win her husband by her "chaste conversation." Other translations use the more proper term "conduct" instead of "conversation."

But notice how the conduct of the Christian wife will manifest itself. Peter asserts that she will win her husband much more readily by laying aside the outward adornment. Surely the Spirit of God anticipated the dilemma of the wife who feels that she needs to wear a wedding ring to please her husband, even though she knows it does not please the Lord. This text makes it exceedingly clear that God should come first, and that such a decision also will do more to win the husband than any other course. Hundreds of evangelists and pastors could bear witness that this is true. The women who eventually lead their husbands into the faith are the ones who hold firmly to the standard of God's word. The ones who do not win their companions are those who will let down the standard in little things to be more compatible with their unbelieving husbands.

This may seem contradictory, but the practical results are demonstrable. As long as the wife is not living up to all the points of her own belief, the husband figures that it must not be very important. He cannot get excited about doing something which does not even claim the full compliance of his sweet, Christian wife. But if she does take a firm stand to please the Lord above all others, even in the face of his own displeasure, the husband is deeply impressed that this "religion bit" must be important. He probably will say nothing about his true feelings. He may, in fact, affect great indignation, but his respect and admiration will be secretly stirred by the firm, conscientious stand of his wife.

We must anticipate right here the argument that is advanced by the wives who are not inclined to part with their wedding rings. They say, "I don't want to give up my ring because it shows that I am married. I'm proud of my husband. I want everyone to know that I'm married. I think marriage is a most sacred and important thing." No one can find fault with these sincere sentiments. Every wife should love her husband and be proud of him. Marriage is important, and she should want everyone to know that she is married. But let's ask this question: Is there anything in a person's life which is more important than marriage? Yes, there is just one thing which is more important than being married to a husband or wife and that is to be married to Christ. The claims of Christ's love are the only claims which should ever take priority over the love of husband and wife. In the light of all the overwhelming

Bible evidence, we have discovered that ornaments are displeasing to the Lord, our Lover. It is true that the wedding ring will tell everyone that the wife is married to her husband, but it will also tell something else. It will tell that she has chosen to please her husband even above the Lord Jesus. It will reveal that she is placing someone else's will above the Bible-revealed will of God. As such, it bears a wrong testimony to the world.

Some may object that such a conclusion is too strong. Some are bound to say, "You are judging and testing my Christianity by a little thing like a ring or an ornament." No, this is not the case. It is love for God which is being tested, and the Bible clearly points out the criteria for the test. That test not only involves keeping the plainly revealed commandments of God, but also includes laying aside everything else that we discover does not please Him. Here is the evidence: "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." 1 John 3:22.

Please do not overlook the two things which true Christians will always be doing. They obey the direct, overt requirements that God lays down in His law, but they also go further by searching out everything that would please Him. In other words, they will obey the injunction to "always be trying to find out what best pleases the Lord." Ephesians 5:10 (20th Century Translation). Jesus exemplified and dramatized this divine principle in His own life and teachings. He said, "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." John 8:29. The arbitrary commandments are obvious even to a carnal man, but the little things that please God are revealed only to the loving heart of the Christian who searches the Word for indications of His will. It is a solemn fact that those who will be saved at the coming of Jesus are symbolized by Enoch, who "was translated that he should not see death ... for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Hebrews 11:5. Paul describes the glorious coming of Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. In the same text he portrays the resurrection of the righteous dead, and the catching up of the righteous living. But, speaking of those saints who should be ready for translation, Paul said, I "exhort you by the Lord Jesus ... how ye ought to walk and to please God." 1 Thessalonians 4:1. One of the marks of those who are redeemed out of the earth is their willingness to please the Lord in everything.

Listen, if you know a certain thing is pleasing to the Lord, and yet you refuse to do it, what are you really doing? You are pleasing someone else above the Lord. You may say, "But it's such a small, small thing." Of course it is a small thing, but love is actually tested and proven by the little things we do for one another. Ask any housewife if it isn't so. Her husband may give her a washing machine on her birthday and she would appreciate it. But if he brings home flowers in the middle of the week and says, "Honey, let me dry the dishes for you," any wife will tell you that it means more than the washing machine. Why? Because it reveals more of his true feeling to do the little things than to do big things that are more or less expected. God is pleased when we keep His Ten Commandments, but we really show our love more by going beyond the commandments, to please Him in the little things which are revealed in the Bible.

Right and wrong never have been, and never should be, measured by the amount. It is the quality of sin, not the quantity, which presents the largest problem to the Christian. The Bible reveals the fact that colorful cosmetics, rings, etc. are displeasing to the Lord. The word of God does not reveal that a certain quantity of colorful cosmetics is wrong, or that a certain type or number of rings is displeasing to Him. Even the smallest deliberate violation of the revealed will of God is serious. It indicates an inward rebellion against placing God first. The devil's favorite argument today is, "a little bit is all right." This was Lot's foolish argument when he was ordered by the angels to flee into the mountains. He begged for permission to go into another city close by Sodom and Gomorrah. His argument was, "Is it not a little one?" Genesis 19:20. Can you understand why he wanted to go into another city after losing everything he had in Sodom? Yet the same rationalization is used by many Christians today. They debate and quibble over the size of their ring or the amount of the immodesty.

Satan is delighted to hear people trying to decide just how much they should violate the will of God. Never forget this: it is not the *degree* of the deviation from the Bible standard which is so important, but it is the *fact* that there is a deviation which constitutes the real problem. The size of the step is not the thing of greatest importance but rather the direction in which the step leads.

Sometimes ministers are accused of making a big issue out of the wedding ring, because they wait for the candidate to remove it before being baptized. Actually, experience has proven that the ring is not the problem at all. The ring is merely the symptom of a much more serious problem - the lack of full surrender. When the heart is yielded, and God is made first in the life, no convert will allow a little ring to stand in the way of uniting with the body of Christ by baptism. When love of Christ is stronger than love of self or husband or wife, then nothing will stand in the way, least of all a small metal ring.

STUMBLING BLOCKS

In this final chapter we shall give consideration to another aspect of biblical evidence on this subject which some consider to be the most persuasive of all. It answers the objection raised by the few who are still unconvinced that jewelry is displeasing to God. In the most explicit manner it demolishes the last stronghold of defense for even the wedding ring.

Before moving into Paul's eloquent discourse on this point, let us establish a fact which is well known to all who are engaged in full-time soul winning. Those who persist in wearing their ornaments, after becoming members of the church, have been responsible for placing a stumbling block in the path of interested souls. Almost any evangelist or pastor could break your heart with stories of men and women who were turned back almost at the baptistry by the inconsistency of a few church members. After being taught the full Bible truth about Christian standards, these candidates are shocked to see church members, and sometimes church officers, wearing rings or other adornment. Many drop back in disappointment and refuse to join the church at all.

Someone is bound to object, "Well, they should not be looking at people so much. They ought to accept the truth because it is the truth." This is very good and true, but just remember that we are dealing with souls who are searching for loopholes around the unpopular message of the Bible. It is our business to close every loophole patiently and meet every argument so that they finally surrender in full obedience. The fact is that these people have a right to expect the church to be practicing what it preaches. A few inconsistent members can counteract months of prayerful study and preparation of candidates on the part of the pastor. It isn't right that anyone should be a stumbling block to another individual.

Paul penned the most solemn warning to those who would discourage a single soul in their Christian growth. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." Romans 14:13. Jesus spoke out on the very same topic except that He described the enormity of causing a child to stumble. Perhaps His words will have more meaning for us if we read them with the children's Sabbath School teachers in mind.

"Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matthew 18:6. Serious words indeed! But no more serious than the offense it describes - the misleading of little children who look to teachers as examples. How often have little girls questioned the Bible standards about rings after seeing a ring on the finger of a favorite teacher.

In one particular church, a kindergarten teacher who wore a wedding ring was idolized by a little girl in her department. During the church service the child would often be permitted to sit with the teacher and her husband. Since they had no children of their own, the couple was delighted to have the well-behaved little girl sit with them. She would usually occupy herself with things in the teacher's purse, but being of an affectionate nature, she would cling to the hand of her teacher much of the time. One Sabbath during the sermon, the woman glanced down at the little girl and noticed she had slipped off the wedding ring and placed it around her small finger. Somewhat perturbed, she recovered the ring

and put it back on her own finger.

Week by week, much to her chagrin, she noticed how obsessed the tot seemed to be with the ring. She fondled and caressed the ring and often tried to remove it unobtrusively, so that she could slip it around her childish fingers. The growing fascination of the little girl for the golden circle became an increasing concern to the older woman. Knowing the Bible teachings about ornaments, her conscience had not been at ease from the time she had started wearing the ring. Now she was unable to enjoy the worship service, as she sought to divert the girl's vain attention from the article of adornment.

At last she could bear it no longer. Under deep conviction that she was placing a stumbling block in the path of the child, she removed the offending ring once and for all. Later, she related the experience to her pastor and described the feelings of guilt which tormented her for placing temptation before the face of an innocent little girl.

"But I don't see anything wrong with rings. Why should I be a hypocrite and take them off just to impress someone?" This is a question which Paul answers with devastating effect in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. That entire chapter is concerned with the problem of foods offered to idols. The early church was seriously divided over the issue. The Gentile Christians who had come in from paganism believed that it was wrong to eat such meat. They remembered offering the food in sacrifice to idols. Even though they were now Christians, they still felt it was somehow giving allegiance to the idol to eat the food. On the other hand, the Jewish Christians who had come into the church from Judaism felt that the food was perfectly good to eat. Since the meat was not "unclean" and since it was sold along with other meats in the marketplace, the Jewish Christians bought it with no question of conscience whatever.

The contention became so severe between the two groups that Paul finally had to deal with it at considerable length in 1 Corinthians 8. Notice his decision in the matter: "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. ... Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ... But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." Verses 4-12.

These tremendous verses, with their spiritual focus on love for others, apply with even greater force to those who feel at liberty to wear rings in the church. The application is stronger because the ornaments are condemned by God, whereas the meats offered to idols were not condemned. Still, Paul said it was a sin to eat such food because it was a stumbling block, or hindrance, to someone else. Since the rings have been stumbling blocks in the same way, to other fellow Christians, we cannot escape the conclusion that such an offense is also a "sin against Christ."

This brings us right back to the central theme of this little book - *love*. Whether we are looking at Christian standards from the viewpoint of loving and pleasing God or loving our neighbor, the result is just the same. The whole idea is to put self last of all. A religion based upon such love will not be satisfied merely to fulfil the letter of the Ten Commandments but will search the Word of God daily for indications of His will. As John reminds us. "We keep his commandments, *and* do those things that are pleasing in His sight." 1 John 3:22.

May I ask a question concerning what you have read up to this point? Has it raised a doubt about the wearing of ornaments? Does the evidence of all these verses, scattered through the Bible, suggest that the practice is open to question? One couple said, "We are not convinced yet that God would keep us out of heaven for wearing a piece of jewelry." I asked them, "Even though you don't feel you would be

lost by wearing it, do the many texts raise at least some question about the practice meeting the full approval of God?" "Oh, yes," they said, "We cannot say that the issue is not a bit cloudy." My next question was this: "Do you think there is a 10 percent chance that wearing your ring could be displeasing to God?" After thinking a moment, they both agreed that there was at least that much chance that it was questionable. Then I asked them this question: "As you stand on the brink of baptism and the complete surrender of your lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, do you want to run a 10 percent chance of displeasing the Lord who has laid down His life for you?"

Slowly they reached down and began to remove their rings. "No," the husband said, "we don't want to run the smallest chance of displeasing Him. We want to go all the way with Jesus. Since there is a doubt, we'll give Him the benefit of the doubt."

I will not try to pretend that this kind of surrender is easy. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23. Saying "No" to self is what the Master was talking about. He was saying that everyone will have to battle it out with something that self doesn't want to surrender. The individual who is coming to Christ and learning His ways will have to deny self, or say "No" to something that his whole nature craves to keep. That is what self-denial means. Some people fail the test at one point, and others at a different point. I have seen some who could not deny self on the point of money. To obey God might jeopardize their job or cut their salary, and they were not willing to say "No" to their love of money. Others had to give up friends to go all the way in following Christ, and they were not willing to deny themselves their friends. Appetite has stood in the way of many who were not willing to deny themselves the alcohol, tobacco, or unclean foods as required in the Bible. A few have failed the test on the point of vanity and pride. They have been unwilling to deny themselves the *inordinate pride of dress*.

It is always interesting to see how the truth weeds people out of an evangelistic audience. No one drops out until we present the claims of God which demand a change of life and practice. If we did not preach *all* the counsel of God, most listeners would gladly respond to the invitation. Struggle takes place when the truth challenges a darling self-indulgence. The tests of the Sabbath, tithe, and diet are all aimed at some element of the self nature. Many fail on each of these points. But strangely enough, the greatest battle seems to ensue when God's will touches the area of personal pride. Vanity is deep and pervasive. Self-love has a thousand faces and exhibits itself in as many subtle ways.

Mark it down, somewhere along the line for every soul the devil will use self to make a last desperate stand against the will of God. Only those who love Christ with all their heart, soul, and mind will be able or willing to make the 100 percent surrender to Him that is required. The happiest people in the world are those who let nothing stand in their way of pleasing God in everything.

It has already been mentioned that Christians who live to please the Lord are the happiest people in the world. Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that *your joy might be full*." John 15:10, 11. No wonder, then, that fully committed Christians are so easily recognized. There is a holy radiance and joy shining from within which even transforms the countenance. Although they have laid aside the adornment of the world, they have put on another adornment of the Spirit, which identifies them instantly. Some women feel almost naked after removing their jewelry, but very soon they recognize that God has replaced the artificial with the real. David wrote, "They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed." Psalms 34:5.

It is this "new look" of the new-born Christian which has caused the world to marvel. For every evil thing that is given up, the child of God receives a spiritual replacement. As Paul said, "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." Romans 13:12. And please notice how dramatic this exchange can be when it involves the clothes and adornment of an individual. The

bride of Christ receives special attention. Isaiah contrasts the marriage dress of God's people with the dress of the world. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath covered me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." Isaiah 61:10. When we are married to Christ and take His name, we are not to adorn ourselves as worldly brides and bridegrooms. We are joyfully to be clothed with the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness." This is what lightens the face, and presents the new radiant appearance which amazes the world.

This vital point should be given careful consideration. The face has much to say about a person's character and experience. Our most powerful Christian witness may simply be the witness of our shining countenance. One of the most convincing arguments I have ever heard against the use of colorful cosmetics was based upon this very fact. Frances Parkinson Keyes, the well-known Catholic author, explained why she had never "touched up" her face or hair with artificial adornment: "A quarter century of living should put a great deal into a woman's face besides a few wrinkles and some unwelcome folds around the chin. In that length of time she has become intimately acquainted with pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, life and death. She has struggled and survived, failed and succeeded. She has lost and regained faith. And as a result she should be wiser, gentler, more patient and more tolerant than she was when she was younger. Her sense of humor should have mellowed, her outlook should have widened, her sympathies should have deepened. And all this should show. If she tries to erase the imprint of age, she runs the risk of destroying, at the same time, the imprint of experience and character." *Words of Inspiration*, p. 198.

What a tremendous truth is contained in that statement! Christian women have a witness to bear by the expression of their faces. Righteousness, dignity, purity, and calm faith in God - these attributes are often clearly revealed by the countenance alone. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when He said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16. The spiritual light and radiance of an unadorned face may attract more attention to the religion of Jesus Christ than a dozen sermons or Bible studies.

We have spent considerable time on the subject of artificial adornment in order to demonstrate how love leads to the Bible, to search out what pleases the Lord. We could just as well have used other examples of Christian standards. The same principles provide the motivation for seeking always to please Him in what we do about dancing, movies, gambling, diet, and dress. It could be shown just as clearly that these high standards of the church are not based upon any committee actions of men, but upon the revealed will of God in His Word. May God help us to find our greatest joy and delight in doing the things that please Him.

Coming One World Church

Acts 20:30

One Christmas, a rabbi from Russia visited an American family as part of a cultural exchange program. His host family wanted to treat him to a new culinary experience, so they took him out one evening to their favorite Chinese restaurant. After the meal, the Chinese waiter brought each of them a little Christmas gift. It was a small, brass Christmas tree ornament that was stamped with the words "Made in India."

They all laughed at the irony of receiving a "Made in India" gift from a Chinese restaurant. But suddenly, everyone stopped chuckling when they noticed tears rolling down the rabbi's cheeks. Had they offended him in some way?

"Nyet," the rabbi replied. "I was shedding tears of joy to be in a country in which a Buddhist gives a Jew a Christmas gift made by a Hindu."¹

Such peaceful co-existence and affirmation doesn't happen often between religious faiths. Even today, religious differences frequently escalate into fierce war. It's no wonder that many people want to dismantle the religious "Berlin wall" that exists between faiths.

In no other community is this more true than within Christianity. Even though all Christian churches profess faith in Jesus as the Son of God, they have not been able to find a way to form a single, united group. For nearly two thousand years, doctrinal differences have splintered Christians into hundreds of independent denominations. But many within Christianity desire to reverse this.

Foremost in the crusade for Christian reunification is the pope. During the last few years he has been doing all he can to pave the way for a single world church. Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls reports that the pope "is pushing hard on the accelerator toward unity."²

One of the road signs along the pope's autobahn to unity are his confessions to non-Catholics. While conducting mass in the Czech republic, Pope John Paul II said, "Today, I, the pope of the church of Rome, in the name of all Catholics, ask forgiveness for the wrongs inflicted on non-Catholics during the turbulent history of these peoples."³

And this isn't the only confession. He is also trying to bridge the gap between the Catholic and orthodox churches. He says that "men of both sides were to blame" for the conflict that erupted between their churches in the 11th century.⁴

The pope's confessions have found a favorable response. Pennsylvania state university professor William Petersen remarks, "He's bringing the church into the 20th century. You've had statements from the early popes that the Roman church can never err."⁵

Pope John Paul II is not only making verbal overtures; he has also committed himself in print in three highly publicized works. In his letter "Orientale Lumen" ("The Light of the East") he writes, "The sin of our separation is very serious... How can we be fully credible if we stand divided?" "These divisions must give way to rapprochement and harmony. The wounds on the path of Christian unity must be healed."⁶

The twelfth encyclical of John Paul's papacy is dedicated to the subject of Christian reunification and appropriately entitled "Ut Unum Sint" ("May They All Be One"). The pope calls it his "contribution to this most noble goal," which is "to increase the unity of all Christians until they reach full com-

munion."⁷

And in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul says it is his desire to see Christian unity achieved within the next few years-before we reach the new millennium. "By the year 2000 we need to be more united, more willing to advance along the path toward the unity for which Christ prayed on the eve of his passion."⁸

Without question, a united Christian church is a very worthy goal. It was Jesus' great burden just before he died. He prayed, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all May be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also May be one in us: that the world May believe that thou hast sent me." John 17:20, 21.

While none should fault the pope for seeking unity, several questions must be carefully considered. What is the true source of disunity within the Christian church? One Vatican insider suggests that "the main obstacle is not doctrine, but history with all its prejudices."⁹

But is this an accurate evaluation? Do the differences stem merely from prejudice, or is it doctrinal? And, if it is doctrinal, which doctrines are in question? Furthermore, where Catholic, Protestant, and orthodox doctrines differ, which body will adjust their beliefs to appease the others? And most important of all, how does the bible instruct God's people to achieve true unity?

The pope is already anticipating some of these questions. In "Ut Unum Sint," he identifies five key doctrines that need further study before we "reach full communion:" the relationship of scripture and tradition, the church's authority, the ordination of priests, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the role of the virgin Mary.¹⁰ While this is a good start, there are numerous other areas that must also be covered before unity of any degree can be reached. But for now, let's briefly look at each of these five doctrines to see what the Catholic church teaches and what must transpire if a united world church is ever to become more than a dream in the night.

Scripture Versus Tradition

Admiral Byrd, the famous explorer, knows death is only minutes away. He's caught outside in an unforgiving blizzard at the south pole. Snow swirls around him like a dancing sheet. The temperature, well below zero, chills him to the bone. His limbs stiffen and threaten to freeze. The cold is painful.

But all is not hopeless. He knows that he is within 100 yards of the warmth and security of his hut. But how to find the hut is the problem. Everywhere he looks there is the same snow and ice. White. Everything is white. There isn't a single landmark. If only he could find one to use as a central reference point, then he could navigate to find the hut. But without it, he might head in the wrong direction to certain death. "A man can't last long out here," he thinks.

Byrd knows there is no time for panic. Calmly he assesses the situation. In his hand is the 10-foot pole he always carries. It is his only chance. He sticks the pole in the snow and then ties his brightly colored scarf to it. Then he strikes out to find his hut, first in one direction and then in another-but always keeping the pole with the waving scarf in sight. Three times he returns to the pole, and on the fourth excursion he discovers his hut and stumbles into its warmth.

Our world is like trackless Antarctica in a blizzard. The devil blinds the minds of humanity "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ ... Should shine unto them." 2 Corinthians 4:4. We are lost in sin, but there is a place of safety-heaven. It is out there. And it is not too far distant. That is, if a person can find the straight and narrow path that leads to it.

Just how do we find this path? We need a reference point. We need an inerrant guide that can lead us through all the twists and turns and the ups and downs of life. But there is one danger. If the thing we use as our reference point slips either to the left or to the right, then we are sure to stray and die.

Catholic and Protestant churches have disputed the identity of this reference point for centuries. The Catholic church teaches that the guide to heaven consists of the bible and nearly two thousand years of church tradition. "we find the truths revealed by God in sacred scripture and sacred tradition ... Both sacred scripture and sacred tradition are the inspired word of God, and both are forms of divine revelation."¹¹

Protestants, however, believe the bible alone must form the basis for faith and practice. In fact, this was a major issue in the Protestant split from the Catholic church in the 15th century. John Wycliffe, John Huss, Jerome, Martin Luther, and many other Protestants began as faithful Catholics. But while in pursuit of a closer relationship with God they discovered the practices of their church often contradicted the clear teachings of the bible.

The ensuing conflict was more than a battle of ideologies. These men had tried to live by the authority of tradition and personally found it bankrupt. Luther had a tortured conscience. Painful penances and fastings threatened to rob him of life itself. He didn't find peace until he discovered the plan of salvation clearly presented in the bible as a gift to all who believe. Somehow the traditions of the church had obliterated this most vital truth. For centuries it taught that salvation could be had by penance, pilgrimage, and payment. Salvation by faith as the free gift of God had been completely forgotten. Clearly tradition and scripture were at odds-a fact that was not lost on the Protestants. A fact for which Luther was willing to die.

In Worms, Germany, Luther stood before an August assembly of bishops, prelates, priests, and noble men to answer for his strange "new" doctrine of salvation as a free gift to those who accept Christ as their Saviour. When commanded to renounce his "heretical" teachings, he said, at peril to his life, "Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the pope nor the councils alone, it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the holy scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God. I can not and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand. God help me."¹² Tradition or scripture? Luther had drawn the Mason-Dixon line for the Protestant reformation.

In 1545, the Catholic church finally convened the Council of Trent in Austria to answer the questions raised by the Protestants. What will it be, tradition or scripture? The answer came near the conclusion of the meetings. "Finally, at the last opening on the eighteenth of January, 1562, all hesitancy was set aside. The Archbishop of Reggio made a speech in which he openly declared that tradition stood above scripture. The authority of the church could not therefore be bound to the authority of the scriptures."¹³

Like a sledge hammer striking a wedge in a block of dry wood, a split was created that has never been mended. But now, nearly four hundred and fifty years later, the pope is calling for reunification. And he accurately states that this issue of scripture versus tradition must be resolved.

So what is correct? Is it scripture and tradition, or scripture alone? Certainly the best source for an objective answer to this dilemma is the Word of God itself. What does the bible say about tradition?

It teaches several things. First, traditions that are in harmony with God's word are to be respected. "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

Secondly, not all traditions are pleasing to God. "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye May keep your own tradition." Mark 7:7-9. Traditions which replace God's commandments are vain worship. They reveal contempt for God's authority.

Lastly, God has promised to rid his church of unscriptural traditions. "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath

not planted, shall be rooted up." Matthew 15:6, 13.

We cannot depend upon the traditions of men. They are often an erring guide. And not surprisingly so. Humans are erring. Even while trying our best, we make mistakes of mammoth proportion.

For centuries Protestant churches have claimed that Catholicism follows numerous unscriptural traditions. Is this charge accurate? If you are a Catholic, this question is doubly important. You love God and desire to please him. But fellow believers say that many of your church's doctrines are not found in the bible. Your pope also acknowledges that this is a serious issue that needs study. And he says it must be resolved if we are to answer Jesus' prayer for unity among Christians.

Therefore, you will want to ask yourself this very important question. Does the Catholic church really have many unscriptural traditions? Yes, unfortunately it does. This may be hard to accept, but it is true. Cardinal John Henry Newman made this candid admission: "The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness; holy water; asylums; holy days and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage, turning to the east, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, and the kyrie elision ... Are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the church." (emphasis mine)¹⁴ Many Catholic doctrines are of pagan origin and are not found in the bible.

But, wait. Catholics need not feel that this is an unkind thrust against them. This is not just a Catholic issue. Protestants also hold many unscriptural traditions that contradict clear teachings of the bible. This fact has not been missed by some Catholics.

Notice the following Catholic challenge to Protestants to be consistent with their "scripture alone" maxim. "The bible does not contain all the teachings of the Christian religion, nor does it formulate all the duties of its members. Take, for example, the matter of Sunday observance, the attendance at divine services and the abstention from unnecessary servile work on that day, a matter upon which our Protestant neighbors have for many years laid great emphasis. Let me address myself to my dear non-Catholic reader:

"You believe that the bible alone is a safe guide in religious matters. You also believe that one of the fundamental duties enjoined upon you by your Christian faith is that of Sunday observance. But where does the bible speak of such an obligation? I have read the bible from the first verse of genesis to the last verse of revelation, and have found no reference to the duty of sanctifying the Sunday. The day mentioned in the bible is not the Sunday, the first day of the week but the Saturday, the last day of the week.

"It was the apostolic church [i.e. Catholic church] which ... changed the observance to the Sunday. ... In observing the Sunday as you do, is it not apparent that you are really acknowledging the insufficiency of the bible alone as a rule of faith and religious conduct, and proclaiming the need of a divinely established teaching authority which in theory you deny?"¹⁵

John A. O'Brien's logic is glaringly accurate. If Protestants are going to insist that Catholics return to the bible, then they must do the same. And back to the bible we all must go—Catholics and Protestants.

God's word is the only true foundation for consensus of faith. Catholics must stop defending their position that tradition and scripture are of equal authority. And Protestants must surrender their unscriptural traditions and truly live by "every word" of God (Matthew 4:4). We should all keep the bible's Saturday Sabbath along with every other teaching of God's word. Only as we Christians are honest with God's truth can we hope to positively impact an unbelieving world for eternal good.

Church Authority

India has a problem. They worship rats. And their worship is literally consuming them. Tens of

thousands of rats overrun certain cities. They race across floors, feasting on anything they can sink their teeth into. Rats are especially revered and worshipped at the Temple of Karni Mata. Here the furry critters leap onto the platform where food is placed for them. They eat while the priest serenades them with hymns and plays cymbals. These well-cared-for rats reproduce prolifically. And few Indians will kill them, fearing that in so doing they will kill their God's companion.

But the rats have introduced something worse than more rats. They've brought the plague. Hundreds have died as a result. But since the Indians won't kill the varmints, the plague continues to spread.

The issue of what we worship is crucial in all cultures. This is why the Catholic position on the authority of the church and pope is so sensitive with non-Catholics. Catholic catechisms teach that church authority refers to the infallibility of the pope. "when the pope in his official capacity, with the fullness of his authority, as successor of St. Peter and head of the church on earth, proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals binding on the whole church, he is preserved from error. It is to be noted that three conditions are required: (1) the pope must speak *ex cathedra*, i.e., from the chair of Peter in his official capacity; (2) the decision must be binding on the whole church; (3) it must be on a matter of faith or morals." (emphasis mine)¹⁶ These infallible doctrines of the pope are "certainly true and binding in conscience on all the faithful."¹⁷

So what should we believe regarding the pope's authority? Catholics and Protestants must turn to the bible to form their opinions. Here we'll find that scripture teaches no human is infallible. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23. Even those who have been specially called to holy service are fallible. History is an eloquent witness to the foibles of church leaders, including popes. The apostle Peter himself fell into sin numerous times (see Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 22:54-62; and Galatians 2:11-14). Now, the church must have leaders. But every thing they teach as truth must be tested by scripture. The bible never teaches that spiritual leaders have periods where they speak *ex cathedra*. There is no special chair or office from which they can proclaim infallible truth. But the bible does tell us to test our leaders by the word. The believers in Berea were commended for being "more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they ... searched the scriptures daily" to see if Paul's teachings were in accord with God's word (Acts 17:10, 11).

The bible also warns us against spiritual leaders who are used by Satan to lead many astray. "of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20:30. Infallibility is a dangerous doctrine. If we ascribe it to any man, we make ourselves very vulnerable to deception. Therefore, "beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1.

How are we to "try the spirits?" Isaiah 8:20 says, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." They are to be tested by the bible. When Paul warned the church to beware of leaders who introduce erroneous teachings, he said to test them by the word. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts 20:32 (emphasis mine). We can be safe only as we test every declaration of truth by God's word.

Now, the pope May be a good man with noble intentions. Nevertheless, all that he says and advocates must be tested by the holy bible. No human has *carte blanche* infallibility. For centuries, popes have claimed infallibility as direct successors of Peter, who they believe was the first pope. But according to scripture, Peter was not established as a pope. He wasn't even the leader of the early church councils. James was (see acts 15:1-22).

Another problem with the papacy is that it runs counter to God's truth. Popes have great power. People bow before them. They confess their sins to them. Popes live amid great pomp, splendor, and riches. They have been some of the most powerful men who have ever lived. But when one studies the bible for examples of men of God, we find a much humbler model. Our Lord himself taught that those who

desire rich robes and to sit in high places are not following him (Matthew 23:1-12).

Clearly, the bible never claims for church leaders what the papacy claims for itself. The papacy, therefore, is an unbiblical position. If consensus of faith is to be achieved, then all Christians will need to get back to the bible. The claims made regarding the powers and rights of the papacy will need to be officially renounced. The pomp and splendor should also be traded for Jesus' example of humility.

The pope has indicated he is willing to explore some change in the function of the papacy. While not promising to surrender his ultimate authority over the church, he has said that he would seek "to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation."¹⁸

What possible new situation could the Vatican be considering? The president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the promotion of unity of Christians has suggested that the pope May act as a mediator in religious disputes.

Unfortunately, it seems the pontiff is only considering not insisting that Protestants accept the doctrine of papal infallibility. What he will settle for is to be the final mediator in doctrinal disputes between Christians. But this is still unacceptable to those who desire to take their faith from the bible. No single human can claim the power to be the final word on doctrine and morals. Every believer must study the scriptures for himself to determine what God would have him do.

When there is a controverted point of doctrine, the question can come to an assembly of representatives of the church for their humble study of God's word to see what scripture truly teaches. Many minds working together to find God's will is always a lot safer than one man being in charge of determining truth.

But even in religious assemblies, we see the weakness of man. Many Christian convocations have made declarations that run counter to bible truth. What should believers do in such cases? They should follow what the bible teaches. Many American Catholics are already following their own convictions to some degree. Catholicism officially teaches that nearly all forms of birth control are sin. But most American Catholics disagree. Thereby they too deny the absolute, infallible authority of the pope.

The authority of the church is a crucial question, and the pope is correct in tagging it for discussion. But until he reverses the supremacy and primacy of the papacy, apostolic succession, and the authority of the church to be the sole interpreter of scripture, no unity can be achieved with those believers who want to remain true to the bible. Christianity cannot unite around a fallible human, no matter how noble a person he May be. Only as we humbly submit ourselves to God and his word will we be able to come together.

The Ordination Of Priests

We now come to the third doctrine identified by Pope John Paul II. What does the Catholic church teach about the ordination of priests? Official Catholic teaching is that priests are ordained to have the power to forgive sins.¹⁹ Some American Catholics May disagree with this representation. They May be honestly unaware of this doctrine. Nevertheless, it is true. Here are a few excerpts from official Catholic sources.

"An authorized priest ... [says] the words 'I absolve you from your sins.'... All bishops and priests have the power to forgive sins or absolve sins."²⁰

"Who has the power to forgive sin today? All bishops and priests of the Catholic church can forgive sin. ... What do you have to do to have your sins forgiven? You have to be truly sorry for them and confess them to a Catholic priest."²¹

Sometimes American Catholics defend the confessional by comparing it to going to a counselor or

psychologist. They claim the priest does not actually forgive sins, but simply plays the role of a counselor.

However, when the pope speaks about priests, he refers to the official Catholic position and not the "corrupted," Americanized version. The church tries to make its official teaching clear in its catechisms. "Does the priest merely pray that your sins will be forgiven? No, acting as God's instrument and ordained minister, he truly forgives the sins."²² "This is not a mere ritual repetition or psychological exercise."²³ "Does the priest really forgive your sins? ... The priest really forgives your sins. The priest does not merely 'pray away' your sins."²⁴

This Catholic teaching is based on John 20:23: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." A correct understanding of this verse requires reading the context. Before telling the disciples about the remission of sins, Jesus said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The disciples were to go to the world in a way similar to which Jesus was sent to our world.

How did the Father send Jesus to our world? Jesus said, "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." John 12:49. "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." John 8:28. "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." John 6:38.

Jesus was sent not to speak his own words or teach his own doctrine or to do His own will. He came to speak the Father's word and will and sent his disciples to do the same. Like an ambassador, the disciples were to tell others about the will and word of the Person they represented. "God ... hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (emphasis mine). Notice that the power to actually forgive sins was not given to the disciples as priests, but only the word of reconciliation as ambassadors. Ministers and believers can only pass on the word of truth that Jesus has reconciled the sinner to himself if they will confess and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the right to invite and urge people in behalf of Jesus to come to him. But the actual ability to read the heart and to grant forgiveness is something only the almighty can do.

So how is it that "whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained"? Whenever an unbeliever does not accept a believer's call to repentance, then we have caused them to retain their sins. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17. "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth." John 9:41. Sin remains and is retained when a sinner has encountered truth and has refused to repent and accept it.

So when the disciples took truth to people and they refused to accept it, their sins were retained. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not sin: but now they have no cloak [margin: excuse] for their sin." John 15:22. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city." Matthew 10:14, 15. On the other hand, if people accept the good news of salvation in Christ, then their sins are forgiven by God.

Man is on dangerous ground when he tries to usurp God's prerogatives. No one should ever say the words used by the priests in the Catholic sacrament of penance: "I absolve you from your sins." Only God can forgive sin. "Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" Luke 5:21. "Blasphemy," the bible calls it. Strong language we would do well to remember!

Sin requires the death penalty be paid. Whenever we sin and confess to God, Jesus applies the blood of his death on the cross to our account. He alone can read the heart and apply the blood accordingly. We

do not have this power. We don't know if a person is truly sincere and desirous of transformation. We misjudge others all the time.

There is a danger in accepting humans as our mediators with God. God regards only one mediator. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5. For humans to take the place of this mediator is presumptuous. This is trying to take the place of Jesus and God. And no good Catholic or Protestant Christian wants this to happen.

One cannot find any indication within the biblical record that the apostles exercised the authority supposedly conferred upon them to forgive sins. They certainly would have done it if they had understood Jesus' words in the manner the Catholic church teaches. Neither does the bible refer to the Catholic church's confessional. There is no record of sinners going to the apostles to confess their sins and receive forgiveness. Yet, we do read numerous instances of the disciples directing people to God for forgiveness. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart May be forgiven thee." Acts 8:22 (emphasis mine).

Associated with the ordination of the priest is celibacy. According to the Catholic catechism, "The basis for clerical celibacy is the example of Christ and his apostles."²⁵ Does the bible really teach that priests are to remain unmarried and celibate for life? Admittedly, Jesus was celibate. But He did not command this for all who should follow him in ministry. He called Peter to be an apostle, and Peter was married. "[Peter's] wife's mother lay sick of a fever." Mark 1:30.

Although it is recommended for those who choose it, celibacy is not a requirement for ministry. Jesus says that there are those who "have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." Matthew 19:12. The apostle Paul highly recommended celibacy. He saw it as an opportunity to care only for the things of God (1 Corinthians 7:32). But he also says this is his opinion and not a direct command from God. "I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." 1 Corinthians 7:6. Furthermore, Paul did not forbid marriage. "If thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned." 1 Corinthians 7:28.

The Catholic position is not as flexible as that of Paul. "By church law a Catholic priest in the western church is obligated to live a life of celibacy [no marriage]."²⁶ The dilemma the pope finds himself in is that he forbids that which God clearly permits. Many Catholics, recognizing this, are trying to get their church to change this teaching. But the pope has indicated it will not change.

A church in Georgia once installed chimes to play hymns over a loudspeaker for the townspeople to hear during supper. Every evening the chimes faithfully played their sweet music. But a nearby turkey farmer was not soothed by the sound. It seemed that the chimes disturbed his turkeys during their evening feeding. The birds just wouldn't eat while the music played, and they were not getting fat for the market. Discussions between the farmer and church deteriorated. Pretty soon things became quite ugly. The farmer tried to silence the loudspeaker on the steeple by shooting it. In retaliation church members sneaked into the turkey pens at night, spooking the birds and giving them one more reason not to eat. Only after the birds had a complete nervous breakdown and the church steeple was peppered with bullet holes did the two parties finally come to an agreement that met both their needs. The church played the chimes at a different hour and the farmer called a cease-fire.²⁷

Resolving doctrinal differences does not need to become a shouting match and certainly not a shooting match. Both the pope and Protestants agree that the Catholic doctrine of the ordination of priests must be resolved. And it must be done in light of bible truth. Teachings regarding the priest's ability to forgive sins, apostolic succession, and celibacy will need to be radically changed to come into harmony with the bible. This is the only wise thing to do if we are to answer Jesus' prayer for Christian unity.

The Eucharist

Four children were born to a family in Amman, Jordan. Each birth certificate said the child was a girl.

And for 13 years the family believed this. But when the oldest child reached puberty, "she" started revealing male characteristics. The teenage "girl" grew facial hair, her voice broke, and she developed a male physique. Doctors examining Mohammed diagnosed him with a rare genetic defect that left him appearing to be female when in reality he was male. Apparently, during his development in the womb his male organs never descended.

Mohammed's three younger siblings were also diagnosed with the same defect. Fortunately, all the children were successfully operated on and are now males. The day of their transformation was one of great celebration. The girls, now turned boys, cut their long hair, removed their jewelry, and wore boys' pajamas. And their jubilant grandmother Fatima Netasha said, "I had six granddaughters and two grandsons, and now I have six grandsons and two granddaughters. I thank God and the doctor."²⁸

Sometimes things aren't as they appear. This is what is at the heart of the controversy over the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper. Protestants view the bread and grape juice as symbols of Jesus' body and blood. But according to Catholic teaching the bread and wine aren't what they appear to be—mere bread and wine. Instead, they are literally the real body, blood, and person of Jesus.

Official Catholic teaching is unambiguous. "The Eucharist is a sacrament which really, truly, and substantially contains the body and blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine."²⁹ "After consecration, this sign contains the whole Christ, his body and blood, his soul and divinity."³⁰ "Christ is present in the Eucharist ... With all his physical properties, hands and feet and head and human heart. He is present with his human soul, with his thoughts, desires, and human affections."³¹

Another difference between Catholic and Protestant beliefs is that of relevance. Protestants view the service as a holy ritual in which people voluntarily participate. However, the Catholic church teaches that "The Eucharist is necessary for salvation."³² This is because of their view that the benefits of the cross can be had only by partaking of Jesus' "literal" body as found in the bread.

Follow this to its logical conclusion. The only bread that can be Jesus' body is bread that has had the special prayer and blessing of the Catholic priest. No priest means no changing of the bread into the body of Christ. No body of Christ means no salvation. A Protestant pastor cannot do what the Catholic priest can with the bread. Only the priest has the power conferred upon him to command God to come down from heaven and enter the bread. Therefore, if people are going to be saved, they must go to a Catholic church to receive the Eucharist. Furthermore, in order to receive the Eucharist they must first become a Catholic. "The person who is receiving instructions in preparation for full membership in the Catholic church should participate in the mass but may not receive holy communion."³³

What did Jesus mean when he said in Matthew 26:26-28, "Take, eat; this is my body. ... Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood"? Did he really mean that his literal body and blood were present in the bread and wine? The disciples knew this wasn't what he referred to. They had heard him speak like this before. Jesus once said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. ... Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." John 6:51-53.

On that day, many who listened interpreted Jesus' words very literally. They thought he advocated salvation by cannibalism. They were shocked. Jesus knew their thoughts, so he clarified what he meant. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6:63. Jesus says his life is contained in his words. To eat his word means to read and meditate upon its meaning. When we apply Jesus' teachings to our life, then we've truly eaten his word. The Catholic teaching of the Eucharist misses this point. Instead, what Jesus intends to be spiritual is taken literally.

Another controverted point regarding the Eucharist concerns the wine. In many Catholic communion services, only the priests drink it. This teaching came into the church at the Council of Constance, A.D. 1414-1418, and is not taught in God's word. When Jesus took the cup, he gave it to all those present, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:25 (emphasis mine). See also Matthew 26:27, 28. The blessing of this service is for every believer, not just priests.

Yes, the pope is right again. The Eucharist needs to be studied. Imagine what blessings can come to Christianity if we all return to bible truth. United on the clear teachings of God's word, we can be a powerful witness to unbelievers. But before unity can be reached, we must also resolve another doctrinal difference the pope said must be resolved-the virgin Mary.

The Virgin Mary

The Lawrence Welk show had its tele-vision premier in 1955 and launched Welk into becoming what life magazine called "the most popular musician in U.S. history." But things weren't always so rosy for Lawrence Welk. Once, after playing his accordion for a dance, he overheard one of the band members remark, "Did you get a load of that accordionist? If I had to play every night with him, I'd go back to jerking sodas."³⁴ At the time, it appeared Welk might be a failure, but he continued to play and finally landed his television show. Though many would rate him as an average musician, 40 million people tuned in to his program faithfully every Saturday night. Quite a large following for an ordinary musician!

To many Christians, Mary, though extremely blessed to be the mother of Jesus, was still just an ordinary human. In the Catholic church, however, she "is honored and loved second only to God himself."³⁵ Because the pope is well aware that this reverence for Mary is a major block in the road to unity, he has put it on the list for discussion. And Protestants have some very good reasons to raise objections to this Catholic belief.

The bible is very clear that Jesus is our saviour. No other person can atone for our sins. So to God alone should we pray. It is Jesus "who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Romans 8:34. Yet, Catholic catechisms contain numerous prayers to Mary pleading for her to make intercession for our sins. The very popular Hail Mary prayer says, "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."³⁶

The Hail Holy Queen Prayer addresses Mary as mankind's advocate. "Hail Holy Queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears! Turn, then most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy towards us, and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus ... O sweet virgin Mary! Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God. That we May be made worthy of the promises of Christ."³⁷ The bible, however, says that there is no advocate for man other than Jesus. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1.

The second problem with the Catholic doctrine of Mary is called the "Immaculate Conception." This teaches that Mary was "conceived without sin."³⁸ "Not only was she free from the slightest stain of actual sin, but by a singular miracle of divine grace she was free also from original sin, with which all the other children of Adam are born into this world. It was eminently fitting that she ... should be undefiled by even that slight shadow of Adam's fall. To her alone, among all the members of the race, was granted this singular immunity ... The immaculate conception [refers] ... to the conception of Mary in the womb of her mother without the stain of original sin."³⁹

Unfortunately, this teaching finds no support in the bible. It was only recently proclaimed as a dogma of the Catholic faith in 1854.⁴⁰ The bible unequivocally declares that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23. Only one person ever lived a life of perfect sinlessness-Jesus. He

"was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15.

So why does the Catholic church teach that Mary never sinned? Simply because if Jesus was sinless, then they feel that his mother had to be sinless. But it is a mistake to assume that just because Jesus' mother was a sinner, he had to be born a sinner. You see, Jesus received from his mother a body "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Romans 8:3. But he received from his Father a divine spirit and mind. Jesus' body, degraded by the effects of four thousand years of sin, did not control his actions or sully his character. Though his sinful flesh provided a launching pad for temptation, his divine nature recoiled from it. He chose not to heed temptation's slightest whisper. Therefore, he was without sin.

If Jesus had been born of a sinless mother, then he couldn't be the sympathizing saviour that he is. It is because he did receive "the likeness of sinful flesh" from Mary that he is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Hebrews 4:15. He is our mediator and heavenly priest by virtue of this very fact. He understands us because he was tempted from his flesh. "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." Hebrews 2:17, 18.

The immaculate conception veils the compassion of Jesus. This is why Mary is often prayed to as a mediator and intercessor. Catholic catechisms portray her as one who understands our weaknesses better than Christ. "She is our mother, near and dear to us, loving us with all the warmth of a mother's love. As the little child frightened by the shadows of night finds safety in his mother's arms, so will we in time of temptation find a safe refuge by fleeing to the outstretched arms of Mary our mother. If we will but clasp the loving hand of our mother, stretched out to aid us in every danger, our uncertain footsteps will be guided safely to that golden ladder upon whose rungs we will climb step by step, to the very throne of her son and savior, Jesus Christ."⁴¹

The Catholic teaching of the assumption of Mary is another area of concern. This declares that Mary was taken to heaven before her body decomposed in the grave. "It was eminently fitting that the body of the chaste and immaculate mother of God was not permitted to undergo disintegration and putrefaction but was assumed into heaven."⁴²

Given the burial process in bible days, this would have had to happen very soon after her death. Four days after Lazarus' death, his sisters expected his dead body would be decomposed. "By this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." John 11:39. Therefore, according to Catholic teaching, for Mary not to "undergo disintegration and putrefaction" we must conclude she was taken to heaven within four days.

Again the bible does not teach this. It is a new doctrine of the Catholic church. "This belief ... was formally defined as a dogma of the universal church by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950."⁴³ Instead, the bible declares that all who die go to the grave to sleep in the dust until the return of Christ. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Daniel 12:2. (See also Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Psalms 146:4; 13:3.)

Catholics need to re-examine their doctrines concerning Mary. Good Catholic Christians who love God and who've been taught to have an emotional attachment to Mary May find objectivity difficult. But if they will keep Jesus foremost in their hearts and minds they will be able to extricate this unbiblical doctrine from their prayers and lives. And they will be infinitely more blessed. All the love and devotion they've felt for Mary will now be available for the saviour. Here they will find a richer, fuller experience far beyond anything they've yet known.

Conclusion

One Presbyterian pastor described himself as "a Presbyterian by earthquake." You see, years ago his grandmother moved from Iowa to California. It wasn't long before the local Presbyterian pastor called

to invite her to attend his church. "I'm a Baptist," his grandmother said, "and it will take an act of God to get me to change." Remarkably, just at that moment an earthquake shook the home. This farm girl from the Iowa plains had never felt anything like this before. Trembling, she told the pastor, "I'll join."

Christians sometimes choose their church affiliation for strange reasons. But once they've found a church home, most people cling to it tenaciously. "I was born a member of this church and I will die a member," is sometimes the motto. While it is good that we cling to our Christian faith, we must be more open to denominational change if we are ever to answer Jesus' prayer for his people to be one.

All Christians need to strive for unity. But we must unite on the platform of bible truth. Anything less than honest adherence to truth minimizes the teachings of scripture to justify each denomination's highly cherished traditions.

It is good that the pope is confessing his church's sins and errors. Protestants need to do the same. But then we all need to go beyond confession. There must be change. We must give up any doctrine and practice not in harmony with scripture.

This will not be easy. We May feel a little like the farmer who was out one day on his tractor when he rolled over several gopher mounds. The earth caved in under his tire and the tractor flipped. Fortunately, he was only bruised in the accident. His wife gave a great sigh of relief when she heard of his brush with danger and said to him, "Honey, the Lord sure was with you."

Looking at his bruises, the farmer replied, "Well, if he was, he sure got a rough ride."

Some days we May feel as though the Lord is taking us on a rough ride. Returning to bible truth and surrendering cherished opinions and unbiblical doctrines May feel painful.

We all have a special challenge ahead of us. In spite of the personal pain we May feel, we must follow our love for Jesus into a more complete obedience to his word. Let neither Protestants nor Catholics allow themselves to be seduced into any arrangement under the banner of unity that compromises the bible. None should yield on this point. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, boys, and girls have shed their blood in ancient days because they would not compromise. If we abandon truth now, we will walk through the blood of these dear believers who chose death over compromise.

God is drawing his people back together. Those who live up to all the teachings of God's word are called the "remnant" in the bible. "The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17. God's remnant people are identified by their fidelity to his commandments and bible truth. People from all religious backgrounds will eventually unite to make up this loyal group that loves Jesus supremely.

So, how can you guarantee your place in this remnant? Pursue bible truth relentlessly. Then obey it with just as much gusto. And do it because you love Jesus. As each of us is faithful to God's word, we can participate in fulfilling this prophecy. Then we can truly have an uncompromised world church that answers Jesus' prayer for unity.

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Culture and the Christian

We hear a lot these days about vanishing species in the physical world of nature. Some creatures have almost become extinct as their breeding habitats have been invaded and destroyed by advancing "civilization."

I would like to suggest that there is a similar problem in the spiritual world also. A certain kind of historic faith and lifestyle is being slowly choked out of existence by the inexorable advance of a voracious, alien culture. Paul warned of a time when the true church would be threatened by a spirit of conformity to worldly values. He said, "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2. One translator has made it more urgent: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold" (Phillips).

Is there reason to believe that the simple faith of our fathers has been eroded by a burgeoning hedonistic society? Jesus made some very clear statements about the spiritual threats that would confront His people just prior to His return. He said, "as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." Luke 17:26. Obviously there will be some dramatic parallels between this high-tech final generation and the antediluvians of 6,000 years ago. Certainly the Master was not talking about scientific similarities, but something would be the same. What was it? The answer is found in the book of beginnings: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5.

We could cite scores of texts to show how an obsessive self-indulgence would be rampant in the last days just as it was in the days of Noah. Love of pleasure, vanity, desire for the supremacy, and above everything else *an inordinate pride*, would characterize the doomed end-time civilization. *Self* lies at the root of almost every sin for which man will be held accountable. It was that spirit of egocentric pride which precipitated Lucifer into his original course of rebellion against God. He declared that he would be the greatest and sit in the sides of the north. He would even be "like the most high" and take God's place in ruling the universe.

After being cast out of heaven, Satan sought to infect the human family with the same evil principles of self-aggrandizement which had turned him into a devil. He appealed to Eve's unfallen mind to become more wise so that she could be like God. Since that encounter with our first parents, Satan has used exactly the same avenues of approach to all the descendants of Adam. His temptations are always aimed at the most vulnerable point of weakness in fallen human nature - and that weakness is *pride*; the desire to attract attention to self.

Has the prophecy of Jesus been fulfilled today? Have the minds of most modern sons of Adam been invaded by "evil continually"? No one who reads the newspaper can be in doubt on these questions. Murder, drugs, rape, terrorism, satanism and every conceivable related perversion, has turned this planet into a place of fear. And there is an evil basic principle behind every type of crime being committed today. The *self*-nature wants attention. It wants to rule; to be gratified; to have its own way. People are usually murdered because they stand in the way of someone who is determined to acquire either money, power or attention. The twisted ego of fallen man demands to be the greatest, to have the most, and to stand at the top. The drug and sex problems are always related to self-gratification. Political corruption and spiritual compromise are equally rooted in greed, to gain either materially or in popularity. Whether we look at Wall Street, professional sports, politics or religion, we see extreme manifestations of the self-nature seeking to be recognized and exalted.

What does all this have to do with the loss of a spiritual lifestyle among God's people? Jesus put His finger on the pulse of the problem when He said, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:12. In other words, there would be a corresponding compromise in the church

as the conditions of evil proliferated in the world. The deadening influence of a self-centered environment would gradually infect those who once had a genuine love relationship with God. That love would grow cold.

Are we suggesting that all those violent drug and crime scenes would be reenacted among the saints? No. Jesus did not say that those iniquities would come to characterize His church, but He did imply that they would create a carelessness within the body of Christ which could lead to a loss of faith and love. Note the significant question that Jesus asked, "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8. No one can deny that a lethargic lukewarmness has crept upon us, diluting many of the unique devotional practices which identified true worship for centuries of the past. Jesus indicated that an encroaching secular society would decimate the ranks of His own followers to such a degree that only a few would survive. "As it was in the days of Noah." How many were saved at that time? Only eight. Jesus said, "*So shall it be* in the days of the Son of man." He was talking about His return. A small remnant would recognize the contaminating process of gradual compromise which would endanger even the "very elect." Jesus said, "narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few* there be that find it." Matthew 7:14.

I would like to suggest that any satanic plan capable of destroying the vast majority of believers would have to be very subtle, devious and almost undetectable. It is also quite apparent that such a program would be so well disguised that those deceived would not even be aware of losing their faith. Love grows cold by degrees. The world crowds in closer and closer. Conformity begins over issues which seem small and inconsequential.

Look once more at the analytical sentence of our Lord in describing the anatomy of compromise. He said, "Because iniquity shall abound," Christians would grow cold. Their love would *wax* cold. Paul prophesied that "evil men and seducers shall *wax worse and worse*, deceiving, and being deceived." 2 Timothy 3:13. As evil slowly grows worse *in the world*, love slowly grows cold *in the church*.

Why did Jesus tie the loss of spiritual power to the rise of iniquity in the world around us? Simply because He understood how we can be affected by the sights and sounds of a carnal society. Repeatedly the Bible warns against relating to the world. Jesus said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world ... therefore the world hateth you." John 15:19. Paul wrote, "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." 2 Corinthians 6:17. John declared, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." 1 John 2:15. James said, "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4.

In order to understand better what these inspired people were warning us about, read the illuminating words of our Lord in Luke 16:15. He said, "for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." There is the real crux of truth that we have been searching for. Jesus defined the enemy for us so clearly that no Christian needs to be confused. The "world hateth you" because you do not esteem the same things they do! "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." James 4:4. The most highly esteemed things in the world today are utter abomination in God's sight, and true Christians should be aware of what they are.

A very important question is raised at this point in the minds of many. How can we know which things fit into this category of abomination? Obviously we are talking about social values and cultural practices. Almost everything we do is rooted in a pattern of current customs. Are they all wrong? What aspects of prevailing lifestyles are acceptable and which are unacceptable? Jesus has certainly shown us that abounding iniquity is out there in the world, increasing all the time, and that it will be responsible for the majority of Christians losing their way. He has also said that some of the most popular cultural behavior in the world is an abomination to Him.

I believe the answer to these questions is found in the words of our Lord. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Please notice that Jesus did

not say "let him deny himself alcohol or drugs or illicit sex," He just said to "deny himself." Period. All one is really required to do is say no to the self-nature which is resident in everyone of us. Since self is behind every sin, this victory will bring all other victories with it. Yielding to the demands of that egocentric nature is to participate in the same sin that actuated Lucifer and later led to the death of Jesus on the cross. It is the constant subduing of that lower, carnal nature which distinguishes the children of light from the children of darkness. Although conversion does not remove that selfish nature, it does bring a new spiritual authority into the life which overpowers the propensities of evil, bringing them under the sanctified control of a surrendered will.

It is important to note that a continual life-or-death warfare is being waged in every born-again Christian. The ever-present *fallen nature* will always be in conflict with the *spiritual mind*. We must choose which of the two shall rule our life. Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve two masters." It must be either *self* or the *Saviour*. But many overlook the fact that we are responsible for saying no to self. Jesus said, "Let *him* deny *himself*." Everyday we have to choose what we look at, listen to, smell, feel and taste. The five senses are the doors which give access to influences which either sanctify us or pollute us. The mind automatically conforms to whatever we allow to enter through the sensory perceptions.

This brings us back to the question of which cultural practices we can safely engage in. All of them are going to have an influence on the mind by appealing to one of our senses. By the grace of God, we can close the door on any cultural influence which will feed the self-nature. *We need to learn which ones will weaken us and which ones will strengthen us.* Cultural practices are neither good nor bad simply because they have become the behavioral norm for a contemporary society. They must be tested by something deeper than a passing fad or custom.

There are many Christians who believe that cultural practices cannot be judged as wrong because they represent only the application of a principle and not the principle itself. They contend that a practice can be right for one society but wrong for another depending on the cultural imperatives in operation at the time. Indeed there are examples that could be given to demonstrate that this is valid as a *general principle*. But there are also one or two notable exceptions to that rule. If we do not recognize those exceptions, we are subject to some grievous errors of biblical interpretation which could endanger our souls. I am alarmed to see theologians as well as laymen applying this cultural rule to the understanding of Scripture. They surmise that the Bible writers themselves were so influenced by prevailing cultural mores that they incorporated many current social do's and don'ts into their "inspired" writings. It is assumed that if the Scripture authors were writing today they would not take the same position. Thus many biblical teachings believed to be tied to a cultural influence are simply disqualified for being relevant to our own day.

Even though time and place may be appropriate to consider, those factors should never be allowed to override the authority of an inspired canonical instruction. It is a serious thing to assume the responsibility of choosing from the counsels of God what should be applied to this age and what should not be applied now. Eternal judgment is to be determined by the Word of God, and no man is to take away or add thereto. What an awesome account will be required of any who weakens one single requirement of the inspired record.

It is interesting to notice which biblical teachings are being modified by an appeal to culture. Almost invariably it proves to be subjects dealing with prohibitions or restrictions in popular lifestyle practices. Do you know why? Because many of those practices are rooted in the indulgence of the self-nature. No one objects to the application of a biblical truth or principle as long as it does not make any demands involving self-denial. Anything which challenges the basic carnal drive of the self-nature is hard to accept. Is it any wonder that Christian standards are gradually being reinterpreted in order to accommodate more of the increasingly egocentric fashions of the world? High spiritual standards always demand a yielding up of self and all that glorifies the perverted pride of the fallen nature.

Jesus said it very succinctly when He declared, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." The spirit of pride has continually catered to attitudes which focus on self-display. Our Lord said that self should be denied. Scores of Bible texts indicate that God was displeased with the outward adornment of the person. Divine disapproval of jewelry in the Bible is in direct conflict with the natural vain tendencies of the fallen nature. It is not surprising that efforts are being made to nullify the clear biblical counsel on this and other subjects by a new hermeneutic approach. They tell us that specifics don't apply to us today because the inspired writers were influenced by the prevailing social atmosphere in which they lived. The cultural practices which they found objectionable are no longer objectionable because the times have changed.

This same reasoning has been applied to the subject of ordaining women for the ministry, as well as other areas of pressing public interest. The Bible cannot speak authoritatively in these matters because the writers were simply expressing the current, popular viewpoint of their cultural system. So goes the argument of those who have crumbled under the pressure of majority opinion. I have observed a number of my friends reverse their positions on the subjects of jewelry and women's ordination. They agree that the Bible evidence is against the two practices, but they do not believe the prohibitions apply today. So they have shifted over to the position that they believe the inspired writers would assume if they were living under our cultural conditions.

Now I would like to explain the real inadequacy of the "culture" argument by a closer look at the jewelry question. Most people agree that there is an abundance of negative references to the wearing of ornaments in the Bible. In some places a list of the decorative items are actually given in the texts, and the Lord Himself gave instruction for them to be stripped away. In every case, the condemned articles were a part of the common cultural practices of the time. But was that the reason for their meeting with divine disapproval?

I submit that God clearly revealed that He was attacking a deeper problem than simply a social or cultural conformity. In Exodus 33:5 He said, "Ye are a *stiffnecked* people ... therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee." In Isaiah 3:16-18 the Lord addresses the women of Israel thus: "Because the daughters of Zion are *haughty*, and walk with stretched forth necks ... the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments." Paul admonished "that women adorn themselves in *modest* apparel, with *shamefacedness* and *sobriety*; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls or costly array." 1 Timothy 2:9. Peter said, "let it not be that outward adorning ... but ... the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit." 1 Peter 3:3, 4.

None deny that God is addressing a principle here rather than just localized social custom. The women in all cases were afflicted with pride, the great basic sin of fallen humanity. The wearing of the jewelry was merely a symptom of the real problem, but it was playing havoc with the spiritual principle of modesty and humility. The texts show that the women were cited as an example of the *violation* of the principle. Thus God's disapproval was not rooted in a cultural practice, but in a basic flaw common to all the human family. Had it been tied only to culture, God's objections would have changed when and if the culture changed. But since God's prohibition rested upon an inherent condition of human nature, the prohibition would remain as long as the fallen nature remained. If a certain practice stirs up sin because it appeals to a weakness in every human being, then that practice is wrong *on that basis alone!* And it would be wrong whenever and wherever it appeared in fallen human nature. No one can point to a single period in history when the wearing of ornaments did not elicit from that carnal nature the same inordinate pride which the inspired writers saw and condemned in their day.

To be totally honest, we must concede that, culturally, the practices of adornment appear to be just about the same today as they were when the Bible was written. Since those practices were portrayed by the inspired prophets as being a violation of the spiritual principle at that time, we have absolutely no grounds for assuming they would not be equally wrong today.

If it could be demonstrated that the objectionable adornments stirred up sinful pride in one age but not in another, then the cultural argument might have some validity. But even then we would have to ask why God would include so many specific instructions in the eternal Scriptures that would be applicable at one time but not applicable at another time. It is very superficial to assume that by proving a cultural connection we are destroying the application of those prohibitions to later generations. Surely no one can honestly contend that pride is a less devious problem in its manifestation today than it was in the days of Isaiah, Peter, Paul or John.

It is truly a staggering thought that the great original sin by the author of all evil was the sin of pride of appearance. The Scripture declares of Lucifer: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." Ezekiel 28:17.

Think of it! Here was a holy creature, totally unlike the race of fallen Adam. He had no natural propensities toward sin, but yet he was overcome by yielding to the appeal of personal vanity. We have every reason to recognize this temptation as the most powerful that any free-choice being could ever face. Surely if inordinate pride of his "brightness" and "beauty" overwhelmed the most glorious of God's creatures, then we fallen mortal beings must be a thousand times more susceptible to the same appeal. Is this why God warned against the feeding of those fires of self-love by adorning the physical person? Was God trying to protect us from an innate perversity which was almost second nature to every descendant of fallen Adam?

This would certainly explain the inherent propensity of women to be so emotionally distressed by the removing of make-up and jewelry. For years I wondered why ladies would often react with tears and anger even when the subject was broached. I've observed the same visceral reaction of some men to the giving up of rings or chains. Now I understand why the offended self-nature leaps to a defense of those items. The very deepest springs of perverse pride are affronted by the stripping away of the outward objects. Few will admit that they really are attached to the glittering baubles, but none have been able to explain, if that is true, why they are so disturbed by taking them off. The truth is that pride is so subtle, being the root of most other sins, that it creeps into many cultural practices almost unrecognized. It not only tries to attract attention to self *physically* by wearing artificial adornment, but also *intellectually* by dominating conversations, and *spiritually* by calling attention to one's dutifully correct way of life. In reality, self-righteous spiritual pride could be more deadly than the pride of vain display.

Sometimes I have been asked why God would deny us the wearing of gold, jewels, pearls, etc., when the Holy City will actually be composed of such rare gems. Again we are reminded that the precious stones are not the problem; they are not evil. The problem is what the wearing of those things does to the carnal human nature. After this fallen nature is removed, and these purified characters are translated into glorious immortality, there will be no more lower self-nature to be appealed to. Golden crowns can be safely worn by all the redeemed, and not one heavenly being will be seeking to draw attention to anyone save the Lamb who will be in the midst of us.

Glittering earrings, chains, finger rings and colorful cosmetics will not be collected and worn by competing saints in order to appear more beautiful or more sophisticated. The beauty of the Lord our God will be upon every ransomed man, woman and child, and no one will give the slightest thought to being more than our God makes us by His own divine adornment. How wonderful it would be if all could now be satisfied to bear the same heavenly beauty of His righteousness without obscuring it by cheap, artificial tinsel.

It has been suggested by some that all specific applications of a principle must be left to individual conviction. These people contend, therefore, that no church should set up a standard that would proscribe certain articles of adornment. But if this is true, why did the Holy Spirit inspire Bible writers to make lists of then-current items of dress that were objectionable? It was God who identified such

things as earrings, rings, and eye paint as being displeasing to Him. *And it had nothing to do with culture!* These things were condemned because they catered to the carnal appetite of a sinful nature. They violated a holy principle whose roots went far deeper than the shallow vagaries of contaminated culture.

The truth is that there are scores of modern manifestations of pride which were unimaginable in the days of Bible writers. Were they writing today, they would undoubtedly call them by name and warn against the indulgence of them. If there is uncertainty on the part of anyone as to which of the latest innovations of pride would be specifically named, let them have no uncertainty about the listing of those indulgences which called forth their strong condemnation when they wrote hundreds of years ago. They would surely look at the same symbols of pride - rings, earrings and painted eyes - and would write, "I will therefore ... that woman adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with broided hair, or gold or pearls or costly array." 1 Timothy 2:9.

I view the problem of cultural interpretation as one of the most serious issues in the area of biblical research. What uninspired scholar or layman can claim the wisdom to separate between cultural issues and eternal principles - if indeed there are such things as cultural issues in the Bible? It boggles our minds that God would clutter the pages of His everlasting, living Word with remonstrances that would have meaning only for a certain few people in a certain brief span of time.

Through the appeal of this perverted hermeneutic, thousands have found a way to avoid unpleasant requirements of the Scriptures. It is not hard to be persuaded if one is already looking for the means of evading a difficult duty.

The confusion would be unimaginable if specific biblical standards were tailored to the social whims of any particular age. How would any of the Bible be trustworthy if any part of it could be attributed to a writer who was influenced more by his environment than by the Holy Spirit? Many times the inspired prophets had to take stands against extremely popular cultural activities. Some were put to death because they dared to defy the demands of a dissolute social order.

We need to study once again how men were moved by the Holy Ghost to translate God's thought into human verbs and adjectives. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" not just the part which appears relevant to my age, my culture or my sex. The Bible is absolutely timeless in its universal application to every person, in every age, and under all circumstances.

But now let's consider the fact that the jewelry question cannot really be properly placed in the "cultural issue" category. The basic argument in favor of doing so collapses when we discover that ornamentation practices of biblical times and the present are essentially the same. It is true that the inspired writers observed the majority of women in their day wearing almost every variety of decorative jewelry - just as we see it being done today. Yet, with those culturally acceptable practices before their eyes, they wrote *against* the wearing of them. If indeed they were being influenced by culture, they would have certainly bent toward a tolerance of the practice. How can we charge the writers with cultural bias when they wrote counter to the cultural demands? And on what basis could we believe they would write differently today? If those men were to come alive today, they would see many strange and bewildering things on this modern scene, but I submit that the earrings, bangles, chains and make-up would probably be the most familiar custom with which they could relate.

Do we dare contend that they were influenced to write against the most popular practice *because* everyone was wearing the ornaments? And if we took such a view on that issue, how would we correlate it with the parallel issue of ordaining women to preach? In New Testament times, women were culturally not permitted to be spiritual leaders, and Paul took a firm position against their public function as such. By doing so he has been charged with undue bias *favorable* to the cultural demands. Yet in the same chapter, Paul wrote against women wearing ornaments, even though his position, this time, was *unfavorable* to the cultural demands. So poor Paul has been charged with cultural bias

regardless of what he wrote. Is it not obvious why he wrote against some practices that were popular, and supportive of other practices that were equally popular? Paul was writing what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. Whether it agreed or disagreed with majority opinion was the least of the great apostle's concern. This man had faced every form of violent opposition without compromising his message. What an insult to even suggest that Paul might have allowed cultural circumstances to dictate his position on controversial issues whether popular or unpopular.

Surely it must now be clear why some people today are inconsistently charging Paul with bias on both of these issues. It is the only way to discredit the inspired words of Scripture which cut across their own preferred lifestyle. The truth is that Paul's modern-day accusers are the only ones being influenced by culture. It seems that they do not have the courage to stand against the overwhelming tide of popular practice in the area of personal adornment and women's ordination, and the only way to justify their compromise with a worldly culture is to somehow discount the clear Bible statements condemning those practices. But they cannot have it both ways. They must define how culture is supposed to affect inspired Bible authors. Does it pressure them to favor that which is culturally popular? Or does it pressure them to condemn current acceptable customs? Regardless of how they answer those questions, their real motive is exposed. The culture argument seems to provide a way to indulge the self-nature and to be popular with the crowd, even if it involves rejecting certain parts of the Bible to do so.

Because it tends to weaken credibility of the Scriptures, most advocates of the culture-interpretation view seek to dilute their humanistic approach with a variety of trite surface arguments against a literal application of the texts. For example, a great deal is made out of certain Greek and Hebrew words which, in their translation, can be made to describe either functional or decorative articles of clothing. And because the Bible cautions against ostentatious and extravagant display of otherwise acceptable dress, it is made to appear that if we approve any expensive type of clothing, then we must also approve the wearing of purely ornamental jewelry as well.

This same exaggerated ploy seeks to confuse the issue further by equating utilitarian objects such as watchbands, tie clasps and cuff links with decorative display jewelry. Even though it may be wise to avoid wearing certain functional items because of the way they are perceived by some, there is a clear distinction between the two classes of articles. For instance, no one would ever suggest that a pair of eyeglasses are in the category of ornaments. Yet if the frames were worn without any lenses held before the eyes, those frames would certainly qualify as a true ornament. Even a ring would not be counted in the jewelry class if it served to hold the finger on the hand! That would make it a functional object. Generally those who press these frail arguments are simply trying to create a rationale for indulging self. Unfortunately the predictable result is a loss of confidence in the integrity of Scripture.

Women's ordination is endorsed in the face of Paul's unilateral assertion that elders should be "the husband of one wife." The apostle's explanation of women's secondary role in spiritual matters, based upon the order of creation, has been totally rejected by the new culture revisionist. They fault Paul for allowing personal chauvinistic prejudice and/or local cultural mandates to influence his writing of the epistles. The strongest arguments they can offer in favor of female priestesses and ministers are built around the verses alluding to equality of salvation for every man, woman, Jew or Gentile. Those verses have nothing to do with assignment of office or spiritual roles. They are referring to salvation and moral worth. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26-28. Just as surely as slave/master relationships were physically unaffected by entrance into Christ, so were the male/female physical relationships unaltered. Spiritually, yes. But not in any other way. The physical roles were not changed, either legally or in practice.

By the way, it should be noted that there are some very important and specific roles for women to fulfill in the church today. Just because they have been excluded from spiritual leadership does not mean they have no responsibilities in sharing and teaching. Short of serving as priests or elders there

are multiplied functions of ministry available to dedicated Christian women. Millions are serving in these supportive roles with no thought of public acclaim or ordination.

In both cases of jewelry and women's ordination, the Bible clearly reveals that the objection was not tied to the culture. It went deeper by far. The ornamentation violated the spiritual principle of modesty and humility while the ordination of women violated the spiritual order of creative roles. Paul pointed to these basic principles in dealing with the two issues, but that fact has been ignored by those who seek to make both of them a mere matter of cultural relativity.

Deathwatch in Siberia

by W.S. Jesske

You must prove what you say!" The fierce Kirghiz tribal leader glared around the room at each of us." "One of our priests of the skin offerings tells us that you are liars and deceivers, and that you cannot prove that the day to worship your God is Sunday. If you cannot prove this, then we will certainly kill you, for we want no white man's deception in this place! "that, he whirled and left our little church.

A chill of terror swept through the little room. These Siberian tribesmen were indeed much to be feared. The Kirghiz had the grisly habit of tanning the flesh of human beings. Whenever they were angered or did not receive justice, they would skin their victims, tan the skins, and make what they called "worthwhile items" out of them. The minister ran out of the church after the chief. "It will take a few days, but we will find you the text," he shouted. We would be give three days.

Exiles, we had no way of escape in the frozen wastes of Siberia. The only method of transportation that we had were a few ponies that were still in a semi-wild state, having just recently been captured. However, we were not yet totally discouraged, for we thought that we knew what we believed. The minister summoned us all to our little adobe church. The Bibles that we had were given to each person who could read and understand what we were looking for- a scripture that said to keep Sunday, the first day of the week, holy. It must be there. We believed it as Christians, and we knew that there must be a text to prove our belief. It was now up to us to find it.

Those who could, began searching the Scriptures; those who could not knelt in prayer that we would be successful. Sections of the Bible were assigned to each one of us. If we were to finish before we found the passage that we needed to find, we were to exchange sections and check and double check our work.

Long hours of scripture study and prayer failed to give us the text we so desperately needed. Much to our amazement, however, we did find many scriptures that pointed to the seventh day as God's holy Sabbath. Nowhere in Scripture could we find that the Sabbath had been changed to another day!

There were 21 families in our exile colony- more than 100 people. The first two years of our exile were extremely difficult and many times existence was a real fight. Many people starved to death, and the horribly cold winters took their toll of life, with no respect for age or sex. Only the most hardy were able to survive. But our living God heard the cries of His exiles, just as He had in ages past. He was a comforting Presence in the vast wastes of Siberia, and we never felt abandoned or without hope.

During the 19th century, more than one million of Russia's intelligentsia were exiled to Siberia to die. They were not criminals. All that they wanted was the freedom to live a free life according to the dictates of their own consciences, but they were not allowed to do so. This longing for freedom had cost untold thousands their lives, and many more would never see civilization again.

Now this same fate had come to us, a group of Christians with the simple desire to worship the God of our choice in the manner that we felt was correct. For this we found ourselves deep in the heart of Siberia, with only the wild animals and a few Kergiesen tribesmen surrounding us. The natives with whom we had become acquainted were kind to us, but for a long time, the language barrier between us was almost insurmountable. They could not speak a European language, and we could make absolutely

no sense from their Kergiesen tongue. Time and practice were all that we needed, however, and one day, we began to be able to communicate readily.

It was about two years before we really became proficient with their language, and it was then that our pastor called the elders of our church together, and proposed a plan for a missionary endeavor among these people. The pastor felt sure that God must have had a reason for allowing us to be banished to this barren wasteland, and we were reminded that God's Word never returned to Him void. We were urged to exercise our Christian concern among these Siberian natives and teach them of the living God, and His dear Son who had given His life a ransom for all men. We were encouraged by their interest in our way of life, as many times the Kirghiz had expressed their dissatisfaction with their terrible pattern of existence.

They could not read or write, but the Spirit of God works on all hearts. For weeks the elders, sometimes accompanied by their wives, went to the Kergiesen Arkulic (village) to teach them of God and the Christian way of life. After several months, the Kerghiz began to come to the little adobe church which we had erected for our worship services. It was at this point that we really began to introduce them to the three main points of doctrine that we, as a mixed group of different denominations, held in common.

Of course, the first point was that there was indeed a living God who cared personally for each one of the Kerghiz. This was not too hard to make clear to them, as all around us we had unspoiled natural wonders to convince them of God's existence. The second point was that there was a Word of God, rather like a group of love letters left for all men, to assure them of God's care for them and to remind them of their duties and responsibilities to Him as His subjects. We told them that although this book had been written by men, it was God's Spirit that had moved upon the authors to write the messages. The Bible was our guide to the heavenly land for which we are all looking, where there would be no more cold winters, no more freezing to death, no more starvation or exile. The third point we showed them was that they should not keep Friday as the day of rest as was their custom from their Mohammedan background. We instructed them that they should henceforth keep the Lord's day holy, which was called Sunday. This was not an easy subject for them to grasp, and we sensed their uneasiness with this doctrine from the very first. We also presented many other subjects surrounding these three major doctrines, such as baptism and the second coming of Christ.

It was then, after these natives had worshiped with us for several weeks, that we were visited on that fateful day by three of the Kerghiz tribal leaders, and their spokesman had made the demand that we prove from God's holy Word that a man must worship Him on Sunday. If we couldn't prove our doctrine, we would certainly be put to death!

Now here we were, huddled together in our little church, unable to justify our beliefs according to the Bible, and with all the evidence pointing to the fact that we were indeed wrong and had been following the dictates of men and not of God. We had no place to escape, and nothing to escape with. Many wept and prayed, for we were certain that the morning dawn would bring our doom. How we longed for the wings of a bird, to be able to flee from our persecutors!

Solemnly our pastor stood and motioned for silence. "My dear Christian brethren, take courage! God will not fail us in this time of trouble! In honesty we have prayed and searched the Scriptures, and He has rewarded us with a gem of new truth, hidden for centuries! Do not you think that if we are honest with our brothers, the Kerghiz, that our God will not soften their hearts to believe? This is what He has sent us here for, and live or die we must accomplish His will! Let His truth be known! And trust yourselves to Him! Tomorrow we admit the truth and God will indeed be with us, I am sure!"

We spent the remaining time of our probation in prayer, promising God that if He would Hear our cries and let us live, we would do His will as revealed in His Word.

Thursday arrived, perhaps our last day of life. Clouds appropriately veiled the sun as the members of our settlement gathered in the church for a final session of prayer. At noon the cloud of dust grew thicker as across the steppes came a herd of galloping horses, more than a hundred in all! Brandishing their sharp knives, our native neighbors headed for the church. They knew exactly how many people were in our little colony, and there was one Kerghiz rider for each of us. It was indeed a terrible reminder of what they had in mind! They surrounded the church, jumped off their horses and stood beside them while the three leaders came inside for our answer to their question.

We had cried our last tears and spoken our last words of comfort to each other, assuring each other that if our appeal failed, we would certainly meet on the resurrection morning. Now we sat silent, at the mercy of these native men and of God.

Our minister arose and met the three men halfway up the narrow aisle. He told them that we had been misled in Europe. We had been taught falsely. We had now read the Word of God through for ourselves several times, and the only Scriptures that we could find identified the seventh day, and not the first, as the Christian Sabbath. True, there were eight mentions of the first day of the week in the New Testament, but not in a single case did we find any suggestion of holiness attached to it.

"We will not resist," our pastor said. "You may kill us if you wish, but we hope and pray that instead you will join us in worship of the true God on His holy Sabbath."

Then he stepped back and sat down. The three natives stood conferring among themselves, then turned and walked out without saying a word in reply. The little door closed. It did not seem like a good omen. We sat in silence for another few moments with God. The quietness was broken only by an occasional sob. We felt as if time pressed down around us and stopped as we waited there.

Suddenly the door opened and the three men entered once again. "Don't be afraid," they said. "We will not kill you. We have come back to join you and we will all worship on the seventh day, as your Holy book prescribes." Then Hammemba, the chief and spokesman, began to tell us why they had made this request in the beginning.

When the caravan of native priests had arrived at the Arkulic for their skin offerings that the natives regularly supplied, the Kerghiz had nothing to give. When they explained that it was because of their friendship with the Christian exiles that they had not taken any skins, the priest asked, "Oh, then you have become Christians?"

"Yes," the native replied.

"Then you have undoubtedly also given up your keeping of Friday, as you were taught, and begun to keep their Sunday?"

"Yes, we have," was their reply.

The chief priest drew up to his full height, and a slow smile began to spread over his face. "Fools! God back and ask your white friends to show you the proof that they are instructed by their God to keep the first day holy! If they cannot do that, then bring me their skins, for they lie!"

The native priests had heard about the Bible before, and some had even studied it. They told the Kerghiz that the Christians would be unable to find such a text and that they would get our skins. The priests told the natives while they were waiting for our reply that if we were really honest (they felt that most white men were liars) about Christianity and wanted to live in the way our God prescribed, we would be keeping the seventh day holy and not the first.

Now these natives had heard our minister make an honest confession that we had all been misled, and that our Book had indeed pointed to the seventh day as the Sabbath of the Lord. They had to decide that we were honest, even though we were white! They really did want to be Christians; they were tired of such things as skin offerings. Their lives did not improve under the supervision of the heathen priests, while we had helped them to advance in many ways and had asked for nothing in return.

After they had finished telling us this story, they said that they wanted to be real Christians, and to follow the Bible and its sacred teachings. They returned to their village and told the priests to be on their way, that henceforth they would have no more skin offerings. The following Saturday, on God's holy Sabbath, our little colony, together with the Kerghiz, worshiped together in our humble mud brick church.

Chapter 2

After those years of indescribably horrible experiences in Siberian exile,* we returned to our former home in the Ukraine, a beautiful area of western Russia. Some of the other exiles had returned already. Others were coming. Many of course, never returned. Many whole families were lost. Those who returned were happy to see each other, and many long evenings were spent discussing the breath-taking experiences we had had.

Our former homes, of course, were in ruins. But we were home and we could rebuild, and we did. So also did we restore our former beautiful Baptist Church. With great enthusiasm we went about these things, for we thought that now things would be better and we could again live our lives as before. But we were wrong. Political unrest worsened. The old Tsarist regime had been overthrown and the Kerensky reforms had died.

There were now many political parties, and they fought each other. This resulted in a real revolution. For years we lived in a firing line atmosphere. Many times for weeks on end the revolutionists were roaming back and forth shooting, looting, and fighting, destroying not only the opposite parties, but the very country, homes, and families. After Lenin came to power these things began to subside. But under these circumstances we had forgotten all about our promise to God. We had forgotten about keeping the Sabbath.

Our own family was alone in their belief, and of course we weren't going to be different. There were no people around us that kept the Sabbath. As far as we knew, the only class of people that kept the Sabbath were the Jews, and we were not Jews.

There was still much unrest among the citizenry. My father happened to be one of the underground leaders. He had called a Gramada meeting of all the underground movements in that particular area. They had a secret meeting place, very well-protected from any intruders. It was guarded by many secretly armed men, so that no one could approach it.

One night, as my father was dismissing a rally, he noticed a stranger enter the room—a fine looking young man with a great big mustache. Looking right at my father, it appeared that he wanted to say something, but he did not. The meeting had already been dismissed and men started to mill about. Father wanted to run back and grab this man and find out who he was. But by the time he reached the door he had disappeared. No one else had noticed him, not even the guards.

My father was greatly alarmed over this incident and summoned the guards, but no one could find the

stranger. It seemed like a spirit had come and gone. Father came home and told us about this experience. We were all very worried, especially mother. She was usually extremely anxious over things like this and she kept questioning him. "Why didn't you call to the guards to grab him, hold him, and find out who he was? Why didn't you do this, why didn't you do that?" Her questioning continued until father became very irritated, but mother didn't let up. Day after day she worried herself and everybody else. Every night we were fearful that some strangers would come to arrest us. If any men working in the underground were apprehended, they would be shot immediately.

There was no one more beautiful and dear than my mother, but even mothers have a way of doing things sometimes that are not so good. But when she saw that she couldn't do anything with my father, and she knew it was too late to do anything about the stranger, she and father agreed that they would pray over this matter. Every morning and evening we prayed that the Lord would send this man back to us. It was five weeks before Easter.

One week before Easter on a Thursday night my father had a dream. He saw the stranger sitting in our church while my father conducted the choir. He told us the dream and on Sunday morning he said to Mother, "You stay home. Prepare an Easter dinner while I take the children to Easter morning services." She agreed. Sunday morning my father, my sister and I climbed onto our wagon and he drove our team to church. It was a beautiful Sunday morning. We had prayed and we believed that the Lord would answer our prayers. Father was sitting on the platform after directing the music of the choir.

He searched the faces of the 1,200 people in the congregation, but he just couldn't find the stranger. He searched row after row. He knew many of the people and he knew that he could easily detect a stranger. But he couldn't find this young man who had that particular big, beautiful mustache.

Just before the pastor finished the sermon and father was preparing to conduct the closing anthem, there-there he saw that handsome young man with the beautiful blue eyes and the large mustache sitting on one side of a certain post, not far from the side exit. His heart began to pound. He was thankful and spoke a little prayer to God thanking Him for answering his prayer, for he had seen this very man in the dream.

When the meeting closed, he quickly went to the side entrance and met the young man, took him by the arm, and said, "Come on, young man, you are going home with me today."

The stranger answered, "I am glad, that's what I came here for."

We all climbed onto the wagon and started for home. Very little was said on the road except that the young stranger told father that he had had a dream the Thursday night before that he should come to this particular church. Since he lived a long distance away, he had never visited there before. Mother had our meager meal ready.

We were hungry most of the time. Many people were starving to death. During those days of revolution, people had lost everything. The government that had been set up was not very favorable to Christian people, and this caused great hardship among the people. But my dear mother had fixed what she had, and we called it Easter Sunday dinner. After we had eaten, this young man started to talk to us. We discovered who he was. He was an Adventist lay worker. His name was Kelm, and he was keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

This was, of course, very new to us-to see someone in that section of Europe keeping the seventh-day Sabbath that was not a Jew. We told him of our experiences in Siberia with the natives and how we had

learned about the Sabbath. But we told him we had not kept it since we had returned to our own home in Europe, because it really didn't fit into our lives at all. This was the beginning of a series of cottage meetings.

The next week young Kelm returned to our home. At that time we had called together five other neighbors to study this wonderful message. We told them of our experience in Siberia. We said the Scripture was really true and that we were not living up to it in every minute detail. We should perhaps turn to it and then trust God to bless us after obeying Him more closely. After several studies with Mr. Kelm, one each week, one of the families withdrew, but five of us did continue to study for some time longer.

We were fully convinced that this was the truth. We studied not only the Sabbath, but many other scriptural doctrines, such as the state of the dead, the millennium, healthful living, and so forth. This all seemed so real and so good to us, and above all, an answer to our prayers. We had prayed that God would send the light, and now it had come.

What should we do? With our families we made our decision and promised each other and God that we would stand united to follow in the footsteps of our Saviour. Mr. Kelm, and some of the others that had come with him to give us studies, were to return the following week for final studies to prepare us for baptism into the Adventist Church. Now there was another surprise. My father and the other four men met and decided not to be baptized.

On the appointed day toward evening, Mr. Kelm and two of his friends came back to give us the Bible studies. Father was on the roof fixing something there. I was helping him. We saw these three people coming down the hill and as they approached our yard, my father called down from the top of the barn. He told them not to enter the yard, but to turn around and leave as quickly as possible. He said that we did not want to have anything to do with the Adventist people, that they were from the devil, that all these teachings that they had brought to us were false, and we wanted nothing to do with them—just leave.

They couldn't believe what they heard. But as they were trying to come through the gate Father called once more and said not to enter or he would loose the dog. Then they understood that he meant what he said. They tried to talk to him from a distance but it was useless. They turned around. they walked away from the yard, the distance of a short block. There were some bushes there, and they knelt under these bushes in seclusion and prayed for quite a while. Then they arose and left, never to return again.

Mother had watched this whole procedure and was very, very unhappy. She was weeping like a little child, not only for these people who were heartbroken, but for our own souls. She feared that we were lost, forever lost. When Father came down from the roof, Mother was there, and an argument ensued over this experience. But nothing was changed, for Father had spoken.

Chapter 3

Weeks and months passed by. The five men who had turned their hearts against God seemed to be at peace—at least superficially. but not so with the mothers and the children that had attended the meetings and had learned something so wonderful, that seemed so real. We gathered from time to time and talked over this horrible experience. Two neighbors met with our family one evening. My mother never kept quiet, always reminding my father of this terrible thing that he had done to these kind people and against God. She had prayed in secret almost continually that God would do something to my father to change his stubborn heart. We children and MOTHER and the two neighbors' children and their mothers had met, talked about these truths, had Bible studies, and prayed that God would help us to accept this

new light.

Finally the time came when our father and the other two neighbor men met with us to talk about this strange experience. During all this Mother saw that it was useless to talk to my father very much about it, for he became irritated. All she did was keep praying with her children. The three of us would kneel down many times and ask the Lord to help us accept the call of the Holy Spirit, for we wanted to be saved in God's kingdom.

On this particular evening when the three families met, we made our decision that we would take up this teaching. We wanted to call the remaining neighbors of the original five to join us. We took our stand right then and there that evening that from then on we would not let anything else influence us. God only should be our guide and the Bible our textbook.

When we called the other two neighbors, they refused to join us. One of them, Mr. Grenke, became violently angry over our decision. He promised my father and us that no Sabbathkeepers would live next to him, that he would kill them. Both Mr. Grenke and my father had been elders in our Baptist Church and had been friends for many years. They had been officers in the army long before the revolution. They had been very close and now this man swore that he would kill all of us if we became Seventh-day Adventist.

It was now Christmas time. The night before Christmas Eve about two inches of beautiful white, fresh fluffy snow had fallen. I was in a trade school at this time so my Father was coming after me this early afternoon to take me home for Christmas Eve. He had our two horses hitched to a double sleigh. We were sitting on a plank across the siding, talking to each other about the difficult times and what the future might hold for us. Our horses reached a certain spot under a great big oak tree that seemed to extend its branches forever. Of course we were not thinking of any danger coming to us. We were occupied with our own thoughts and conversation. As the horses were beginning to pass the trunk of this big oak tree, Mr. Grenke, our neighbor, jumped from the other side, grabbed the reins, and, stopping the horses, immediately started talking to my father.

Mr. Grenke said, "Look, Sam, I have told you many times that no Sabbath-keeper will be my neighbor, and for that reason, I am going to carry out my promise. I am going to kill you both." By that time, he had moved closer to the sleigh, never letting loose of the reins that he had caught. He had a giant stick on his shoulder and was aiming it right at my father. He asked Father for his final answer. From where he stood he could have struck both of us with one blow. He was a powerful man. He told us that he would count to three and then he would strike. We spoke to him but felt that our words fell on deaf ears. He meant to carry out his threat. Father, who had on a heavy fur coat, shook it off his shoulders so that he could be more free to fight. When the time came and Mr. Grenke counted one, two, three, and struck his deadly blow, he only struck the board we had been sitting on, and nothing else. The force of the blow only injured his hand. His club fell to the ground.

Father, who was a small man, but very quick, jumped up and grabbed Grenke by the collar. I threw myself off the sleigh, and ran to my father's aid. The two men were facing each other, my father with a grip on Grenke's collar. Grenke swung his strong arm around to break Father's neck. Father increased his hold on the collar and cut off Grenke's wind. He had to release his arm. As soon as he released his arm, Father released some of the pressure on his windpipe so that he could take a breath. Again Grenke swung his big arm around to break Father's neck. Again Father choked him till he turned white and began to faint, then released him again to take some more fresh air.

These two Prussian officers stood face to face in a death struggle. Every time our neighbor tried to break Father's neck, Father again cut off his breathing. Finally Father asked him if he would give up his

intention. When Mr. Grenke agreed, Father raised him up and threw him on the sleigh. We took him home, and never saw him again.

This was not the end of our struggle, but it was the beginning of a new life for Christ. Now we were determined more than ever to take our stand for the truth. We had learned that nothing else really matters in this world. Life is so short and can only be made happy by serving our Creator. We observed the following Sabbath with our two neighbors.

Now we wanted to find our Adventist friends. But we did not know where they were living. They had visited us from time to time for quite a while, but we never asked them where they were living. We knew the general direction. We knew the colony that they might be living in but that was all. We prayed that God would reveal their whereabouts to us. That week Father had a dream to go to a certain marketplace that we had often gone to about 20 kilometers away. The bazaar was held on Tuesday. He went there and asked some Jews about certain people that were calling themselves Adventists and were keeping the Sabbath holy. The Jews were well acquainted with them and gave my father the precise directions where to find them.

The following Sabbath our family and the two neighbors got up early to walk the distance, for we were not permitted to take our horses more than five kilometers away from our dwelling. We came to a farmhouse at about 9:30 that morning. Everything seemed so quiet that we thought no one was home, but Father knocked on the door. When the door opened, who do you suppose greeted us? Mr. Kelm! No words can describe the emotions that existed during this meeting. Many tears were shed. We assembled for Sabbath School. There was a group of about 15 people already there, and there were about 10 of us. After the embracing and kissing was over we settled down for the Sabbath school study and for the worship services.

They invited us to join their group, and we were quite willing to do so. But Father said, "We are Baptists, or have been Baptists. We have been baptized before and therefore we do not desire to be baptized again." But my sister and I agreed that after all this struggle that we had gone through to find this wonderful truth, we wanted nothing more to do with our former connections, and we requested to be re-baptized.

On a beautiful Sabbath morning my sister and I and some of the others of our neighbors were baptized, but my father and mother still held back for two more months, and then they requested to be baptized too. This, of course, automatically separated us from our beautiful Baptist church. We had no church building and for a while we were worshiping in our home.

Then even that was forbidden, as a law was passed that no more than two neighbors could visit together at one time. We had to find other places to assemble ourselves. This became very difficult. We often gathered in secret places in the woods and forests and sometimes among the rocky cliffs. We couldn't sing very much because that would be heard. But we could have Bible studies together, and we could pray. We talked to our God who had been so kind to us in the past and in whom we had put all our trust that He would see us through to the end.

I thank God each day of my life for a living faith in Him who has power to save His erring children, and has promised us a home with Him throughout eternity if we are faithful to the end of life's journey here on planet Earth.

Does God's Grace Blot Out the Law?

Romans 3:31

The devil, through sin, has just about wrecked this world of ours. We live in an age of rebellion against all restraint and law. Our nation stands aghast at the big-city, gang-defiance of social order and property rights, including the right to live. Murder, robbery, and personal assaults have become the trademark of both urban and suburban 20th-century life.

Each day as we read the newspaper it seems that the quality of life has edged downward a little bit further. At times we are tempted to believe that things can get no worse, and that conditions have hit rock bottom. Yet, the next day, even more violent, bizarre crimes are reported, and we simply shake our heads in disbelief. It is difficult to comprehend how a nation like America with its rich Christian heritage could ever depart so far from its founding principles. Even the non-Christian countries are not plagued with as much crime and overall violence as this so-called Christian nation. More crime is reported in Washington, D.C., in 24 hours than Moscow reports in a full year. No doubt the reporting methods are not the same, but it still presents an alarming picture.

The problem becomes more serious when we realize that lawlessness also reaches into the area of religion and affects millions who would never think of killing or raping. It is probable that the great majority of church members in America today carry few convictions against breaking at least one of the Ten Commandments. A very insidious doctrine has been developed in both Catholic and Protestant theology which has tended to minimize the authority of God's great moral law. It has led many to look lightly upon transgression and has made sin to appear unobjectionable. In fact, sin has lost its horror for multitudes and has become an acceptable mode of life for both youth and adults. Witness the current trends in lifestyle which support this view.

How many young men and women are living together without benefit of marriage! Yet they do not believe such living arrangements should be designated as sin. A large portion of shoplifters are professing Christians, and most of those who belong to churches believe that there is no sin whatsoever involved in violating the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment.

How can we explain this paradoxical situation among those who profess such high regard for the Bible, and such love for Christ? This question becomes more significant when we consider the historical position of Christianity toward the Ten-Commandment law. Almost all of the great denominations have officially placed themselves on record as supporting the authority of that law. Yet very subtle errors of interpretation have crept into the modern church, leading to the present state of confused loyalty toward the Ten Commandments. How earnestly we need to look at that law and study its relation to God's grace and to salvation itself. It is so easy to accept the popular clichés concerning law and grace without searching out the biblical facts by which we will finally be judged. We must find authoritative scriptural answers to questions like these: In what sense are Christians free from the law? What does it mean to be under the law? Does God's grace nullify the Ten Commandments? Is a Christian justified in breaking any of the Ten Commandments because he is under grace? These are the questions we shall address ourselves to in this important study.

Condemned to Die

Let us push aside the rubbish of confusion which has obscured the truth about how men are saved. Multitudes have heard emotional discourses on sin and salvation, but they still do not understand the logic and reason which require a blood sacrifice.

Can you imagine the horror of standing before a judge and hearing the sentence of death pronounced against you? Probably not. But you have felt the driving guilt and fear when God's Word stabs you with this sentence: "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. Why fear and guilt? Because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23.

The words are there and the meaning cannot be mistaken. The word "all" might just as well be spelled John Smith or Mary Jones or whatever your name happens to be. The shocking fact is that you are under the sentence of death! You have been found guilty before the law, and there is no court of appeal in the world that can reverse the sentence and find you not guilty. The fact is that you are guilty, just as guilty as sin. According to 1 John 3:4, "sin is the transgression of the law," and you must plead guilty to breaking the law. Whose law did you break? Paul answers quickly, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Romans 7:7. There it is! The great Ten-Commandment law is the one which was broken, and it demands death for the transgressor.

In desperation the sinner searches for a way to be justified in the sight of that broken law. How can the sentence of death be turned aside? Can man atone for his sins by obeying the commandments of God for the rest of his life? Back comes the answer in language that no one can misinterpret: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Romans 3:20.

Listen, there is a reason why works will not justify a soul. If a man is found guilty of stealing and is sentenced to ten years in jail, he may indeed justify himself by works. By serving the time of his sentence, the man may satisfy the claims of the law. He is considered perfectly justified and innocent because he has worked out his deliverance by fulfilling the sentence. In the same manner, a murderer may be justified by works if he serves the fifty years of his sentence. But suppose the sentence is death instead of fifty years? Can the prisoner then justify himself by works? Never! Even if he should work for one hundred years at hard labor, the law would still demand death. The truth is that "without shedding of blood is no remission. ... So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." Hebrews 9:22-28.

This is why the sinner can never be saved by works. The penalty for sin is not ten years in prison or fifty years at hard labor. The sentence is death, and the law cannot be satisfied except by the shedding of blood. That unchangeable law with its unrelenting death sentence could no more be removed than the throne of God could be toppled. The guilt of the past cannot be erased by resolutions of good behavior in the future. The sinner finally is forced to confess that he owes something that he cannot pay. The law demands death and he cannot satisfy it without forfeiting his own life for eternity.

The Law Still Binding

Now we are brought to the question which has created confusion for multitudes of Christians: If the works of the law cannot save a person, is it therefore necessary to keep the law? Apparently this was a burning issue in the early church, because Paul asked the same question in Romans 6:1. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" In other words, does grace give us a license to disobey the law of God? His answer is: "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Verse 2.

How interesting it is that Christians in this age of relativism can invent their own definitions which condone lawbreaking. The Bible says sin is violating the Ten Commandments - the law which has been described as irrelevant and old-fashioned by many modern theologians. Don't be deceived. Every one of those great moral precepts is just as timely and needful today as they were when God wrote them on the imperishable tables of stone. And nothing has ever happened to make them less binding than they were when God gave them. In fact, we are going to discover that Jesus came to magnify the law and to open up its spiritual application, making it more comprehensive than the legalistic Pharisees ever imagined. Under the distilling influence of Christ's perfect life of obedience, we can see the spiritual

details of law-keeping which are neither recognized nor made possible apart from Him.

God's Law - A Mirror

At this point we must be very careful to designate also what the law cannot do. Even though it points out sin, it has no power to save from sin. There is no justifying, cleansing grace in it. All the works of all the laws would not be sufficient to save a single soul. Why? For the simple reason that we are saved by grace through faith, as a free gift. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Romans 3:20.

Do not stumble over this crucial point. We cannot earn forgiveness by working hard to obey. No sinner can gain favor and acceptance with God because he keeps the law. The law was not made for the purpose of saving or justifying. It was made to show us our need of cleansing and to point us to the great source of cleansing, Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Bible speaks of the law as a mirror to show us what kind of persons we really are. "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." James 1:23-25.

It is obvious to all that a mirror cannot remove a spot from the face. Looking into the mirror all day, and even rubbing it over the face, will not provide any cleansing. Its work is to reveal the spot and to point the dirty one to the sink for actual cleansing. The law, in like manner, can only condemn the sinner by giving him a knowledge of his condition and then pointing him to the cross for true cleansing. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8, 9. Paul further emphasizes this point in Galatians 2:16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ ... for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Right here we must consider one of the most fallacious propositions ever set forth relating to the law. Countless sincere Christians have accepted the idea that the Old Testament encompasses the dispensation of works and that the New Testament provides for a dispensation of grace. Under this garbled plan people were saved by works in the Old Testament and by grace in the New Testament. This is simply not true. The Bible holds forth only one beautiful, perfect plan for anybody to be saved, and that is by grace through faith. Heaven will not be divided between those who got there by works and those who got there by faith. Every single soul among the redeemed will be a sinner saved by grace.

Those who entered into salvation in the Old Testament were those who trusted the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ, and they demonstrated their faith by bringing a lamb and slaying it. They looked forward in faith to the atoning death of Jesus. We look back in faith to the same death and are saved in exactly the same way. Be very certain that all the redeemed host throughout eternity will be singing the same song of deliverance, exalting the Lamb slain from the foundations of the world.

The "New" Law of Christ

Some try to dispose of the Ten Commandments on the basis of the "new" commandments of love which Christ introduced. It is certainly true that Jesus laid down two great laws of love as a summary of all the law, but did He give the idea that these were new in point of time? The fact is that He was quoting directly from the Old Testament when He gave those new commandments. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Deuteronomy 6:5. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Leviticus 19:18. Certainly, those penetrating spiritual principles had been forgotten by the legalists of Christ's day, and they were new to them in relation to their life and practice. But they were not intended by Jesus to take the place of the Ten

Commandments.

When the lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment in the law, he received the answer: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:37-40.

Notice that these two love commandments simply summed up "all the law and the prophets." They all hang upon these two principles of love. Christ was saying that love is the fulfilling of the law just as Paul repeated it later in Romans 13:10. If one loves Christ supremely with heart, soul, and mind, he will obey the first four commandments that have to do with our duty to God. He will not take God's name in vain, worship other gods, etc. If one loves his neighbor as himself, he will obey the last six commandments which relate to our duty to our fellow men. He will not be able to steal from his neighbor, lie about him, etc. Love will lead to obeying or fulfilling all the law.

Not Under the Law

Often we hear this argument in an effort to belittle the law of God: "Well, since we are not under the law but under grace, we do not need to keep the Ten Commandments any longer." Is this a valid point? The Bible certainly does say that we are not under the law, but does that imply that we are free from the obligation to obey it? The text is found in Romans 6:14, 15. "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid."

How easily we could prevent confusion if we accepted exactly what the Bible says. Paul gives his own explanation of his statement. After stating that we are not under the law but under grace, he asks, "What then?" This simply means, "How are we to understand this?" Then notice his answer. In anticipation that some will construe his words to mean that you can break the law because you are under grace, he says, "Shall we sin (break the law) because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid." In the strongest possible language Paul states that being under grace does not give a license to break the law. Yet this is exactly what millions believe today, and they totally ignore Paul's specific warning.

If being under grace does not exempt us from keeping the law, then what does Paul mean by saying that Christians are not under the law? He gives that answer in Romans 3:19. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Here Paul equates being under the law with "being guilty before God." In other words, those who are under the law are guilty of breaking it and are under the condemnation of it. This is why Christians are not under it. They are not breaking it - not guilty and condemned by it. Therefore, they are not under it, but are under the power of grace instead. Later in his argument, Paul points out that the power of grace is greater than the power of sin. This is why he states so emphatically, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Grace overrules the authority of sin, giving power to obey God's law. This is the effective reason that we are not under the law's guilt and condemnation and also why Paul states that we will not continue to sin.

Suppose a murderer has been sentenced to death in the electric chair. Waiting for the execution the man would truly be under the law in every sense of the word - under the guilt, under the condemnation, under the sentence of death, etc. Just before the execution date the governor reviews the condemned man's case and decides to pardon him. In the light of extenuating circumstances the governor exercises his prerogative and sends a full pardon to the prisoner. Now he is no longer under the law but under grace. The law no longer condemns him. He is considered totally justified as far as the charges of the law are concerned. He is free to walk out of the prison and not a policeman can lay hands upon him. But now that he is under grace and no longer under the law, can we say that he is free to break the law?

Indeed not! In fact, that pardoned man will be doubly obligated to obey the law *because he has found grace* from the governor. In gratitude and love he will be very careful to honor the law of that state which granted him grace. Is that what the Bible says about pardoned sinners? "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Romans 3:31. Here is the most explicit answer to the entire problem. Paul asks if the law is nullified for us just because we have had faith in Christ's saving grace. His answer is that the law is established and reenforced in the life of a grace-saved Christian.

The truth of this is so simple and obvious that it should require no repetition, but the devious reasoning of those who try to avoid obedience makes it necessary to press this point a bit further. Have you ever been stopped by a policeman for exceeding the speed limit? It is an embarrassing experience, especially if you know you are guilty. But suppose you really were hurrying to meet a valid emergency, and you pour out your convincing explanation to the policeman as he writes your ticket. Slowly he folds the ticket and tears it up. Then he says, "All right, I'm going to pardon you this time, but ..." Now what do you think he means by that word "but"? Surely he means, "but I don't want to ever catch you speeding again." Does this pardon (grace) open the way for you to disobey the law? On the contrary, it adds compelling urgency to your decision not to disobey the law again. Why, then, should any true Christian try to rationalize his way out of obeying the law of God? "If ye love me," Jesus said, "keep my commandments." John 14:15.

Obedience - The Test of Love

Someone may bring up the objection that after the law has accomplished its purpose of pointing the sinner to Christ for cleansing, it will no longer be needed in the experience of the believer. Is that true? No, indeed. The Christian will always need the watchdog of the law to reveal any deviation from the true path and to point him back to the cleansing cross of Jesus. There will never be a time when that mirror of correction will not be needed in the progressive growth experience of the Christian.

Law and grace do not work in competition with each other but in perfect cooperation. The law points out sin, and grace saves from sin. The law is the will of God, and grace is the power to do the will of God. We do not obey the law *in order* to be saved but *because* we are saved. A beautiful text which combines the two in their true relationship is Revelation 14:12. "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." What a perfect description of faith and works! And the combination is found in those who are "saints."

The works of obedience are the real test of love. This is why they are so necessary in the experience of a true believer. "Faith without works is dead." James 2:20. No man ever won a fair maiden's heart by words alone. Had there been no flowers, no acts of devotion, no gifts of love, most men would still be searching for a companion. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Matthew 7:21.

Words and profession are not enough. The true evidence is obedience. Today's bumper stickers reflect a shallow concept of love. They say, "Smile if you love Jesus," "Honk if you love Jesus"; but what did the Master Himself say? He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. And that is exactly what most people don't want to do. If love makes no demands beyond a smile or wave, then it is welcome; but if the lifestyle must be disturbed, the majority will reject it. Unfortunately, most people today are not looking for truth. They are looking for a smooth, easy, comfortable religion which will allow them to live the way they please and still give assurance of salvation. There is indeed no true religion which can do that for them.

One of the strongest texts in the Bible on this subject is found in 1 John 2:4. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." John could write that with such assurance because it is one of the most deeply established truths in the Bible. Jesus spoke of those who said, "Lord, Lord," but did not do the will of the Father. Then He described many who would seek

entrance to the kingdom claiming to be workers of miracles in the name of Christ. But He would sorrowfully have to say, "I never knew you: depart from me." Matthew 7:21-23. You see, to know Christ is to love Him, and to love Him is to obey Him. The valid assumption of the Bible writers is very clear and simple: If one is not obeying Christ, he does not love Christ. And if he doesn't love the Master, then he doesn't know Him. John assured us, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3. Thus, we can see how knowing and loving and obeying are all tied closely together and are absolutely inseparable in the life of God's faithful people. The beloved John summed it up in these words: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3.

Is It Possible To Obey the Law?

Countless Christians have been taught that since the law is spiritual and we are carnal, no human being will ever be able in this life to meet the requirements of the perfect law. Is this true? Has it been given by God as a great idealistic, impossible goal toward which converted souls should struggle but never expect to attain? Is there some hidden reservation or secret meaning in the many commands to obey the ten great rules God wrote on stone? Did God mean what He said and say what He meant?

Many believe that only Christ could have obeyed that law and only because He had special powers that have not been made available to us. Certainly it is true that Jesus is the only One who lived without committing a single act of disobedience. His reason for living that perfect, victorious life is laid out in Romans 8:3, 4. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

Do not miss the point that Jesus came to condemn sin by His perfect life in the flesh in order that "the righteousness of the law" might be fulfilled in us. What is that righteousness? The Greek word "dikaima" is used here which means, literally, "the just requirement" of the law. This can only mean that Christ won His perfect victory in order to make the same victory available to us. Having conquered the devil, showing that in the flesh the law can be obeyed, Christ now offers to come into our hearts and share the victory with us. Only by His strength and indwelling power can the requirements of the law be fulfilled by anyone. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13.

Not one soul can ever keep one of those Ten Commandments in human power alone, but all of them may be kept through the enabling strength of Jesus. He imputes His righteousness for cleansing and imparts His righteousness for victorious living. Christ came in a body of flesh like our own and depended wholly upon His Father in living His life to demonstrate the kind of victory which is possible for every soul who will likewise draw upon the Father's grace.

Judged By the Law

Now, a final question about the subject of the law: How many of the Ten Commandments does one have to break in order to be guilty of sin? James says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." James 2:10-12.

Every individual will be judged at last by the mighty moral code of God's law. To break one is to be guilty of sin. The Bible indicates that the Ten Commandments are like a chain with ten links. When one link is broken, the chain is broken. So it is with the law. Those who stand in the judgment will have to meet the acid test of the Ten Commandments. If a practicing thief should seek entrance into the kingdom, he would be rejected. This is why Paul says thieves will not inherit the heavenly city. Furthermore, the Bible specifically declares that liars, adulterers, idolaters, and covetous men will not

be in the kingdom. Why? Because the Ten Commandments forbid those things, and men will be judged finally by that law. Not one person will be admitted into heaven who is willfully violating any one of the Ten Commandments, because breaking one is breaking all.

Someone might object that this is making works the basis of entering the kingdom. No. It is really making love the qualifying factor. Jesus said that the greatest commandment of all is to love God supremely. He also said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. Those who practice any known sin are really confessing that they do not love God with all their heart, soul, and mind. So it is the lack of love which shuts them out; not the act of disobedience which exposes that lack. Only when love is motivating the obedience does it become acceptable to God. Any other work is man's vain attempt to earn salvation and to deny the efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Ransomed for What?

A dramatic illustration of the law-grace doctrine is seen in the story of the slave auctions in old New Orleans long ago. Two planters were bidding for an old Negro slave who kept shouting his rebellion from the auction block. Finally, one of the planters won the bid and took the slave in his wagon back to the farm. Throughout the journey the defiant black man declared that he would not work for the new owner. When they arrived at the plantation, the planter dropped the shackles from the newly bought slave and said, "You are free to go. You are no longer a slave. I bought you in order to give you your liberty."

According to the story, the old man fell at the feet of the planter and said, "Master, I'll serve you forever."

In like manner, we were all held in the bondage of sin, condemnation, and death. Christ then paid the price to secure our freedom from that hopeless slavery. Lovingly He tells us that the reason He made the sacrifice was to set us free. What should our response be? Every ransomed child of God should fall at His feet and say, "Master, I love you for what you did for me. I'll serve you the rest of my life."

Think it through for a moment. Jesus had to die because the law had been broken. Sin demanded death. If the law could have been abrogated, the penalty of sin would have been set aside also. "For where no law is, there is no transgression." Romans 4:15. So strong was the authority of that unchangeable law that God Himself could not abolish it - not even to save His own Son from death.

The old, old story of the two brothers is almost a perfect illustration of both law and grace in operation. The older brother was a judge. His younger brother was brought before him as a transgressor of the law. From all the evidence it was clear to all that he was guilty. The court was tense. Would the judge mete out justice in such a case? The judge looked at his brother and sternly declared him guilty. Then he stunned the court by imposing the maximum fine. But immediately he left the bench and threw his arms around his brother and said, "I had to do it because you are guilty. I know you cannot pay the fine, but I will pay it for you."

The point of the story is dramatic in its impact. The brother was forgiven, but the penalty was not. It had to be paid. But by paying the maximum penalty, the judge not only did not abolish the law, but he greatly magnified it. He demonstrated that its binding claims could never be voided. In the same sense, God would not and could not abolish the law to save His beloved Son. It cost something to uphold the law and pay the maximum penalty. No one will ever know how much it cost the Son of God. But how thankful we should be that His love was as perfect as His justice. In His own body He bore the penalty, satisfied the law, and justified the transgressor.

Can't you see that no greater demonstration could have been made to prove the permanence of the Ten Commandments? In all the universe God could not have displayed a more convincing and irrefutable argument in favor of His law. Yet, in the face of this tremendous exhibition, misguided millions of poor, feeble men belittle the government of God by belittling His law. They seem not to understand

that the law is only a reflection of His holiness and righteousness. To speak of its abolition is to border on treason against the divine government of heaven.

Look into that holy law right now for a divine revelation of what God wants your life to be. Confess that you have no strength to live up to that perfect standard. Then turn your eyes to the only One who has kept that law perfectly and who desires this very moment to enter your life with enabling power. He will fulfill the righteousness of the law - the just requirements of the law - in you, so that you can say with Paul, "Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

Down From His Glory

Hebrews 2:16

Christ's substitutionary death on the cross stands at the heart of all other salvation truths revealed in the Bible. He took our place in suffering the penalty for sin. The demands of the law against the transgressor were fully satisfied by His voluntary acceptance of our punishment. To distort this great central fact about the plan of salvation would weaken the entire foundation of Christianity. It is this tremendous Bible truth concerning the imputed merits of Christ's atoning death which lends assurance to every born-again believer.

It has always been Satan's purpose to obscure the simplicity of the cross in its application to our sin problem. In various ages of history, he has raised confusing questions about the nature of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Early Christian records reveal that certain groups did not believe in the full deity of our Lord. The Arians, for example, taught that Jesus was only a created being. Another school of theology believed that Christ's death was only an appearance which did not constitute a real cutting off by death. Many conflicting theories have raised questions about the ethics of the atonement. How could He assume our guilt and accept our punishment in such a way that we can be declared righteous and uncondemned?

The Bible teaches that Christ was "manifest in the flesh" in order to accomplish certain things for the redemption of the human race. First of all, He would have to live a life of perfect obedience to redeem man's failure. Secondly, He would need to assume man's guilt for breaking the law and suffer the penalty of death demanded by the law. Those two things His atoning death and perfect obedience could then be credited to all who would accept Jesus as their divine Substitute. Through faith, the sinner could be counted as having paid the penalty of death and of living a life of perfect obedience. That experience, called justification by faith, is the center of all Protestant teaching about salvation. According to this beautiful Bible doctrine, the repentant sinner now stands before God as though he himself has satisfied the penalty. At the same time, his past record of failure and disobedience is covered by the imputed merits of Christ's perfect obedience, so that he can be counted as justified as though he had never sinned.

Any teaching which takes away from the effectiveness of this marvelous transaction must be considered a most dangerous heresy. Any doctrine which would make it impossible for Christ to live a perfect life in the flesh, or to die as a substitute for man, must be considered an enemy of righteousness.

I'd like to suggest that millions of Christians today have unwittingly accepted a theological position which does this very thing. Most of those who are deceived on this matter actually believe that they are honoring Christ by holding their view.

What Kind of Humanity Was Required?

To understand the problem, we must look closely at the subject of the Incarnation. It was the Saviour's entrance into the human family which laid the foundation for the entire redemptive process. According to the Scriptures, He had to be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, and die for our sins. In what manner and form did He fulfill those requirements? To assume human nature, He had to choose between the only two kinds available: the holy, unfallen nature of Adam, or the fallen nature of all Adam's descendants. If He had taken any other kind, it would not have been human nature at all.

The religious world today is divided over this matter of which nature Jesus chose for His incarnate life. Those who believe He took Adam's unfallen nature, before the lapse into sin, are called Prelapsarians. Those who believe that Jesus assumed the nature of fallen man are called Postlapsarians. Whichever position one chooses to accept of these two groups, he is locked into the limitations of that choice.

Let us consider first the implications of believing that Jesus came in the nature of unfallen Adam. It is

mind-boggling to discover where this position leads us. First of all, let's ask what kind of nature Adam had before the fall. Of course, it was a perfect, obedient nature for which sin had no appeal. But it was more than that. Adam's pre-fall nature was also one of conditional immortality which means that he could not die except by choosing to sin.

The truth is that there was no way for unfallen Adam to ever experience death except through disobedience. THE UNFALLEN NATURE OF ADAM COULD NOT DIE. It only became subject to death after Adam sinned. If he had never sinned, Adam would have continued to have access to the tree of life. "Obedience, perfect and perpetual, was the condition of eternal happiness. On this condition he was to have access to the tree of life." Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 49.

When God created man, He set up the condition by which he could live forever. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Death and separation from the tree of life was decreed for man only on the condition of his sinning. As long as Adam and Eve obeyed God, they could eat of the tree and were immune to death. "Just as prior to his fall Adam could be certain of immortality, vouchsafed to him by the tree of life, so now, subsequent to that catastrophe, his mortality was just as certain." 1 BC, p. 225.

It is very important for us to understand the reason for Jesus taking on a body of flesh when He came into this world. The Bible says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels *for the suffering of death*...that he by the grace of God *should taste death* for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

Jesus had to come as a man in order to experience death and pay the penalty for sin. He could not die as God. He had to put on a nature that was capable of dying. But here is the startling truth: If He had taken Adam's unfallen nature, He could never have died UNLESS HE HAD SINNED! That nature was not subject to death until after it was weakened by sin. Jesus could taste death only by being born into the fallen family of Adam's descendants. As one writer has put it, "Christ did in reality unite the offending nature of man with His own sinless nature, because by this act of condescension, He would be able to pour out His blood in behalf of the fallen race." EGW, Manuscript 166, 1898.

His Humanity Subject To Death

Paul emphasized this point when he described how Jesus "was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Notice that it was only after He was made in fashion as a man that He could become "obedient to death." His divinity was not subject to death, therefore He could not live here and die as God. He had to assume a nature that could die. The atonement for sin would have been totally impossible had He not been born with the only nature that could be "obedient unto death," Adam's fallen nature. This is why the Scriptures also teach, "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16).

Why did He not come with the nature of angels? Because they, like Adam, had been created with a conditional immortality, and were not subject to death unless or until they sinned. Christ could not have paid the price for sin as an angel because He could not have died. Neither could He make atonement as an unfallen Adam, because He could not have died in that nature either. He had to come as the "seed of Abraham."

The seed of Abraham consisted only and entirely of those who were subject to death because of Adam's sin. Had Christ taken the pre-fall nature of Adam, He could never have suffered the required death for our sins unless He had first sinned, and sin would have disqualified Him from being our Saviour.

Again I say we are locked into the limitations which the pre-fall nature requires. Jesus made it very clear that He was submitting to live in this world as a man and not as God. But limiting Himself to the condition of humanity, Jesus could draw from His Father only those powers and advantages which are

available to others living in the flesh. Repeatedly Christ stated that He could say nothing and do nothing that was not given Him by the Father.

In other words, Jesus did not capriciously shift back and forth between His divine and human natures in order to escape the exigencies of this earthly life. He accepted the dangers, rebuffs and sufferings imposed by His living as a man. Satan constantly sought to goad Him into using His divinity to deliver Himself from certain situations, and it must have been the Master's strongest test not to call upon His own omnipotence during those excruciating final hours of His life on earth. Had He done so, the plan of salvation would have failed. Even in His death, he had to submit to the conditions imposed by His human nature.

The Pre-fall Nature Could Not Die

Now we are brought to a dilemma. If Jesus possessed Adam's unfallen nature, it was not possible for Him to die except by sinning or by changing those rules under which He had submitted to live His earthly life. By doing either, the plan of salvation would have been thwarted. Some might suggest that by assuming man's guilt and being made sin for us, Jesus' nature was also changed so that it could experience death. But this is not the case. The vicarious assumption of our guilt for sin would not have changed His human nature. Sin did not enter His life to corrupt or defile. He only received those sins vicariously, which means He took them AS THOUGH they were His own, even though they were not.

But please mark this important distinction: When He assumed human nature, He did not do it vicariously. He did not live here AS THOUGH He were a man. He actually took human nature. He became one of us in reality. Therefore, the vicarious assumption of man's guilt did not enter His life to corrupt that nature with actual sin. Whatever human nature He had experienced for thirty-three years was still with Him, and He carried it to the cross with Him. He was just as holy after assuming our guilt as He was before. The only change was in the way God looked on Him and dealt with Him judicially.

According to God's creation edict, man's conditional immortality could be lost ONLY by COMMITTING sin. It could not be lost through some vicarious ACCOUNTING of guilt. Only the defiling influence of sin entering the heart could bring a change of nature which would make man subject to death. This never happened to Jesus. His being accounted as guilty did not make Him guilty. But His human nature was not just *accounted* to Him: it was real. And He had to accept that reality through His entire life, even in the experience of death on the cross. The fact that He submitted to that death is proof positive that He was not acting in harmony with the requirements of a pre-fall nature.

Some claim that it does not matter what we believe on this question of Christ's incarnate nature, but the truth is that tremendous issues hinge on this question. If I choose to believe that Jesus came in the unfallen nature, there is no way for me to avoid one of the following conclusions:

- (1) He could not die to pay the penalty for my sin, or
- (2) He Himself sinned in order to become subject to death, or
- (3) He had to exercise His divine power to change the human nature He had assumed, in order to escape the limitations it imposed. Only thus could He be made subject to the death required for the atonement. The unfallen nature could not die.

Any one of those three things would have thwarted His ability to fulfill His substitutionary role as our Redeemer.

It has been claimed that those who follow the post-fall doctrine of Christ's nature thereby make Him guilty of sin. I'd like to suggest that only those who believe in the pre-fall nature project such a distorted view. In fact, theirs is the only position which makes it necessary for Christ to sin in order to accomplish the plan of salvation.

The Prelapsarians sincerely believe that to be born with Adam's fallen nature would make Jesus guilty of sin. Consequently, in an abortive attempt to remove Him from being subject to sin, they remove Him from being subject to death!

Original Sin Not Biblical

Why then have those who believe in the post-fall nature been charged with making Christ a sinner? Simply because those who make the charge believe in the doctrine of original sin. Postlapsarians do not believe that sin is imparted by nature, but rather by choice. They hold that Jesus did not assume any guilt when He was born as a man. He inherited the same weakened nature that sin imposed upon all of Adam's descendants, but He never yielded to those weaknesses in a single instance. His life was absolutely holy and sinless. Filled with the Holy Spirit from His mother's womb and trusting the daily impartation of heavenly power, He lived a life of uninterrupted victory over every sin.

That same life of continual victory is available to every other descendant of Adam through the process of conversion and sanctification. The same divine nature which sustained our Lord for 33 years is the same divine nature we partake of when we accept Christ as our Saviour. His submission was total and lifelong; while ours is often temporal and limited by our own choice.

We are brought to the undeniable conclusion that this subject is not one on which we can be neutral. In the doctrine of the pre-fall nature of Christ, we not only lose the encouragement of having even one example of victory over sin in the flesh, but we abolish all possibility of Christ being our divine sin-bearer. God forbid that we should dishonor His name by holding such a limited, erroneous view of His substitutionary atoning death for our sins.

Some have subscribed to the idea that Jesus did not assume either the pre-fall or post-fall nature of man, but an entirely unique nature which has never been possessed by other human beings. They propose that He had the spiritual nature of unfallen Adam and the physical nature of post-fall Adam. They feel it is necessary to do this in order to account for Jesus' sinless experience in His years of infancy and youth. But is it necessary to give Him a different nature because He had a different experience from other children? How different was His experience? It was a life of full surrender and obedience to His father. Is this accessible to other children? It is indeed, just as soon as they are old enough to make a total commitment to Christ. If other human beings are able to appropriate the power of victory over sin at a later age, even with a fallen nature, then why couldn't Jesus do the same at an earlier age with the same nature? We are talking only about a difference of time, not a difference of nature.

Someone might say, "Well, that gives Jesus an advantage over us." But wait a moment. What kind of advantage is it? If you accepted Christ two years before I did, then you had an advantage over me DURING THAT TWO YEARS. The truth is that Christ only had the same kind of advantage over us that we have over all others who enter the conversion experience later than we do. It is not a different kind of human nature than that which is common to every soul who surrenders the life unreservedly to Christ. It was simply that His human nature was submissive to the Father from birth, whereas we often allow circumstances to delay such a submission. John the Baptist was also filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth according to the word of the angel (Luke 1:15).

What are the objections to believing that Jesus had the spiritual nature of unfallen Adam and the physical nature of post-fall Adam? Three serious flaws seem to make it irreconcilable with biblical theology:

(1)

It Conflicts With The Wholistic Bible View Of Man's Nature

Where does the Bible teach that there is a dichotomy between body and spirit? Scriptural truth has always been in favor of a unified understanding of human nature, with body and spirit interacting

together to produce total mental and physical health. But when we come to the nature of Christ, this wholistic concept is abandoned and some begin to talk in dualistic terms with part of Christ's nature being sinful and part being sinless.

How could there be such a combination within Him as the unfallen spiritual nature of Adam and, at the same time, the fallen physical nature of sinful men? Are we trying to say that Christ's physical weaknesses had no impact on His spiritual nature? Would it not be true that Christ would be most prone to discouragement or irritation when His body was physically tired? If this is true, then Christ would have tendencies to sin in His moral or spiritual nature.

(2)

It Suggests a Hybrid Nature Possessed Neither By Adam Nor Those Who Lived After Him

With no such combination known among human kind, this totally different nature could not be designated as "human nature" at all. It would be hopelessly at odds with the Bible requirement that Christ "also himself likewise took part of the same...in all things...made like unto his brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). No one would contend that such a blend of unfallen and fallen natures would be in "all things" like his brethren! It would be unlike "His brethren" before the fall if He had a fallen physical nature, and it would be unlike "His brethren" after the fall if He had a sinless spiritual nature. What other "brethren" are left? Logic compels us to finally confess that if His nature was "in all things...the same" as His brethren, then it would be required that some brethren be produced who had an unfallen spiritual nature and a fallen physical nature. If no such brother could be found, then Jesus would, by necessity, have to possess a human nature "in all things...the same" as pre-fall Adam or "in all things...the same" as post-fall Adam. To do otherwise is to either deny the plain words of Scripture or deny simple logic.

(3)

It Would Nullify The Possibility For Christ To be "In All Points Tempted Like We Are." (Hebrews 4:15)

It seems inconceivable that Adam's holy, unfallen nature could be tempted in every way that we are tempted. He had no inward response to temptation whatsoever, and surely there is no one who will assert that our fallen natures are not strongly tempted from within. Good theology does not defy rationality. Whatever we believe on this point, it must be consistent with clear statements of the Bible. If Jesus was tempted in all points "like as we are," it could not have taken place in the physical arena alone. Most of our temptations arise from a weakened spiritual and moral nature. If this source of our strongest temptations was absent in Jesus, then He never could have been tempted in all points "like as we are." It would be a self-contradiction to even suggest such a thing.

Now let us look briefly at the biblical evidence for the post-fall view. The second chapter of Hebrews contains an abundance of material on this subject. Consider these words: "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same.... Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:14-17).

This verse is one of the most emphatic and definitive to be found in the Bible. A combination of words is used which leaves absolutely no doubt about what is being said. Any one of the words would express the clear thought being presented.

For example:

He took part of the same or

He *also* took part of the same

He *Himself* took part of the same

He *likewise* took part of the same

In *all things* made like His brethren

Why did God choose to give a five-fold impact by putting all those expressions together in one Scripture setting? It almost sounds repetitive. "He also himself likewise took part of the same." Surely the reason lies in the extraordinary importance of the truth being expressed. God wanted to leave no lingering question about the nature of the Lamb who was slain. Any misunderstanding here could cast a shadow over the entire plan of salvation. It could challenge the validity of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross and the adequacy of His imputed righteousness.

How is it possible for anyone to misconstrue the precise language used in these verses? The answer is obvious. Satan hates this truth. It is a dramatic illustration of his deceptive cunning that he is able to take the most unambiguous verse in the Bible and cloud its meaning. It is also an amazing example of the power of the mind to believe what it wants to believe.

I submit that if God had used ten or twenty ways of saying the same thing it would still be rejected and denied by those who do not want to believe it. Would it be any more convincing by adding extra words and phrases? For example, "He also himself verily likewise in the same manner truly in all things exactly took part of the same." It would be useless to multiply adjectives and more rhetoric for it could not make the matter any more clear than it is.

Look at that phrase carefully, "took part of the same." What does it mean? The same as what? The previous verse gives the answer. The same as the children who are born of flesh and blood. By this illustration, the Bible writer closes every possibility for speculating about the human nature of Jesus. Nothing could be more convincing. Since no children were born into the world before Adam and Eve sinned, it is beyond question that every child who has partaken of flesh and blood by necessity partook of Adam's fallen nature. So when the author of Hebrews wrote that Jesus "took part of the same" and was "in all things...made like unto his brethren" it is an unanswerable assertion. Only by proving that some children were born of flesh and blood without a fallen nature could anyone rationally challenge the post-fall human nature of Christ. The very same verse declares that He took the same nature as all other children born in order that "he might be a merciful and faithful high priest...to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Only thus could He have been qualified as a suitable representative of the human family before the Father.

Someone might argue that Christ could do anything He wanted to do without limitations of any kind. Indeed He could have. He could have chosen to sin, but He didn't! He could have saved Himself from the pain of the thorns and the nails, but He didn't! He could have come in a nature that could not suffer death, but He didn't! Thank God that He did none of those things, but "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." What a Saviour!

Hell-Fire: A Twisted Truth Untangled

These are questions which deserve sound Bible answers, and the controversy surrounding the subject should not discourage us from exposing all the truth as it is in Christ. First of all, we need to understand that there is a heaven to win and a hell to shun. Jesus taught that every soul will be either saved or lost. There is no neutral place, and there are no second prizes. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, And them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matthew 13:41-43.

In view of these two ultimate destinies for all who have ever been born, how earnest we should be in seeking to find the right way. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." The only absolute safety for anyone is to take exactly what Jesus taught about hell. His doctrine is the only one which is wholly dependable and true. He said some will be cast into the fire, and some will shine forth in the kingdom.

Strangely enough, Christ has been charged by many religious leaders with teaching a falsehood on this subject. They have accused Him of teaching that an immortal soul flies away from the body at death to either heaven or hell. This is not what Jesus taught at all. He never gave the least intimation that some disembodied soul separates from the body at the time of death. And surely He did not ever give the impression that the wicked suffer an eternal torment as soon as they die.

Now let's get a sample of what Jesus really taught on the subject of hell. "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell ..." Mark 9:43. These words of the Master prove beyond any shadow of doubt that it is the body which goes into the fire, and not some mystical soul. In Matthew 5:30 He spoke of the "whole body" being cast into hell. That means hands, feet, eyes, and all the other members of the physical body.

In contrast to the doctrine of Christ, modern pulpits resound with dramatic portrayals of imaginary souls leaving the body at death--souls that have neither substance nor shape. This view, popular though it may be, is totally contrary to what Jesus taught. Mark it well, for the great Master Teacher spelled it out repeatedly in the gospels--those who are cast into the fire of hell will go there with hands, feet, eyes, and all the physical features of the body. They will not go in some ethereal state of formless spirit or soul.

Now we are prepared to examine four great facts from the Bible which will illuminate most of the questions which have been asked about the fate of the wicked.

1.0 Punishment After the Judgment

The first important fact about hell is this: *The unsaved do not go to any place of punishment as soon as they die, but are reserved in the grave until the day of judgment to be punished.* Christ explicitly taught this truth in the well-known parable of the wheat and the tares. After the householder had sown the wheat in the field, his servant came to report that tares were growing among the grain. His question was whether he should pull up the weeds while they were still very small. The householder's answer was, "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." Matthew 13:29, 30.

Now follow the words of Christ as He explains the meaning of the parable: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire;

so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 13:37-43.

No one can simplify the parable by enlarging on what Jesus said. It is so clear that a child can understand it. He said the tares represented the wicked people, and that they would be cast into the fire "at the end of the world." It was in the harvest that the separation would take place, and He plainly stated, "The harvest is the end of the world." How can anyone misconstrue these words of Christ? The whole idea of the wicked going into the fire at the time of death contradicts our Lord's specific teaching that they would be cast into the fire at the end of the world.

Since the judgment also takes place after Christ comes we can see how impossible it would be for anyone to be punished before that time. Justice demands that a person be brought into judgment before being punished. Peter declared, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." 2 Peter 2:9. That certainly makes sense, doesn't it? Suppose a man should be brought into the court accused of stealing, and the judge said, "Put him away for ten years; then we'll try his case." Listen, even a human judge would not be that unfair! He would be impeached for such an action. Surely God would not be guilty of such a farce.

If we let the Bible mean what it says, there can be no doubt on this point. The wicked are "reserved" until when? Until the "day of judgment." To be what? "To be punished"! This means they cannot be punished before that judgment day. Does the Bible tell where they are reserved until then? Christ Himself said, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5:28-29

How plain! Jesus said that both good and bad will come forth *from their graves* to receive either life or damnation. This proves that from the time of death until they come forth in the resurrection they are not receiving any recompense or punishment. It all happens after they come forth. They are reserved until that day just as Peter indicated, but Christ spelled out where they will be reserved--"in the graves."

If plainer words are needed, listen to Jesus speaking in Luke 14:14, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Or hear Him again in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." When is "then"? When He comes with His angels. No reward or recompense is handed out until the resurrection of the just, when He comes with all the angels. These verses are beyond controversy. Taken in their context, they contain no ambiguity or hidden meaning.

Again Christ is quoted in the very last chapter of the Bible, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12. Here He reminds us that "every man"--every person--will receive his just reward when Christ returns to this earth. Job declares "that the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction. They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath." Daniel wrote that they which "sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Daniel 12:2.

Can there be any doubt where the wicked are reserved before facing resurrection, judgment, and punishment? We have the testimony of Peter, Daniel, Job and the Master Himself. There is no room to quibble. They are reserved in the grave.

Now we come to the second great fact about hell: *None of the unsaved will be cast into hell-fire until after the second coming of Jesus at the end of the world.* Although we have already seen substantial evidence on this point, let's look even more. Describing the punishment of the wicked, John wrote: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and

brimstone: which is the second death." Revelation 21: 8.

2.0 No Second Death Before the Resurrection

Here the lost are pictured in the fires of hell, suffering the punishment for their sins. And what is that punishment? "The second death," says John. Do you realize what this proves about the wicked? It proves they will not be cast into the lake of fire until after the resurrection takes place. These people die the second death in the fire, but they cannot suffer a second death until they get a second life. They lived the first life in this world and died the first death, going into the grave. Before they can die a second death they must be resurrected--they must be given a second life. This, of course, is what happens at the end of the world. Jesus said, "All that are in the graves shall come forth."

Now after getting that second life in the resurrection, the wicked will be punished for their sins in hell-fire, "which is the second death." By the way, that second death is the final, eternal death from which there will be no resurrection. But the point to be noted is the *time of this hell-fire punishment*--it is after the resurrection at the end of the world. It does not take place at the time of the first death as so many have been led to believe.

Does the Bible tell us how the wicked will be cast into the lake of fire? Yes, it does. John describes the dramatic events that take place at the close of the millennium. "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." Revelation 20:7-9.

Here at the end of the millennium all the wicked people who have ever lived will come forth in the second resurrection. After describing how the righteous would come to life and reign with Christ during the thousand years, John wrote, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Revelation 20:5.

The rest of the dead, of course, had to be the wicked, and their resurrection will provide opportunity for Satan to take up his continuing battle against God and the saints. He goes out to gather the host of lost ones, who have been raised from the dead. He has people to deceive once more, and he convinces them that they can prevail against the New Jerusalem which has descended from God out of heaven (Revelation 21:2). As they march up and encompass the city, the wicked are suddenly cut down by the devouring fire which rains upon them from heaven. *This is the hell-fire which is the final punishment for sin.*

3.0 Location of Hell

The Bible clearly asserts that this fire devours the wicked right here on "the breadth of the earth." Every Bible writer who speaks on the subject of hell adds new insight on this second death of the wicked. Peter states: "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." 2 Peter 3:7. Then he goes on to describe the day of the Lord which will melt the very elements with fervent heat.

The language of Peter is very explicit about the place of punishment for the ungodly. He says this earth is reserved for that fire which will bring judgment and perdition to the wicked. Their punishment will be in this earth. Isaiah declared, "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch." Isaiah 34:8, 9.

The prophet portrays the entire planet enveloped in the destroying fire. Even the streams and dust are transformed into an exploding combustion of pitch and brimstone. Isaiah says this is God's vengeance

and "recompense" at the end of the controversy.

David adds to the testimony with these words, "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." Psalm 11:6. Notice that he uses almost the same words as John and Peter in describing the fate of the wicked. All agree as to the place of the punishment (the earth) and the agent of punishment (fire).

This brings us to the third great fact about the subject of hell. *Hell as a place of punishment will be this earth turned into a lake of fire at the Day of Judgment.* But this also raises some other very interesting questions about the fate of the lost. One of the most intriguing and puzzling has to do with the length of punishment. HOW long will the wicked continue to live and suffer in that fire?

No one can answer that question precisely because the Bible says they will be punished according to their works. This means there will be degrees of punishment. Some will suffer longer than others. But one thing we can say with certainty--the wicked won't live in that fire throughout eternity.

4.0 Hell-Fire Not Endless

There are several reasons for being so sure on this point. First of all, this earth is also declared to be the final home for the righteous. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: For they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5. Peter, after describing this earth exploding and burning with a great noise, saw a new earth filled with righteousness. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." 2 Peter 3:13.

The wicked cannot continue to live in this planet because it has been specifically promised, in its entirety, to Abraham's spiritual seed (Romans 4:13). After being purged of all the curse of sin, it will revert to the first dominion, and to God's original plan for it. It will be finally what God intended it to be--a perfect home for a perfect people.

In the second place, the wicked cannot continue to live in this earth because they have never trusted Christ for eternal life. It is only the righteous who receive the gift of eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. ..." John 3:16. But what about those who don't believe in him? They surely will perish. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. Please don't miss the pointed simplicity of these verses. The wicked are never promised life. They are promised death--eternal death. Only the righteous are promised life--eternal life.

But there is only one way to get life without end, and that is through faith in Jesus. John describes it this way: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." 1 John 5:11, 12. Let me ask you a question: Do those wicked ones in the lake of fire have the Son of God? Of course not. Then how could they have life? John says, "Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3:15. Will those murderers in hell-fire continue to have life for eternity? Never.

It would be the rankest heresy to believe that eternal life could be obtained from some other source than Jesus. Where would the wicked get it? Paul declares that Jesus Christ "has brought life and immortality to light *through the gospel.*" 2 Timothy 1:10. Inspiration reveals no other source of immortality except through the gospel of Christ. Where is a text in the Bible which describes the conferring of immortality upon the wicked? You can read often about the righteous receiving it, but never the unbeliever.

Paul said, "Behold I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

This text speaks of a certain point in time when the righteous will be instantly changed into immortal beings. That time is still future. It occurs when Jesus returns, at the last trumpet sound, when the resurrection takes place. Nowhere in the Bible do we read of the wicked being changed in this manner. And it is precisely because they never receive this gift of eternal life that they are unable to keep living in the lake of fire.

It is inconceivable and unreasonable to fabricate such an event. It is contrary to the Bible and repugnant to the senses. Ezekiel declared, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Ezekiel 18:4. No matter what we understand a soul to be, let's accept the simple Bible fact that it can die and will die as a result of sin.

If the wicked live eternally in the fire, then they have the same thing as the righteous except in a different place. Who could give them eternal life but Christ? John 3:16 settles this issue so clearly and simply. Those who do not believe in the only begotten Son will *perish*. They will die. They will die the second death--an eternal death from which they will never be raised. That death will never end. It is an endless, eternal punishment, because it is an endless, eternal death.

5.0 Unquenchable Fire

Someone may raise this question: What about the unquenchable fire that burns the wicked? Doesn't that mean it will never go out? Of course, it doesn't. To quench means to extinguish or put out. No one will be able to put out the fire of hell. That is the strange fire of God. No one will be able to escape from it by extinguishing it. Isaiah says of that fire, "Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before it." Isaiah 47:14. After it has accomplished its work of destruction, that fire will go out. No one can deliver themselves from its flame by putting it out, but finally not a coal will be left. So say the Scriptures.

Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem would burn with a fire that could not be quenched (Jeremiah 17:27), but it burned down to ashes (2 Chronicles 36:19-21). Read those verses and see how the Bible uses the word "quench." It does not mean fire that will never go out. It only means what it says, "unquenchable." It can't be quenched.

And what can we say about the expressions "eternal" and "everlasting" which are used to describe the fires of hell? There is absolutely no confusion or contradiction when we allow the Bible to supply its own definition of terms. Many make the mistake of applying modern definitions to those biblical words without reference to their ancient contextual usage. This violates one of the most fundamental rules of interpretation.

The fact is that eternal fire does not mean a fire that will never go out. The same expression is used in Jude 7 concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha. "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

It is quite obvious that Sodom is not still burning today. The Dead Sea rolls over the place where those ancient cities once stood. Yet they burned with "eternal fire," and we are told that it was an example of something. What is it an example of? "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." 2 Peter 2:6.

There it is! That eternal fire which brought Sodom to ashes is an example of what will finally happen to the wicked. If this text is true, the same kind of fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha will also burn the wicked in the lake of fire. It will have to be eternal fire. Does that mean it will also burn the wicked to ashes? The Bible says Yes. "For behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud,

yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch ... And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:1 3.

No words of any language could make it more forceful or clear. This eternal fire burns up eternally. Even Satan, the root, is finally consumed. HOW consistent the whole picture appears as we let the Bible explain its own terms. What devious manipulation of words would be required to evade the obvious meaning of these words. Yet those who have been prejudiced by a lifetime of tradition can read those words "burn them up ... they shall be ashes" and still insist that the wicked are alive and suffering.

Admittedly, there are some ambiguous verses on this subject, but we are finding that they all harmonize when the context is considered, and the Bible is allowed to be its own commentary.

Even Christ's words in Matthew 25:46, 9 are not confusing when we take the obvious meaning. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Many are troubled over the expression, "everlasting punishment," but notice that it does not say "everlasting punishing." Whatever the punishment is, it will last eternally. Does the Bible tell us what the punishment is? Of course. "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. So Jesus was simply saying that the death would be everlasting. It would never end. It would never be broken by a resurrection.

Paul simplifies it further with these words: "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished ... " Now, listen, Paul is going to tell us what the punishment is. "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." 2 Thessalonians 1 8, 9 So the punishment is everlasting destruction--a destruction that is everlasting. From it there will be no resurrection or hope of life.

But what about that worm which dieth not? Many have read the words of Jesus about hell, "Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." Mark 9:45, 46. Some have interpreted the worm to be the soul. Is that what Jesus meant? Nowhere in the Bible is there any allusion to the soul as a worm.

In this instance Jesus used the word "Gehenna" for the word "hell." It so happened that Gehenna was an actual place of burning just outside the walls of Jerusalem. No doubt, Christ's listeners could see the smoke curling up from the Valley of Gehenna, where dead bodies and garbage were constantly being burned. If anything fell outside the destructive flames, it was quickly consumed by maggots or worms. With the vivid scenes of utter extinction before their eyes, Jesus used the Gehenna fire as an example of the complete destruction of hell-fire. The fire was never quenched, and the worms were constantly at work upon the bodies--a picture of total destruction.

Perhaps the most easily misconstrued text about hell is John's allusion to the smoke ascending "for ever and ever." For those who are unfamiliar with other uses of this phrase in the Bible, it can be very confusing indeed. But a comparison of verses in both Old and New Testaments reveal that the words "for ever" are used 57 times in the Bible in reference to something that has already come to an end. In other words, "for ever" does not always mean "without end."

Many notable examples could be cited, but two or three are noteworthy. In Exodus 21, the conditions are laid down concerning the law of servitude. If a servant chose to continue serving the master he loved rather than his freedom when it came due, then his ear was to be pierced with an awl and the Scripture declares, "He shall serve him for ever." Verse 6. But how long would that servant serve his human master? Only as long as he lived, of course. So the words "for ever" did not mean without end.

Hannah took her son Samuel to God's temple, where he would "there abide for ever." 1 Samuel 1:22. Yet in verse 28 we are plainly told, "As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." The original

meaning of the term "for ever" indicates an indefinite period of time. Generally it defines the period of time in which something can continue to exist under the circumstances prevailing. Even Jonah's stay in the whale's belly is described by him as "for ever." Jonah 2:6.

Someone may object that this could also limit the life of the righteous in heaven, because they are described as glorifying God forever. The terms are the same for both the saved and the lost. But there is one tremendous difference in the circumstances involved. The saints have received the gift of immortality. Their life now measures with the life of God. Immortality means "not subject to death." The words "for ever" used in reference to them could only mean "without end," because they are immortal subjects already. But when "for ever" is used to describe the wicked, we are talking about mortal creatures who can die and must die. Their "for ever" is only as long as their mortal nature can survive in the fire which punishes them according to their works.

6.0 Soul and Body Destroyed

This brings us to the final fact concerning the fate of the wicked. *After the unsaved are punished according to their sins, they will be wiped out of existence, both body and soul.* Jesus states it very simply, "And fear not them which kill the body ... but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28.

In the light of this statement, how can anyone continue to claim immortality for the wicked? Jesus, the only One who can bestow the gift of life, rejects the possibility that those in hell can continue to live in any form whatsoever. The life will be snuffed out for eternity, and the body will be annihilated in the flames.

The psalmist wrote: "But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away." Psalm 37:20 "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be." Verse 10.

The most powerful, definitive words in human language are used to describe the destruction in hell, but people still insist that the writers do not really mean what their words express. "Destroy," "consume," "burn up," "devour," "death"--do these words have some mysterious, opposite meaning in the Bible than they have in other books? We have no reason to think so. The fact is that theology has made an ogre out of our great God of love. He has been portrayed as more cruel than Hitler. Even though Hitler tortured people and experimented with them, finally he allowed them to die. But God will keep these deathless souls alive for the purpose of seeing them writhe and scream throughout eternity, so the theologians claim.

7.0 God's Justice Vindicated

Not only is such a picture misrepresentative of God's love, it also distorts His justice. Think for a moment about the implications of a doctrine that would consign every lost soul to an immediate, never-ending hell at the time of death. Suppose a man died 5,000 years ago with one cherished sin in his life. His soul would go instantly into the fire to be tormented for eternity. Then picture another death; that of Adolph Hitler, who supervised the deaths of millions of people. According to the popular doctrine, his soul also would immediately enter hell to suffer eternally. But the man who was lost because of only one sin, will burn 5,000 years longer than Hitler. How could that be just? Would God deal in such a manner? It would contradict the Bible statement that each one must be punished according to his works.

There are two extreme views in current circulation concerning the punishment of the wicked. One is Universalism, which contends that God is too good to allow anyone to be lost. The other is the awful doctrine of endless torment which would perpetuate for all eternity a dark abyss of anguish and suffering. Both are wrong. The truth lies in between. God will punish the wicked according to their works, but He will not immortalize evil in the process.

I truly believe that many honest souls have been turned away from God because of the* revulsion at this misrepresentation of His character. They can't love someone who would arbitrarily keep evil people in endless torment with no purpose in view. No rehabilitation is possible. Only a vindictive spirit of revenge could be served by such an unspeakable arrangement. Is God like that? After hearing the Bible truth about hell, a bank president threw his arms around my shoulders and said, "Joe, I'm a believer again. For years I've been an agnostic because I had been taught that God would torture the wicked eternally."

8.0 No More Pain or Death

Someday soon God will have a clean universe. All the effects of sin will be banished forever. There will be no sin, no sinners and no devil to tempt. It will be just exactly like God planned it in the beginning. John described that future home in these words, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Revelation 21:4.

Can you find any room in those precious words for any suffering on the part of anybody in the whole recreated universe? God said crying and pain would be no more. Do you believe His Word or do you choose to believe man's surmising? Just four verses before writing this promise, John described how the wicked would be cast into the lake of fire. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." Revelation 20:15; 21:1.

That lake of fire is right here on planet earth according to Revelation 20:9. But please notice that this place where the wicked burn will pass away, and God will re-create the new earth in its stead. Then Revelation 21:2, 3 describe the New Jerusalem descending, and verse four says there will be no more sorrow, pain, crying, or death.

In order for no more pain to exist, there can be no eternal hell existing either. The two things are mutually exclusive of each other. We should thank God every day that His plan will finally bring an end to suffering. Satan will not be here to cause pain, and God promises that His new kingdom will not even contain a shadow of a pain.

9.0 Hell Not Intended for Us

Finally, we should rejoice that hell was never intended for you and me. Jesus said it was "prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:41. If we stumble into that fire, it will be the most colossal blunder we could ever make. You would have to go there over the broken body of Jesus Christ and in spite of the Father's love, the Holy Spirit's pleading, and the heavenly influence of a million angels. The most unanswerable question in the whole world is this: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" There is no answer because there is no escape except through Christ and His cross.

No one will be lost because he sinned, because everyone has sinned. No one will be left out of heaven because he lied, stole, or committed adultery. The only reason anyone will be lost is because he refuses to turn away from his sin into the arms of a loving Saviour who stands ready to pardon and cleanse from all unrighteousness. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Hogs and Other Hazards

1 Corinthians 10:31

During my 46 years of ministry, largely in public evangelism, I have observed some interesting methods of Bible study. For example, many people diligently search the Scriptures, not to find truth, but simply to gather support for their preconceived religious ideas. Their minds are not open to be taught by God's Holy Spirit, and therefore they can manipulate the sacred texts to mean exactly what they want to believe.

One of the great, basic principles of Bible study is to search out the truth on any given subject from all the texts in the Bible. It is literally true that you can prove almost anything you want to prove by using a single, isolated text of Scripture. That is why it is so important to bring together the consensus of what Moses, David, Jesus, Paul and all other inspired authors have to say on the subject. That may involve a hundred or more verses! And even then, there still might be some confusion, because five or six of those hundred texts can always seem to contradict the rest.

So should those half-dozen aberrant verses be discarded since they don't harmonize with the others? No indeed. They should be given special study in the context of surrounding verses, and also in comparison with the 95 which are in agreement. Very quickly it will be discovered that the ambiguity exists only in the mind, and the total Bible picture is in perfect focus and unity.

Someone has said that a text without its context is a pretext, and I believe it. This is particularly true of several strange verses which have been a stumbling block to thousands of earnest Bible students. Under careful scrutiny, however, these "problem texts" are found to be in harmony with each other and also with the rest of the inspired record. Because these texts relate to diet-one of the most popular subjects on the public mind today-we shall seek to untangle some of the confusing questions which have been raised about forbidden foods and biblical health laws.

The four scriptures we shall examine are in apparent conflict with scores of other clear declarations scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments on the subject of proper diet. But before we begin, it is important to note some of the landmark points which God has made through the writings of His servants.

Entire chapters, such as Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, have laid down detailed listings of the clean and unclean categories of animals. And since the original diet prescribed by God included no meat whatsoever (Genesis 1:29), we can be absolutely certain that no forbidden, "unclean" meat was included in the diets of those who lived before the flood and followed God's law.

After the flood, even though clean animals were introduced to the diets of the eight survivors due to the universal destruction of all vegetation, no unclean animals were permitted for food. God commanded the preservation of clean animals in the ark by sevens and the unclean animals by twos (Genesis 7:1-3). Obviously, this allowed only for the clean category to be eaten, while the male and female of the unclean animals were preserved for perpetuating the species.

Incidentally, this post-diluvian permission to eat even the clean animals produced an interesting phenomenon. Almost immediately, the life span of the human race fell from around 800 years to about 150 years.

The flood experience also demolishes a popular argument used by those who insist on eating both clean and unclean animals. They claim that the law of unclean foods only applied to the Jewish people. This

cannot be correct, since there were no Jews in Noah's day when the restriction was laid, by God Himself, upon all the human race. Furthermore, the Bible declares that the forbidden-meat law will still be in effect at the second coming of Jesus. (Isaiah 66:15-17.)

It's Not What Goes In ...

But now, let's look at the four most popular arguments used to support the eating of unclean meats. In Matthew 15:11, we find such a text which, at first sight, seems to support those arguments. Jesus said, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."

Without consideration of the context, this verse seems to be saying that we may eat anything without being condemned or contaminated. But when we examine the entire chapter, we find that it has nothing to do with diet. From verse 2, we learn that Jesus was dealing with a controversy by the Pharisees, who insisted that the disciples give their hands a ceremonial washing before they ate food. The purpose of this bath was to cleanse away the defilement of touching any Gentile person or object. Christ condemned their hypocritical tradition in verses 3-10, declaring that they were worshipping Him in vain by teaching manmade laws. Then in verse 11, He made the statement about defilement coming out of man, not going in.

Afterward, Peter asked Jesus, "De-clare unto us this parable." Matthew 15:15. This statement proves that Christ's words were not to be taken literally, because a parable is merely a story or statement to illustrate a point. Notice how Jesus explained the meaning of His figurative statement: "Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." Verses 17-20.

Now the whole story begins to clear up. Jesus knew that these religious leaders had murder in their hearts against Him, and yet their greatest concern was not over those evil dispositions, but only for a foolish tradition based on prejudice. Christ called those inward sins by name and then declared: "These are the things that defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." That was the meaning of His parable. It did not refer to eating food, but rather to ceremonial washing.

Some have been puzzled by the addition of three words in Mark's account of the same incident. There Jesus is quoted as saying, "It cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats." Mark 7:18, 19, emphasis added.

Does the expression "purging all meats" indicate that anything put into the body is somehow sanctified as wholesome and healthful? Of course not! Again, Jesus is highlighting the fact that true defilement comes from harboring spiritual uncleanness in the mind. Physical food passes through the purging processes of digestion and is separated from the body, while sin remains as a permeating poison.

Sanctified By Prayer?

Now we turn to another text which has been fearfully misinterpreted by certain Bible readers. Paul wrote to young Timothy: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

By carefully considering the context of these words, we find nothing out of harmony with the rest of

the Scriptures. Apparently some specific end-time group is described that forbids marriage, is full of hypocrisy, and is demon-controlled. In addition, this group commands its followers to abstain from obviously clean foods, "which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

Our purpose here is not to dwell on the identity of these evil perverters of the gospel, but to dispel the idea that merely praying over food can make it good to eat. Paul affirms that any created thing in the food line is acceptable as long as it meets two tests-it must be approved (or sanctified) by the Bible, and it should be prayed over with thanksgiving. Please take note that both of these requirements must be met in order for the food to be suitable for the Christian diet. Incidentally, the word "meats" in the original language is not limited to flesh foods. The Greek word "broma" simply means "food."

Do these verses suggest that moles, bats, and rattlesnakes may be sanctified for food by simply praying over them? Quite the opposite! Nothing is made suitable unless it has passed the first test of being approved by the Word of God. If the Bible says it is clean, then and only then can prayers of thanksgiving be assured the seal of God's acceptance.

Creepy, Crawly Things

Perhaps the most common basis for the supposed cleansing of unclean meats is the story of Peter and his vision of the sheet let down from heaven. With a bit of background, however, we can clearly understand the true meaning of Peter's strange vision.

As a Jewish convert, Peter held the opinion that all Gentiles were unclean, and therefore unworthy of salvation. He would not preach to them or have any type of social interaction with them.

Peter received the vision just before messengers arrived at his Joppa home from Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. God had instructed Cornelius to send for Peter, and his servants were practically at Peter's door when the faithful apostle fell into a trance on the rooftop.

In that vision, Peter saw a great sheet descending from heaven, filled to overflowing with all kinds of beasts, birds, and creepy-crawly animals. Three times Peter was invited to eat the disgusting collection of creatures, and three times he refused. Each time a voice declared, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Acts 10:15. Finally, the sheet was lifted back into heaven with its cargo of wriggling varmints.

At this point, we should make some crucial observations. Peter's response to the invitation to eat establishes a very important point. He said, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Acts 10:14. This proves that during his entire three and one-half years with Jesus, Peter had never seen or heard anything that made him accepting of unclean meats. In other words, Jesus had not changed the prohibition against eating the forbidden animals, because if He had, Peter would have known about it and would not have responded as he did.

In fact, the context of Acts chapter 10 reveals that Peter at first did not understand the meaning of the perplexing vision. Verse 17 says that "Peter doubted in himself" what it meant. And again, verse 19 says that "Peter thought on the vision."

While he was trying to figure it out, the three servants sent by Cornelius knocked on Peter's door. He listened to their account of Cornelius' vision, then lodged the men. The next day Peter returned with them to Caesarea, where Cornelius had his family and friends gathered to welcome the apostle.

The crux of the entire narrative is found in verse 28, where the previously blinded fisherman-disciple tells how the vision had been explained to him. He addressed the Gentile assembly with these words: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Acts 10:28, emphasis added.

Here we plainly see that God had used the vision of the sheet to teach the prejudiced Peter that he should no longer shun the Gentiles. The vision had nothing to do with eating and drinking. It was addressing Peter's attitude toward people, not toward food.

What a dramatic lesson for that early church! And it's a lesson that all of us should learn, also. From this moment on, be quick to correct those who try to apply this vision to any cleansing of unclean animals. It actually proves the opposite, and then presses home one of the greatest lessons for Christians everywhere-count every individual of equal worth before God, and make every effort to win that one to Christ.

Stumbling Block to the Weak

The final set of verses which need to be studied in their context is found in Romans 14. Because many readers have lifted words and phrases out of their logical setting in this chapter, some strained interpretations have been created.

There is a very important common theme running through the chapter. Almost every verse relates to the subject of judging, a problem which was most malignant in the early Christian church, even as it is in the modern church today. In order to understand the counsel given by Paul in Romans 14, we must first recognize the parties involved in the judging and the issues over which the judging was taking place.

There were two main groups in the early church-the Jewish Christians who had been converted from Judaism, and the Gentile Christians who had been won from heathenism. These two groups did not get along very well. They were constantly judging each other. Now let's notice what the division was all about. The Gentile Christians judged the Jewish Christians because they were eating meat which had been offered in sacrifice to idols. To the Gentile convert, such food was unfit to be eaten. Even though he was now a Christian, he could not forget how he once offered food to idols, and in his mind the eating of such food was connected to idol worship. The Jewish convert, on the other hand, had no such compunctions because he had always acknowledged only one God, and naturally felt no guilt about eating the meat which had been sacrificed to idols. It was sold in the market place at a cheaper price, and the Jewish Christians considered it a desirable bargain.

Now let's read the first few verses of Romans 14 concerning the brother who was weak in the faith. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" Romans 14:1-4.

Can we, by comparing other Scriptures, locate the weak brother? Can we also locate the problem which created the "judging" situation? Yes, we can. Paul had to deal with it at considerable length in 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Corinthians 8. Notice his description: "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. ... Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ... But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." 1 Corinthians 8:4-9, emphasis added.

Here we locate the weak brother of Romans 14:1-3. He was the Gentile Christian who felt that it was sinful to eat the meat which had been offered to idols. Paul agreed with the Jewish converts that there was nothing wrong with the food, since there is only one God after all. But he advised that the food not be eaten in front of the Gentile believers lest it be a stumbling block to them. Compare this language with Paul's counsel in Romans 14:13: "Judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

In 1 Corinthians 8:11, 12, Paul asks this question: "And through thy know-ledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." Compare that statement with this one in Romans 14:15: "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died." Also read Romans 14:21: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

Obviously the accounts in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 are referring to the same problem. Identical language is used in describing them, and the same judging was taking place in reference to the problem.

One more point needs to be clarified. The meat in question was not "unclean meat" in the biblical sense. The question only revolved around food that was "esteemed" unclean by the Gentile Christians because it had been offered to idols. Actually, the heathen did not offer swine or other unclean animals in their sacrifices, as Acts 14:13 establishes. So when the Jewish Christians bought the food which had been offered to idols, it was not wrong in itself, as Paul pointed out. It became wrong only when it offended the "weak brother," or the Gentile Christian, who esteemed it to be unclean through association with the idol. Some of the Gentile believers were so strong against it that they abstained from meat altogether and ate only herbs for fear they might eat some meat that had been offered to idols. In Romans 14:1-3, Paul urges the Roman church to receive such people and honor their conscience. It was not a moral issue and should not be permitted to divide the church.

By examining these apparent contra-dictions in the Bible relating to diet, we have also discovered the root of much theological confusion in today's religious world. A simple understanding of the circumstances behind the writing enables us to grasp the words and phrases in their original format and to recognize the beautiful harmony and unity of Scripture.

Meats Unfit for Human Consumption

Ponder this significant fact carefully. If certain animals were identified as unclean before the flood; if they were still counted as unclean when Peter rejected them in his vision; if they are still called unclean in Revelation 18:2, where it speaks of "unclean" birds; and if Isaiah declares that all who are eating swine and the abomination at the time of the second advent will be consumed (Isaiah 66:15-17), how can we feel that they are now fit to eat? When did they become clean?

Did God have a reason for forbidding the use of certain animals for food? He never acts in an arbitrary way. We have no indication that the proscription was based on ceremonial, or shadowy, issues. As far as we can determine, all of the forbidden categories are so classified because God wanted His people to be healthy and happy. They simply were not suitable for human consumption, and God told His people not to use them as such.

This conclusion is verified by the findings of modern nutritionists, who have identified many of the "unclean" meats as heavy with deleterious fat or disease elements. In ancient times, God accused His people of destroying themselves for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6), and promised freedom from disease if they followed His laws (Exodus 15:26). Why should we continue the destructive rebellion which marked the course of Israel's past?

The One who made our bodies has also supplied an operating manual for the proper maintenance of these delicate organisms. Just as Israel's frequent apostasies often involved "eating and drinking" (Exodus 31:5), so God's modern Israel goes astray in the same indulgent fashion. There are strong reasons to believe that God considered those health laws to preserve the body temple equally as important as the moral principles of the written law.

Two Thousand Swine Wasted

We have already established that Jesus never communicated any change in the dietary laws to Peter and

the disciples. Now we need to examine an incident in the life of the Master which will show clearly whether or not He regarded the unclean animals as appropriate food.

But first, let's review a principle which appeared often in the ministry of our Lord. He was never wasteful. In fact, we can agree with the writer who described Jesus as a "God of Economy." We recall how He commanded the gathering of all the scraps of food following the feeding of the multitudes. On two occasions, Christ specifically ordered that nothing be thrown away. The Scriptures even detail the exact number of baskets of food which were salvaged from the two mountain-side miracle feedings-12 and seven. (Luke 9:17, Mark 8:20).

With this firm principle in mind concerning our Lord's disposition to conserve every tiny bit of edible food, please consider His experience with the inhabitants of Gadara. With His disciples, Jesus had embarked on a rather harrowing voyage across a wild, tumultuous sea. In their extremity of fear and despair the disciples had awakened Jesus from His peaceful sleep in the bottom of the storm-tossed boat. Standing in their midst, Christ commanded the elements to cease their raging, and there was an immediate calm.

When the ship reached the opposite shore, the little company was confronted with an even greater threat. A naked, demon-possessed madman came rushing out of the tombs as though to attack them. What followed is one of the most unusual encounters in the record of the gospels. For the only time in the Scriptures, Jesus briefly dialogued with the demons who controlled the frenzied victim. When the legion of evil spirits requested to be cast out into a nearby herd of swine, Jesus granted their request. While the nameless man sat at Jesus feet, now fully restored and fully clothed, the herd of 2,000 swine rushed headlong into the sea and drowned.

Many have marveled at this extra-ordinary turn of events. Why did Jesus precipitate the wholesale destruction of that valuable herd of animals? Was He aware of circumstances which related to the owners and their very un-Jewish occupation as hog-tenders? It seems so. But one thing appears beyond all question; Jesus did not consider the swine to be suitable for food. Would the One who commanded leftovers to be gathered from the feast destroy enough pigs to feed a small army? It is impossible to believe that our compassionate Saviour would needlessly allow such a waste of resource when the hungry and needy were on every side. We can only conclude that Jesus did not view the animals, which His Father had declared an abomination, as acceptable items of diet.

As recent nutritional research has been publicized along with recommendations from government health agencies, more and more people are turning away from eating animal products. The very latest releases assure us that Americans consume too much fat and too little fruits and vegetables. It is most encouraging to see a gradual change in the eating habits of millions who have been influenced by either the Bible counsel on proper diet or the directives of government committees on health.

Is it wise to carefully scrutinize the labels of all food items before putting the contents into our bodies? Indeed, we would be almost foolhardy not to examine the list of ingredients in the products which find their way into our stomachs. Often we discover that some of the biblically forbidden animals have been utilized in the manufacture of some very common household staples. Let me share with you what I learned about the chief component of one very popular product.

If Pig Grease and Pride

Quite some time ago I read a gripping story of mission adventures among the fierce Stone Age tribes of New Guinea.

One recurring reference throughout the narrative made a deep impression on my mind, and that was the aboriginal practice of smearing pig grease and soot on the face for beautification purposes.

The proud South Pacific tribesmen called themselves "Lords of the Earth," and the use of the cosmetic

mixture was a settled tradition of their pagan culture.

But now I must tell you why that particular custom made such an impact on my mind. Just before reading the book, I had conducted an evangelistic crusade in New Orleans, Louisiana. One of the young men who was baptized in that series had been employed for several years at a local rendering plant.

He shared some very interesting facts with me concerning his particular duties at the plant and how its product was later marketed.

After I explain the process involved, you will probably appreciate the relief this man felt upon finding other employment just before my crusade began.

In my conversations with him I discovered for the first time what a rendering plant really is. It is a collection center for all kinds of dead animal bodies. Carcasses of every variety are hauled to the plant daily. Some are wild creatures that have been killed on the highway, such as skunks, opossums, etc. Huge supplies of the decaying bodies come from farms where disease has decimated herds of swine, cattle, and other domesticated animals.

At the plant, the bodies were all dumped together into a huge cooking pot which generated intense heat. After a certain period of cooking, the bodies were subjected to a process of extreme pressure in order to extract the fat from bones, skins, etc. It is the rendered fat which constitutes the final product of the plant.

According to my friend's account, no one can imagine the horrible stench of the diseased and decaying conglomeration of cooking carcasses. But the thing which interested me the most was the way in which the extracted grease is utilized. The great majority of the stuff was sold to the manufacturers of lipstick and eye makeup. He named two of the most prestigious cosmetic companies in the country as the chief customers of the rendering plant. Anyone looking at the elegant ads portraying glamorous women wearing the colorful "grease" on their faces would never suspect the true origin of their cover-up.

Is there really a lot of difference between the beauty program of those South Pacific and modern "civilized" people? Are not the practices of both based upon the same principle of human pride? In one case the pig grease has been refined, colored, and properly perfumed; the other has stayed closer to nature and is used unrefined.

But the main point I want to emphasize is how so many millions of fine Christian ladies are ingesting that abominable blend without realizing what it contains. This is only one example of similar concoctions which have found their way into the homes and bodies of untold millions.

Yet, in the final analysis, we must reject the indulgence of forbidden foods not because they are distasteful or unhealthy, but because God says they are not to be taken into the body temple. May the Bible principles unfolded in this book form the basis of our Christian lifestyle: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Homosexuality - Return to Sodom

Leviticus 18:22

The Hamilton Square Baptist Church intended its Sunday evening worship service to be a blessing to the congregation. It turned out, however, to be their worst nightmare. What happened that night will remind you of what took place in the ancient city of Sodom on the eve of its destruction. Be warned. This is not a story for the faint-hearted.

It all began when Pastor Lou Sheldon, founder of the Traditional Values Coalition, was invited to the church to speak on the topic of homosexuality. Homosexual activists caught wind of the meeting and leaked the story to the San Francisco press. The Bay Area Reporter responded quickly and published a front-page article using language guaranteed to inflame the local homosexual community. Immediately, an avalanche of telephone calls began pouring into the church, demanding the guest speaker not be allowed to speak.

By the time the service began, the church property was swarming with homosexual and lesbian demonstrators. Alarmed that the situation was out of control, Pastor David Innes called the authorities and asked for more police backup. Innes could hardly believe his ears when he was told, "This is San Francisco." What followed is best described by one who was there.

"Pastor Charles and Donna McIlhenny were refused entry by the rioters. ... The doors were completely blocked. ... Pastor McIlhenny held on to Donna as they began to make their way through the mob who were shouting and screaming in their ears, 'You will not enter this church!' The rioters assaulted them, pushing and shoving them, seeking to keep them from the front door. One of them grabbed Donna's body, lifting her off the ground, and another put his arms completely around her, attempting to pull her back away from the entry. She stretched her arms out for help from a nearby police officer who offered her no assistance. Her son, seeing she was in trouble, pleaded with the officers to assist her. The officers ... were unable to take control of the situation. ...

"As they made their way past the three officers at the door they were pelted by rocks ... The rioters removed the Christian flag from the flagpole and attached the gay flag under the U.S. flag ... When the caretaker ... attempted to remove the gay flag, he was assaulted and pelted with eggs. ... A single parent who is a church member and her six-year-old daughter were told they could not enter the building. A rioter grabbed her daughter's arm as she was clinging to her mother and began interrogating her. ... The rioters then laid down in the intersection of Geary and Franklin Streets, blocking all traffic. ... A woman demonstrator exposed her bare breasts to church members present in the area. ... People were shouted at and threatened by the rioters as they made their way to their cars, called 'Christian bigots,' hypocrites, fascists, homophobes, and other expletives, some obscene. ... When the rioters saw children standing in the lobby, they shouted, 'We want your children! Give us your children!' ... A nine-year-old boy was crying in hysterics. 'They are after me. It's me they want.' ... In spite of all this malicious disruption, not a single arrest was made by the police."¹

It's difficult to believe this could happen in twentieth century America, isn't it? We might gain some comfort if this were an isolated case, but unfortunately it isn't. Members of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, also found themselves the focus of homosexual demonstrators. Angry over the church's outreach to the Orange County gay community, militant homosexuals invaded the church's Sunday morning service. Filling aisles, they shouted and fondled themselves in full view of families in the congregation.²

Another incredible incident involved a Family Concerns Conference brunch at First Baptist Church in

Atlanta where a group of AIDS demonstrators infiltrated the meeting and threw hundreds of condoms at the attendees while chanting "safer sex saves lives." No arrests were made even though the police had to remove the demonstrators from the church's private property.³

You shouldn't be overly surprised by these stories. Jesus predicted such things would happen near the end of time. "Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." Luke 17:28-30.

The truth of the matter is that our world has arrived at the day Jesus predicted. It is modern Sodom. Let's take a look at just how closely contemporary society fulfills this prophecy.

Ancient Sodom

Sodom once sat in a very fertile valley near where the Dead Sea is presently located. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, took his place at the city gates each afternoon to offer travelers a place to spend the night. Lot's daily vigil at the gates was motivated by more than mere hospitality. He was a man on a mission. He knew the atrocious crimes the city's inhabitants were capable of inflicting upon any foreigner found in the streets after dark. Horrible crimes. Unspeakable.

One day, Lot sees three men approach Sodom's gates. They look tired. It is late in the day, and the men will evidently spend the night here. Lot hurries to be the first one to greet them. He has to do quite a bit of persuading, but eventually he convinces the men to lodge at his house.

That evening as they all gather to eat their evening meal, a loud commotion outside grabs their attention. The sound of jeering and yelling indicates a mob is in the streets. Ominously the noise draws closer. Soon it stops outside their door. Rap! Rap! Rap! Loud pounding causes everyone to nervously push back from the dinner table.

Lot goes to the front door, opens it and quickly steps outside, closing the door securely behind him. What he sees is not pretty. His house is surrounded by every homosexual in Sodom. He knows what they're after. They've come to rape the travelers. A cry erupts from the crowd: "Where are the men which came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally [i.e., sexually]." Genesis 19:5.

Lot tries everything to dissuade them, even to the point of offering them his two virgin daughters. "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof." Genesis 19:7, 8.

But the Sodomites are relentless. Their carnal lusts are driven by an insatiable urge for male flesh. "Then they said, 'This one [Lot] came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them.' So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door." Genesis 19:9. Just as violent hands reach for Lot, the door of his home swings open and he is swept inside to safety.

The ferocious crowd beats upon the little house. Lot's wife and daughters huddle in the corner. Tears course down their cheeks as they cling to one another. Shouts from outside mingling with crying inside make it difficult for Lot to hear what his guests are telling him. Are they really saying they are angels? Yes, they must be! How else could he explain his miraculous deliverance from certain death?

Now it is clear to Lot. His rescuers are angels in human guise. And they've just revealed to him that they are on a mission to destroy the wicked cities of the plain. The next morning Lot barely escapes with his life before God rains down fire and brimstone upon the cities' wicked citizens.

Scripture testifies why God destroyed Sodom. "Because their sin is very grave." Genesis 18:20. Sodom's sin of homosexuality cried for justice from God. The city went down in infamy, leaving only the legacy of its name to describe the very actions for which it burned-sodomy.

Christian Confusion

Without question, this story reveals how God judges homosexuality. Yet remarkably, there are some Christians who teach that God condones it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in its December 1991 document Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith, states, "We must distinguish between moral judgments regarding same-sex activity in biblical times and in our own time."

Furthermore, the ELCA challenges its members to evaluate prejudices against homosexuals, insisting that "what we personally find offensive is not necessarily sinful."⁴ Upon release of its October 1993 edition of The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective, the ELCA said "it recognizes that many Lutherans take literally the biblical condemnations of homosexuality. ... But the task force urges Lutherans to challenge such attitudes. It argues that 'responsible biblical interpretation' strongly supports the acceptance and even blessing of same-sex unions and emphasizes what it says is the pre-eminent biblical command-to 'love your neighbor as yourself.' "⁵

Over 70 bishops of the Episcopal Church signed a "Statement of Koinonia" which says, "We believe that some of us are created heterosexual and some of us are created homosexual. We believe homosexuality and heterosexuality are morally neutral." The Washington, D.C., diocese officially approved the document and declared that homosexuals who live together in monogamous relationships should be "honored."⁶

The United Methodist Church has also convened panels to determine whether homosexuality is a sin. Though the proposals to loosen church strictures on homosexuality were rejected, the 1991 panel did agree that biblical references to sexual practices should not be viewed as binding "just because they are in the Bible."⁷ Probably the church that has departed the most from God's Word on this subject is the United Church of Christ. They permit homosexuals to be ordained to ministry.⁸

Homosexuality in Scripture

In spite of all the confusing rhetoric, Scripture clearly classifies homosexuality as sin. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. Can the truth be any plainer?

While this may sound harsh, it is not intended to be offensive. God is not making a singular thrust against homosexuals. Notice that many other sins are listed in this lineup. In fact, the first and third in the list are primarily directed at heterosexuals.

Several other texts also mention homosexuals. Men having sex with men is specifically condemned. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is abomination." Leviticus 18:22. Paul writes that "those who practice such things are deserving of death." Romans 1:32. And, in the fires of hell, John the Revelator saw the sexually immoral. "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8.

As a group, homosexuals are undeniably sexually immoral. Not only is the practice of homosexuality itself an immoral act, but 43 percent of homosexuals surveyed estimated they had sex with 500 or more partners; 28 percent reported 1,000 or more partners. And 79 percent admit that over half of their partners were total strangers.⁹ Furthermore, two homosexual researchers writing in The Gay Report say that 73 percent of homosexuals surveyed had at some time had sex with boys sixteen to nineteen years of age or younger.¹⁰

Many, however, refuse to accept God's testimony regarding homosexuality. They echo the sentiments of Sodom when Lot declared that homosexuality was wickedness. "This one [Lot] came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge." Genesis 19:9. Christians who declare the truth about homosexuality are not acting as judges, but merely declaring what the ultimate Judge has said. His is the final court. And He has told us what will be found guilty and what will be acquitted.

God Loves Homosexuals

While homosexuality is definitely sin, let's remember that it isn't unpardonable. God's grace is powerful enough to give victory over any temptation. Sexual or otherwise.

There is a difference between temptation and sin. Temptation is enticement. Sin, on the other hand, happens when enticement is entertained and/or entered into. One can therefore be tempted by homosexuality, but repulse that temptation and not sin (James 1:14, 15).

Furthermore, one could have lived a life of homosexuality, repent of it, and experience victory and salvation. This was obviously the case with some of the early Christian converts. "And such [i.e., homosexuals] were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:11. The good news is that Jesus has the power to save us from any type of sin or temptation.

God doesn't hate homosexuals. He doesn't hate any sinner. It is sin itself that He finds repulsive. He dislikes how sin degrades, depresses, and victimizes the sinner and others. And as God doesn't hate sinners, neither should we. Not all homosexuals are militant activists. Many are likable people who have admirable qualities. Christians should never treat gays with scorn and violence.

The way Jesus related to the woman caught in adultery is a good model for Christians to follow. While the crowd waited with stones in hand to bludgeon her to death, Jesus declared that the solution was not capital punishment. Instead of casting a stone, He extended love, forgiveness, and life-changing power to "go and sin no more." John 8:11.

Two thousand years later, Jesus' love is still active in behalf of sinners. Just ask Jami Breedlove. She lived a lesbian life for 12 years. Today she is happily married to Ben, the father of her two children. What was it that changed her life? She says that it was her childhood friend, Ben, who showed her God's unconditional love. "He knew I was a lesbian. I wondered, Why would any man want to see a woman who had lived with other women for 12 years? But Ben wanted to reach me with the same love that Jesus has for me. He told me he cared for me, and he wanted to be my friend. When I saw Ben's love was unconditional, I began falling in love with him. ... I looked deep in my heart, and I knew I had been living a sinful lifestyle. I wanted out, so I repented and asked God to heal me."¹¹

It is love that convicts, converts, and transforms. To love the sinner while not condoning sin is the secret of Jesus' power to change lives. Vera P. also made this wonderful discovery. Vera had been a lesbian for five years when she and Jeanette met. She says, Jeanette "knew exactly what I was, but she persistently invited me to church and accepted me into her family. I was invited to all the graduations, birthdays, and Christmas celebrations-even funerals-in her large, extended family. ... I believe many homosexuals are desperately seeking God. They are aching for genuine love and acceptance, but they often don't recognize it in Jesus' disciples. John 13:35 says that all men will know you are His disciples if you have love one for another. The personal touch worked for me, and I know it would work for countless others."¹²

Is Sexual Preference Genetic?

Many homosexuals like to say, "God made me this way." A supposed genetic predisposition is cited as evidence to scientifically prove their case. However, the studies used as proof are extremely faulty and inconclusive. They are also very biased since homosexual researchers often perform them. Clinical

psychologist Joseph Nicolosi, who has worked with over 200 homosexuals, comments on all the press the poor research gains. "Very key to the gay liberation movement is the finding of a biological basis so that they can be considered 'a people.' So the gay community will celebrate the most fragmentary evidence that they are 'born that way.' "¹³

In 1991, Science magazine published an article reporting the findings of Dr. Simon LeVay. Dr. LeVay reportedly found brain differences in homosexual men compared to heterosexual men. This new discovery was quickly picked up by the media and reported far and wide. But since that time, the study has come under fire.

In fact, the entire study is flawed. First, the sample size was very small. It consisted of only 41 corpses. Secondly, all of the known homosexuals had died of AIDS or AIDS-related complications. And the 16 corpses that were heterosexual men were only presumed heterosexual. It is not known for sure if they had been heterosexuals or not. One can't help but wonder if the fact that Dr. LeVay is a homosexual himself didn't influence his study.¹⁴

While the press and most homosexuals laud LeVay's research, a few homosexuals see through its faulty scientific method. Michael Botkin, a homosexual author, writes: "A sloppy control like this is enough by itself to invalidate the study. LeVay's defense? He knows his controls are het[erosexual] because their brains are different from the HIVer corpses. Sorry doctor, this is circular logic."¹⁵

Another highly publicized study was done by homosexual Dr. Dean Hamer, a scientist at the National Institutes of Health. He reports that a region on the X chromosome is tied to some cases of homosexuality. But interestingly enough, when the same study was done on lesbians, the genetic link wasn't present. Hamer's work is now under investigation by the federal Office of Research Integrity because one of his assistants alleges that the doctor intentionally skewed data to fit his conclusions.¹⁶

For years homosexual activists have persistently quoted Alfred Kinsey's 1948 research. It claims that 10 percent of the population is homosexual. Recently, though, Kinsey has been discredited by none other than the Kinsey Institute. John Bancroft, director of the Institute, reveals that Kinsey based his statistics on the diary of a single pedophile who recorded his experiences with 317 pre-adolescent boys.¹⁷ He says, "Kinsey gave the impression that the data came from three or four men, but it was just one."¹⁸

The truth of the matter is that probably only one to three percent of the population are homosexual. The Kinsey Institute conducted a study in 1970 that found only 1.4 percent of people regularly engaged in homosexual conduct after age 20. This is in harmony with a 1989 survey which revealed that fewer than one percent of adults exclusively engaged in same-sex relationships.¹⁹

Even if a genetic link is found, it will not prove that God creates homosexuals. God is not to be blamed for the genetic deficiencies we're born with. When asked why a man was born blind, Jesus didn't respond, "Because God made him this way." Rather, He said that God was to be glorified through healing the man of the effects of his faulty genes (John 9:1-7).

So it is with homosexuals who might have a genetic predisposition. (Notice I said "might." The verdict is still out.) God didn't make them this way. It is the result of the degeneration of humankind by thousands of years of sin. God doesn't create any of the aberrations sin causes. However, He can be glorified in genetically challenged people. Jesus will provide victory over what genetics might influence.

Don't forget that all of us are born with a genetic predisposition to sin. But this doesn't provide license for sin. Jesus came in the likeness of our biologically weakened flesh to gain the victory for us. Now, instead of sin reigning in our lives, the law of God can be fulfilled through us (Romans 8:3, 4).

A Disadvantaged Minority?

There is a well-strategized movement among homosexual activists to shift people away from these Bible truths. It is organized and financed by a highly capable homosexual community. According to recent marketing studies, homosexuals have an average household income of more than \$55,400-nearly \$23,000 above the average American household. Gays are also three times more likely to be college graduates, as well as three times more likely to hold professional or managerial jobs. They are four times more likely to be overseas travelers.²⁰

Because of their wealth, education, and persistent political activism, gays have been able to form one of the most feared political action committees in Washington. Newsweek magazine reports: "Homosexuals are a powerful and increasingly savvy bloc. Their money, organizing talent, and votes are openly sought, and their agenda is championed in a way that would have been inconceivable only a few years ago."²¹

President Bill Clinton courted their clout during his 1992 presidential campaign. As a reward for their votes, he made it his first duty to grant homosexuals key cabinet staff positions and pushed for allowing them into the military. During his entire presidency Clinton has been pro-homosexual. A letter from Clinton was read to the 300,000 homosexuals who marched on Washington, D.C., on Sunday, April 25, 1993. The President said, "I stand with you in your struggle for equality for all Americans, including gay men and lesbians."²² He has endorsed Senator Ted Kennedy's legislation to extend special rights in the workplace to homosexuals.²³ And in the midst of public debate over same-sex marriages, Clinton's deputy press secretary says the president "doesn't think that same-sex marriages should be outlawed."²⁴

While conservative Christians received virtually no support from the Clinton administration, the homosexual agenda was frequently championed. In March 1995, Vice President Al Gore hosted a party at his residence to honor homosexual and lesbian activists. During the party, Gore said, "It's a wonderful thing to do what you're doing, and that's devoting your lives to others. This dedication is an outgrowth of the way you live your entire lives."²⁵ Two weeks later, President Clinton met with the same homosexuals. He told them that he had appointed a paid White House staff person to serve as their special liaison.²⁶ This is a remarkable first in U.S. history.

Considering the influential status of homosexuals and their advantageous demographics, it is a curious matter that they are able to lobby successfully for minority protection status. To qualify for special rights, groups must be: (1) disadvantaged, (2) not defined by behavior, and (3) politically powerless. Women, blacks, and the handicapped have met these qualifications. Homosexuals do not. Besides, they already have equal rights status, as does everyone else, to protect them from discrimination. But even though they don't meet these criteria for a disadvantaged minority, gays have sought this special legal protection so they can gain preferential treatment and have more influence for their cause.

The Homosexual Strategy

When homosexuals are given minority protection status, it spells trouble. Ann Lockwood discovered this through an unfortunate firsthand experience. She and her roommate put a notice in the classified ads seeking a possible third roommate. The ad was answered by an openly lesbian woman. Ann and her heterosexual roommate politely declined the lady's response. But this was not the end of it.

The lesbian filed a legal suit against them using a 1989 Madison, Wisconsin, gay rights ordinance. Ann and her roommate were summoned to appear before an ostensibly "fact-finding" board, the Madison Equal Opportunities Commission. After 4.5 hours of interrogation, they were assessed fines totaling \$1,500. They were also ordered to attend "sensitivity" classes, taught by lesbians and designed to realign their "politically incorrect" views of homosexuality. Finally, both were told to report periodically to the city for monitoring of their lifestyle for the next three years.²⁷

Similar cases include a Catholic Archdiocese that was fined \$35,000 for refusing to open church facilities to a homosexual club and a priest who was sued because he refused to hire a homosexual to

teach in a church school. In Minneapolis, Big Brothers, an organization that pairs adult men with fatherless boys to provide a good role model, was prosecuted for merely telling one mother that a prospective Big Brother was homosexual. After years of legal suits, Big Brothers has adopted a national policy of "accepting gay men as prospective Big Brothers to fatherless youths."²⁸

What are the goals of the homosexuals? The 1972 Gay Rights Platform, which has not been changed or rescinded in more than 20 years, calls for "Repeal of all state laws prohibiting sexual acts involving consenting persons" (notice, not "consenting adults"); "Repeal of all laws governing the age of sexual consent;" and "Repeal of all laws ... that restrict the sex or number of persons entering into a marriage unit."²⁹

More recently, homosexual author Steve Warren told Christians what gays expect of them. In *The Advocate*, the nation's largest and most mainstream homosexual publication, he says: "Here are some of the things you will be expected to affirm. ... 1. Henceforth, homosexuality will be spoken of in your churches and synagogues as an 'honorable estate.' 2. You can either let us marry people of the same sex, or better yet abolish marriage altogether. ... 3. You will be expected to offer ceremonies that bless our sexual arrangements. ... You will also instruct your people in homosexual as well as heterosexual behavior, and you will go out of your way to make certain that homosexual youths are allowed to date, attend religious functions together, openly display affection, and enjoy each other's sexuality without embarrassment or guilt. 4. If any of the older people in your midst object, you will deal with them sternly, making certain they renounce their ugly and ignorant homophobia or suffer public humiliation. 5. You will also make certain that ... laws are passed forbidding discrimination against homosexuals and heavy punishments are assessed. ... 6. Finally, we will in all likelihood want to expunge a number of passages from your Scriptures and rewrite others, eliminating preferential treatment of marriage and using words that will allow for homosexual interpretations of passages describing biblical lovers such as Ruth and Boaz or Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Warning: If all these things do not come to pass quickly, we will subject Orthodox Jews and Christians to the most sustained hatred and vilification in recent memory. We have captured the liberal establishment and the press. We have already beaten you on a number of battlefields. ... You have neither the faith nor the strength to fight us, so you might as well surrender now."³⁰

Gays Target Children

One of the means homosexuals are using to achieve their agenda is to indoctrinate school children with homosexual propaganda. And the National Education Association (NEA) is providing willing assistance. The NEA is a private teachers' union that has a virtual monopoly on American schools. Along with its cousin, the American Federation of Teachers, it has been successful in getting 34 states to pass laws forbidding teachers to be represented officially by any other unions.³¹ Here are just a few of the ways the NEA is advancing homosexuality.

The NEA has recommended that public schools designate one month each year as "Gay/Lesbian History Month."³² Two NEA-approved books for kindergarteners and first-graders were written to condition children, ages 2 to 8, to accept homosexuality as normal and wholesome. *Daddy's Roommate* is about a boy's divorced father. A picture in the book shows his father in bed with his homosexual roommate. The "moral" the boy learns is that "being gay is just one more kind of love." *Heather Has Two Mommies* is about a little girl who is conceived in her lesbian mother's womb through artificial insemination. She goes to nursery school and learns that she and her "mommies" form a "special" family and that only love matters in a relationship.³³

The New York City Board of Education argued in favor of the books as necessary to promote "tolerance" of people who are different.³⁴ Alyson Publications, the publisher, says these two books are for "kids who themselves may later decide they are gay."³⁵

It is a pity that Alyson, also a major publisher of pedophile (homosexuals who prey on minor children)

and homosexual books, is allowed to market its perverted thinking to the impressionable and innocent minds of children without parental consent or knowledge. One of Alyson's most published authors, Pat Califia, wrote this startling statement: "Boy-lovers and the lesbians who have young lovers ... are not child molesters. The child abusers are priests, teachers, therapists, cops, and parents who force their staid morality onto the young people in their custody."³⁶

Some teachers are being sent to conferences where they are taught how to promote homosexuality. At a Denver taxpayer-subsidized continuing education course, teachers were presented with a several-hundred-page guide entitled "Gay and Lesbian Youth Tools for Educators." The introductory article declares: "There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic." In addition to promoting acceptance of homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism, and condom use (with graphic descriptions of these behaviors and techniques), this teachers' guide suggests that resources be distributed to children including pamphlets (i.e., "I Think I May Be Gay," etc.) containing telephone numbers of homosexual support groups for children to contact.³⁷

The guide also contains a questionnaire designed to be answered by heterosexual junior high and high school students. It asks, among other questions: "3. Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you may outgrow? 5. Is it possible that all you need is a good gay lover? 7. If you have never slept with a person of the same sex, how do you know that you would not prefer to do so? 14. How can you hope to become a whole person if you limit yourself to an exclusive heterosexual object choice and remain unwilling to explore and develop your normal, natural, healthy homosexual potential?"³⁸ Astoundingly, American citizens' tax dollars are being used to promote this blatantly homosexual propaganda.

Homosexuals have also found a beachhead for their movement in an organization that traditionally has specialized in marketing to children, Walt Disney Studios. Tom Schumacher, executive producer for the cartoon classic *The Lion King*, has been called "one of the most influential homosexuals in Hollywood." He says, "I was an out [of the closet] gay man when I came to Disney ... there are a lot of gay people here at every level. It is a very supportive environment."³⁹

Disney is so supportive that Schumacher finds it very comfortable to take his "husband" to company retreats and parties. He says, "What is funny is that Jeffrey [Katzenberg, chairman of Walt Disney Studios] did not bat an eye. ... we talk about it all the time. [Disney's chief executive officer] Michael Eisner didn't bat an eye either."⁴⁰

In an interview with *The Advocate*, Schumacher was asked whether there will ever be a place for homosexual characters to appear in a Disney cartoon classic. He answered, "I am loathe to say there are characters who are gay in our movies because people will want me to go backward and point them out."⁴¹ While Schumacher is not revealing which characters are gay, some of their actors are talking openly about it.

Ernie Sabella and Nathan Lane played Timon, the meerkat, and Pumbaa, the wart hog, in *The Lion King*. They said in a *New York Times* interview that their characters were homosexual.⁴² A more obvious gay element in *The Lion King* is homosexual singer Elton John's songs that croon throughout it. Elton's presence is not happenstance. Schumacher considers this "his proudest achievement" in the project.⁴³

Another gay producer at Disney is lesbian Lauren Lloyd. She says Disney was attracted to her because of her sexual preference. One year after joining Disney, "Lloyd has 15 films in development, with 14 that have 'strong women's leads' including two actual lesbian pictures."⁴⁴

United Sodomites of America

Homosexual activists are working diligently to reorder society. Their politically correct Pledge of Allegiance may one day say: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United Sodomites of America. One country under sodomy, none objecting, with liberty and justice for all who agree with homosexuals." If

you doubt their intent, look at the message homosexuals sent U.S. leaders.

On the weekend of April 23-25, 1993, the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation took place in the U.S. capital. At that time, 300,000 homosexuals and lesbians marched in the city. The Washington Post reported that at one point "perhaps 10,000 hand-clapping, war-whooping lesbians erupted out of Dupont Circle" shouting, "'We're dykes, we're out, we're out for power!'" Then in front of the White House, an elementary school teacher from Seattle climbed a statue and "threw off her shirt and began an ebullient, bare-breasted, hip-thrusting victory dance-in-place." Once the victory dance was done, the crowd started chanting toward the White House: "Chelsea! Chelsea!" On the event's main stage, lesbian comedian Lea Delaria openly lusted after Mrs. Clinton by making a very vulgar statement. If not outrageous enough already, hundreds of lesbians marched topless down Pennsylvania Avenue, and some engaged in homosexual acts in front of children. True to politically correct form, police told bystanders they had orders not to arrest law violators.⁴⁵

The U.S.A. is also in the homosexual export business. Consider the September 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women that met in Beijing, China. The United States representation consisted of the first lady, Hillary Clinton, and 125 government representatives. Mrs. Clinton's team required five Air Force jets, which cost in excess of \$1 million. Commercial airfare for the other U.S. representatives added another half-million dollars to the tab. Here are a few titles of the workshops that were offered: The Role of Inflatable Life-Size Plastic Dolls and Dildos in Improving Health; Lesbianism for the Curious; Spirit and Action: Lesbian Activism From an Interfaith Perspective; Lesbian and Mother; Talking About Being Sperm Donors; Lesbian Flirtation Techniques Workshop; Lesbians in the Baltics: New Phenomenon of the 90s.⁴⁶

The Platform for Action voted by delegates was lauded by lesbian activists and feminists. A few months later, Donna Shalala, Clinton administration secretary of Health and Human Services, publicly stated that she intends to fulfill in America the liberally biased commitments made by the U.S. delegation.⁴⁷

Nearing the End of Time

All of this only goes to show that we are living in the time that Bible writers foresaw. "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthank-ful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." 2 Timothy 3:1-4. The rise in homosexuals' popularity and acceptance indicates that the people of this world are moving further and further from God.

In light of current events, we might wonder how far things will digress. Certainly, in all this confusion there is a call to seek God. While we should love sinners and help them find peace and eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, we must not fall prey to the falsehoods of homosexual activists. The Bible clearly defines homosexuality as sin. Let's compassionately lead homosexuals into a saving relationship with Jesus while steadfastly maintaining the truths of God's Word.

How Evolution Flunked the Science Test

Genesis 1:1

Recently I talked to a man with a fantastic amount of faith. Not one shade of doubt crept into his animated description of man's origin and destiny. He was an evolutionist I met on an airplane. With incredible confidence he bridged the eons of prehistoric time to explain the existence of modern plant and animal life. His detailed description of human ascent from a tiny, one-celled monad was so vivid and convincing that one could almost believe he had seen the microscopic amoeba turn into a man. What is this evolution doctrine which inspires so much faith in its disciples? How has it turned great scientists into dogmatic opponents of any other viewpoint? Many evolutionary scientists have united their professional influence to forbid any classroom instruction contrary to their own views. Does the theory of evolution merit this kind of fanatical support, which would silence all opposing ideas? When religious people take such a position, they are called bigots, but scientists seem to escape that charge. In February of 1977, nearly 200 members of the nation's academic community sent letters to school boards across the United States, urging that no alternate ideas on origins be permitted in classrooms. This indicates that the evolutionists are feeling the threat of a rising revolt against the stereotyped, contradictory versions of their theory. Many students are looking for honest answers to their questions about the origin and purpose of life. For the first time, the stale traditions of evolution are having to go on the defensive. But let's take a look at what they have to defend. Then you will understand why these evolutionary scientists are people of such extraordinary faith, and why they are so fearful of facing competition at the school level.

Spontaneous Generation

How does the evolutionist explain the existence of that first one-celled animal from which all life forms supposedly evolved? For many years the medieval idea of spontaneous generation was the accepted explanation. According to Webster, spontaneous generation is "the generation of living from nonliving matter ... [it is taken] from the belief, now abandoned, that organisms found in putrid organic matter arose spontaneously from it."

Simply stated, this means that under the proper conditions of temperature, time, place, etc., decaying matter simply turns into organic life. This simplistic idea dominated scientific thinking until 1846, when Louis Pasteur completely shattered the theory by his experiments. He exposed the whole concept as utter foolishness. Under controlled laboratory conditions, in a semi-vacuum, no organic life ever emerged from decaying, nonliving matter. Reluctantly it was abandoned as a valid scientific issue. Today no reputable scientist tries to defend it on a demonstrable basis. That is why Webster says it is "now abandoned." It never has been and never can be demonstrated in the test tube. No present process is observed that could support the idea of spontaneous generation. Obviously, if spontaneous generation actually did take place in the distant past to produce the first spark of life, it must be assumed that the laws which govern life had to be completely different from what they are now. But wait a minute! This won't work either, because the whole evolutionary theory rests upon the assumption that conditions on the earth have remained uniform throughout the ages.

Do you begin to see the dilemma of the evolutionists in explaining that first amoeba, or monad, or whatever formed the first cell of life? If it sprang up spontaneously from no previous life, it contradicts a basic law of nature which forms the foundation of the entire theory. Yet, without believing in spontaneous generation, the evolutionist would have to acknowledge something other than natural forces at work - in other words, God. How do they get around this dilemma?

Dr. George Wald, Nobel Prize winner of Harvard University, states it as cryptically and honestly as an evolutionist can: "One has only to contemplate the magnitude of this task to concede that the spontaneous generation of a living organism is impossible. Yet here we are - as a result, I believe, of

spontaneous generation." *Scientific American*, August, 1954.

That statement by Dr. Wald demonstrates a much greater faith than a religious creationist can muster. Notice that the great evolutionary scientist says it could not have happened. It was impossible. Yet he believes it did happen. What can we say to that kind of faith? At least the creationist believes that God was *able* to speak life into existence. His is not a blind faith in something that he concedes to be impossible.

So here we are, face to face with the first contradiction of evolution with a basic law of science. In order to sustain his humanistic explanation of the origin of life, he must accept the exploded, unscientific theory of spontaneous generation. And the big question is this: Why is he so violently opposed to the spontaneous generation spoken of in the Bible? A miracle of creation is required in either case. Either God did it by divine fiat, or blind, unintelligent nature produced Wald's impossible act. Let any reasonable mind contemplate the alternatives for a moment. Doesn't it take more faith to believe that chance could produce life than it does to believe infinite intelligence could produce it? Why did Dr. Wald say that it was impossible for life to result from spontaneous generation? That was not an easy concession for a confirmed evolutionist to make. His exhaustive search for a scientific explanation ended in failure, as it has for all other evolutionary scientists, and he had the courage to admit it. But he also had an incredible faith to believe in it even though it was a scientific impossibility. A Christian who confessed to such a faith would be labeled as naive and gullible. What a difference the cloak of higher education makes upon our easily impressed minds! How much simpler and sweeter the faith which accepts the inspired account: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Genesis 1:1.

Chance Life - A Ridiculous Improbability

What would be involved in the accidental development of a single living cell? The fact is that the most elementary form of life is more complicated than any manmade thing on earth. The entire complex of New York City is less complicated than the makeup of the simplest microscopic cell. It is more than ridiculous to talk about its chance production. Scientists themselves assure us that the structure of a single cell is unbelievably intricate. The chance for a proper combination of molecules into amino acids, and then into proteins with the properties of life is entirely unrealistic. *American Scientist* magazine made this admission in January of 1955:

"From the probability standpoint, the ordering of the present environment into a single amino acid molecule would be utterly improbable in all the time and space available for the origin of terrestrial life."

A Swiss mathematician, Charles Eugene Guye, actually computes the odds against such an occurrence at only one chance in 10(160). That means 10 multiplied by itself 160 times, a number too large even to articulate. Another scientist expressed it this way:

"The amount of matter to be shaken together to produce a single molecule of protein would be millions of times greater than that in the whole universe. For it to occur on earth alone would require many, almost endless, billions of years." *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, p. 23.

How can we explain the naive insistence of evolutionists to believe something so extremely out of character for their scientific background? And how can we harmonize the normally broad-minded tolerance of the educated, with the narrow bigotry exhibited by many evolutionary scientists in trying to suppress opposing points of view? The obvious explanation would seem to be rooted in the desperation of such evolutionists to retain their reputation as the sole dispensers of dogmatic truth. To acknowledge a superior wisdom has been too long cultivated by the evolutionist community. They have repeated their assumptions for so long in support of their theories that they have started accepting them as facts. No one objects to their assuming whatever they want to assume, but to assume happenings that go contrary to all scientific evidence and still call it science is being dishonest.

Mutations -

How Big the Changes?

Now let's look at a second basic evolutionary teaching which is contrary to scientific law. One of the

most necessary parts of evolution, which is supposed to provide the power for changing the amoeba into a man, is *mutation*. This refers to abnormal changes in the organism which are assumed to be caused by chemical changes in the genes themselves. The genes are the hereditary factors within the chromosomes of each species. Every species has its own particular number of chromosomes which contain the genes. Within every human being are 46 chromosomes containing an estimated 100,000 genes, each one of which is able to affect in some way the size, color, texture, or quality of the individual. The assumption is that these genes, which provide the inherited characteristics we get from our ancestors, occasionally become affected by unusual pairing, chemical damage, or other influences, causing them to produce an unusual change in one of the offspring. This is referred to as a mutation. Through gradual changes wrought in the various species through mutation, it is assumed by the evolutionists that the amoeba turned into an invertebrate, which became an amphibian, then a reptile, a quadruped, an ape form, and finally a man. In other words, the species are not fixed in the eyes of the evolutionists. Families are forever drifting over into another higher form as time progresses. This means that all the fossil records of animal history should reveal an utter absence of precise family boundaries. Everything should be in the process of changing into something else - with literally hundreds of millions of half-developed fish trying to become amphibious, and reptiles halfway transformed into birds, and mammals looking like half-apes or half-men.

Now everybody knows that instead of finding those billions of confused family fossils, the scientists have found exactly the opposite. Not one single drifting, changing life form has been studied. Everything stays within the well-defined limits of its own basic kind and absolutely refuses to cooperate with the demands of modern evolutionists. Most people would give up and change their theory when faced with such a crushing, deflating blow, but not the evolutionist! He still searches for that illusive missing link which could at least prove that he hasn't been 100 percent wrong.

But let's look at the vehicle which the evolutionists have depended upon to provide the **possibility** of the drastic changes required by their theory. Sir Julian Huxley, a principal spokesman for evolution, said this:

"Mutation provides the raw material of evolution." Again he said, "Mutation is the ultimate sources of all...heritable variation." *Evolution in Action*, p. 38.

Professor Ernst Mayr, another leader of the evolutionists, made this statement:

"Yet it must not be forgotten that mutation is the ultimate source of all genetic variation found in natural populations and the only raw material available for natural selection to work on." *Animal Species and Evolution*, p. 170.

Please keep this clearly in mind: Evolutionists say that mutation is absolutely essential to provide the inexorable upgrading of species which changed the simpler forms into more complex forms. BUT - the scientific fact is that mutation could NEVER accomplish what evolution demands of it, for several reasons. As all scientists agree, mutations are very rare. Huxley guesses that only about one in a hundred thousand, is a mutant. Secondly, when they do occur, they are almost certain to be harmful or deadly to the organism. In other words, the vast majority of such mutations lead toward extinction instead of evolution; they make the organism worse instead of better. Huxley admits: "The great majority of mutant genes are harmful in their effect on the organism." Ibid. p. 39.

Other scientists, including Darwin himself, conceded that most mutants are recessive and degenerative; therefore, they would actually be eliminated by natural selection rather than effect any significant improvement in the organism. Professor G. G. Simpson, one of the elite spokesmen for evolution, writes about multiple, simultaneous mutations and reports that the mathematical likelihood of getting good evolutionary results would occur only once in 274 billion years! And that would be assuming 100 million individuals reproducing a new generation *every day*! He concludes by saying:

"Obviously...such a process has played no part whatever in evolution." *The Major Features of Evolution*, p. 96.

Does this sound sort of confusing to you! They say mutation is necessary to make the changes required by their theory, yet they have to confess that it is scientifically impossible for multiple mutations to make the changes. This is too typical of the puzzling twists and turns made by our evolutionist friends

in their efforts to uphold an exploded theory. So the second point of contradiction with true science has been established.

Mutations, of course, do effect minor changes within the basic kinds, but those changes are limited, never producing a new family. They can explain many of the varieties of both plant and animals but can never explain the creation of basic kinds as required by evolution.

Fossils Support Creationism

Since we have discovered that the fossil record gives no support to the idea of species gradually changing into other species, let us see if fossil evidence is in harmony with the Bible. Ten times in the book of Genesis we read God's decree concerning the reproduction of His creatures - "*after its kind*." The word "kind" refers to species, or families. Each created family was to produce only its own kind. This forever precludes the drifting, changing process required by organic evolution where one species turns into another.

Take note that God did not say there could be no changes within the family. He did not create all the varieties of dogs, cats, horses, etc. in the very beginning. There was only a male and female of each species, and many changes have since occurred to produce a wide assortment of varieties within the family. But please keep it straight in your mind that cats have always remained cats, dogs are still dogs, and men are still men. Mutation has only been responsible for producing a new variety of the same species, but never originating another new kind. Selective breeding has also brought tremendous improvements such as hornless cattle, white turkeys, and seedless oranges, but all the organisms continue to reproduce exactly as God decreed at Creation - after its kind.

The "common ancestor" that evolution demands has never existed. There is not a "missing link." Man and monkeys are supposed to stem from the same animal ancestry! Even chimpanzees and many monkey groups vary tremendously. Some are smart, others dumb. Some have short tails and some long. Some have no tails at all. Their teeth vary in number. A few have thumbs and others do not. Their genes are different. Their blood is different. Their chromosomes don't jibe. Interestingly enough, apes only breed with apes, chimpanzees with chimpanzees, and monkeys with monkeys.

But when we start comparing humans with monkeys, we get even more impossible differences than those among the simian types. In fact, these differences constitute another unanswerable support for the Bible rule of "after its kind." The fact that some monkeys can be trained to smoke a pipe, ride a scooter, or even hoist a test tube in a laboratory does not prove that scientists are evolved animals, or that monkeys are retarded, developing humans.

It has already been stated that evolutionists expected the fossil record to support their theory of species changes. Their doctrine demanded vast numbers of scaly reptiles transforming their scales into feathers and their front feet into wings. Other reptiles supposedly should be changing into fur-bearing quadrupeds. Did they find those thousands of multi-changing creatures? Not one! No matter what particular strata they sifted through, all the fossils were easily recognized and classified within their own families, just as God decreed. If the evolutionary doctrine were true, the strata would be teeming with hundreds of millions of transition forms with combination features of two or more species. Not only so, but there would have to be millions upon millions of observable living links *right now* in the process of turning into a higher form. Darwin confessed:

"There are two or three million species on earth. A sufficient field one might think for observation; but it must be said today that in spite of all the evidence of trained observers, not one change of the species to another is on record." *Life and Letters*, Vol. 3, p. 25.

How interesting! Then why insist that it had to be that way? This is one of the marvels of those who cling to a traditional theory.

Even the most ancient fossil forms in the lowest fossil beds have stubbornly retained the same features of their modern counterparts, and it is amusing to listen to the exclamations of surprise by the evolutionists. The creationist is not surprised at all. His Bible told him it would be that way, and he hasn't been forced to puzzle over contradictory evidence.

The Mystery of the Empty Strata

Another frustration for the poor evolutionist is the strange case of the empty strata. As one digs deep

into the earth, one layer or stratum after another is revealed. Often we can see these layers clearly exposed in the side of a mountain or roadbed cut. Geologists have given names to the succession of strata which pile one on top of another. Descending into Grand Canyon for example, one moves downward past the Mississippi, Devonian, Cambrian, etc., as they have been tagged by the scientists. Now here is the perplexity for the evolutionists: The Cambrian is the last stratum of the descending levels that has any fossils in it. All the lower strata below the Cambrian have absolutely no fossil record of life other than some single-celled types such as bacteria and algae. Why not? The Cambrian layer is full of all the major kinds of animals found today except the vertebrates. In other words, there is nothing primitive about the structure of these most ancient fossils known to man. Essentially, they compare with the complexity of current living creatures. But the big question is: *Where are their ancestors?* Where are all the evolving creatures that should have led up to these highly developed fossils? According to the theory of evolution, the Precambrian strata should be filled with more primitive forms of these Cambrian fossils in the process of evolving upward.

Darwin confessed in his book, *Origin of the Species*:

"To the question why we do not find rich fossiliferous deposits belonging to these assumed earliest periods prior to the Cambrian system I can give no satisfactory answer...the case at present must remain inexplicable; and may be truly urged as a valid argument against the views here entertained." p. 309. How amazing! Darwin admitted having no way to defend his theory, but he still would not adjust his theory to meet the unanswerable arguments against it.

Many other evolutionary scientists have expressed similar disappointment and frustration. Dr. Daniel Axelrod of the University of California calls it:

"One of the major unsolved problems of geology and evolution." Science, July 4, 1958.

Dr. Austin Clark of the U.S. National Museum wrote concerning the Cambrian fossils:

"Strange as it may seem ... mollusks were mollusks just as unmistakably as they are now." *The New Evolution: Zoogenesis*, p. 101.

Drs. Marshall Kay and Edwin Colbert of Columbia University marveled over the problem in these words:

"Why should such complex organic forms be in rocks about 600 million years old and be absent or unrecognized in the records of the preceding two billion years?...If there has been evolution of life, the absence of the requisite fossils in the rocks older than Cambrian is puzzling." *Stratigraphy and Life History*, p. 102.

George Gaylord Simpson, the "Crown Prince of Evolution", summarized it:

"The sudden appearance of life is not only the most puzzling feature of the whole fossil record but also its greatest apparent inadequacy." *The Evolution of Life*, p. 144.

In the face of these forced admissions of failure to find supporting scientific evidence, how can these men of science continue to press so dogmatically for their shaky views? No wonder they fight to keep students from hearing the opposing arguments. Their positions would crumble under the impartial investigation of honest research.

The absence of Precambrian fossils points to one great fact, unacceptable to the evolutionists - a sudden creative act of God which brought all the major creatures into existence at the same time. Their claims that creationism is unscientific are made only to camouflage their own lack of true evidence. The preponderance of physical scientific data is on the side of creation, not evolution.

Uniformity or the Flood?

The subject of strata beds leads into the interesting question of how these layers were formed, and why the evolutionists have guesstimated their age in the billions of years. The dating of those layers has been done on the basis of the theory of uniformity. This theory assumes that all the natural processes at work in the past have operated exactly as they do today. In other words, the creation of those strata can only be explained on the basis of what we see happening in the world now. Scientists must calculate how long it takes for sedimentation to build a foot-deep stratum. Then that age is assigned to any 12-inch layer, no matter how deeply located within the earth.

Is that a valid assumption to make? Have all the natural forces of the past been just what we can

demonstrate and understand today? How naive and conceited to compel ages past to conform to our limited observation and experience! We can assume what we please, but it proves absolutely nothing except our own gullibility. The Bible explains very graphically about a Flood which ravaged the face of this earth, covering the highest mountains and completely destroying all plant and animal life outside the ark. The destructive action of the Deluge is expressed by these words in the Bible:

"The same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." Genesis 7:11, 12.

The existence of those strata can be scientifically accounted for in perfect harmony with the Bible record. The universal Flood of Genesis provides a much more reasonable explanation of the strata than evolution's speculations. As the waters receded from the earth, powerful tides and currents carved out the great canyons in a short time. Layers of debris, according to the specific weight, were laid down, compressing plant and animal life into a compact seam or stratum. Only thus can we explain the vast oil reserves and coal beds around the world. These are the result of vegetation and animal bodies being buried under extreme heat and pressure. No such process of fossilization is taking place today. No oil or coal is forming by present natural forces at work. Uniformity fails here.

The fact is, there had to be a gigantic cataclysmic overturn of nature, killing and burying millions of tons of plant and animal life. The position of some fossils standing upright through one or more strata indicates that the process was not slow or age long. The material had to be deposited quickly around the body of the animal, or it could not have remained in its erect position. Millions of fish were buried by the flood, many of them contorted as though suddenly overtaken by a phenomenal force. Marine fossils have been recovered from the highest mountain ranges, and a check list on other scientific evidences points to a universal deluge over the entire planet.

Survival of the Fittest

"Natural selection" is a coined phrase of the evolutionist to describe the survival of the fittest. Simply stated, it is the natural process which enables the strongest of each generation to survive and the weaker, more poorly adjusted ones, to die out. The assumption of evolution is that since only the strongest survive to father the next generation, the species will gradually improve, even advancing into other more highly developed states on the evolutionary scale.

Darwin believed that natural selection was the most important factor in the development of his theory. Many of the top teachers of evolution today are hopelessly at odds on the question of how vital it is. Sir Julian Huxley believes in it, as this statement indicates:

"So far as we know...natural selection...is the only effective agency of evolution." *Evolution in Action*, p. 36.

He is disputed on this by another one of the heavyweights in the field, Dr. Ernst Mayr:

"Natural selection is no longer regarded as an all-or-none process but rather as a purely statistical concept." *Animal Species*, p. 7.

These opposite views are rejected by G. G. Simpson, who is regarded as the leading interpreter of the theory today. He said,

"Search for the cause of evolution has been abandoned. It is now clear that evolution has no single cause." *The Geography of Evolution*, p. 17.

By the way, when you read about the great unity and agreement which exists among the scientists regarding evolution, don't believe a word of it. Each one is busily experimenting with new speculative possibilities as to how the changes took place and then abandoning them as they appear more and more ridiculous. The one basic tenet they do agree on is that there was no divine fiat creation as described in the Bible.

But come back a moment to the matter of natural selection. What is the evidence that it can actually reproduce all the changes involved in the transition from amoeba to man? Is there scientific proof that it can even make one small change? When it comes right down to answering those questions, the spokesmen for evolution do some of the fanciest footwork in semantics you ever saw and make some of the most amazing admissions. Even though Simpson supports natural selection as a factor, he recognizes the scarcity of evidence in these words:

"It might be argued that the theory is quite unsubstantiated and has status only as a speculation." *Major Features*, pp. 118, 119.

But listen to Huxley's circular reasoning on it. He says:

"On the basis of our present knowledge natural selection is bound to produce genetic adaptations: and genetic adaptations are thus presumptive evidence for the efficiency of natural selection." *Evolution in Action*, p. 48.

Did you follow that gem of logic? His proof for natural selection is adaptation or change in the organism, but the change is produced by natural selection! In other words: $A=B$; therefore $B=A$. His "proof" proves nothing. Were the changes produced by natural selection, or did he invent natural selection to explain the changes? It is just as likely that the changes produced the natural selection theory. The ludicrous thing is that even the changes from species to species have never been verified. As we have shown already, there is not one shred of fossil evidence or living evidence that any species has changed into another. So Huxley's proof for natural selection are changes which never happened, and the changes which never happened are offered as proof for natural selection. Surely this is the most vacuous logic to be found in a science textbook.

But let us continue with Sir Julian's explanation about the reliability of this natural selection process:

"To sum up, natural selection converts randomness into direction and blind chance into apparent purpose. It operates with the aid of time to produce improvements in the machinery of living, and in the process generates results of a more than astronomical improbability which could have been achieved in no other way." *Evolution in Action*, pp. 54, 55.

Don't miss the force of that last sentence. The evolutionary changes wrought by natural selection are "astronomically improbable," but because our friend Huxley sees no other way for it to be done, he believes in the astronomically improbable. Poor man! He is wrong when he said the complex order of life today could have been achieved in no other way. God created the wonders of cell and gene and all the millions of processes which leave the Nobel Prize winners baffled.

But since Sir Julian doesn't believe in a divine creation, he has to invent a miracle-working process to explain the existence of these complex creatures - who obviously got here somehow. To illustrate the omnipotence of his "natural selection" god, Huxley computed the odds against such a process. The computations were done on the likelihood of every favorable evolutionary factor being able to produce a horse. Now keep in mind that this is all a chance development through the operation of nature, time, mutation, and natural selection. In his book *Evolution in Action*, Huxley gave the odds this way:

"The figure 1 with three million naughts after it: and that would take three large volumes of about 500 pages each, just to print!...No one would bet on anything so improbable happening; and yet it has happened." p. 46.

We commented before about the faith of evolutionists to believe in the impossible. Since this figure of compound probability is effectively zero, how can a scientific mind, in the absence of any demonstrable evidence, be so dogmatic in defending his theory? Why did Huxley employ a mathematical formula to illustrate the impossibility of his theory working? Perhaps he used the figures to accent his personal testimony. Just as born-again Christians seek occasions to bear their personal testimony of faith in Christ, Huxley demolishes the scientific possibilities of his theory in order to magnify the personal faith aspect of his personal testimony for the god evolution.

Marshall and Sandra Hall in their book *The Truth - God or Evolution?* share their reaction to Huxley's absurd faith in the chance production of a horse. It will provide a fitting climax of proof that evolution indeed flunked the science test.

"And, let us remind you who find such odds ridiculous (even if you are reassured by Mr. Huxley), that this figure was calculated for the evolution of a **horse**! How many more **volumes** of zeros would be required by Mr. Huxley to produce a **human being**? And then you would have just one horse and one human being and, unless the mathematician wishes to add in the probability for the evolution of all the plants and animals that are necessary to support a horse and a man, you would have a sterile world where neither could have survived any stage of its supposed evolution! What have we now - the figure 1 followed by a thousand volumes of zeros? Then add another thous-and volumes for the improbability

of the earth having all the necessary properties for life built into it. And add another thousand volumes for the improbability of the sun, and the moon, and the stars. Add other thousands for the evolution of all the thoughts that man can have, all the objective and subjective reality that ebbs and flows in us like part of the pulsebeat of an inscrutable cosmos!

"Add them all in and you long ago stopped talking about rational thought, much less scientific evidence. Yet, Simpson, Huxley, Dobzhansky, Mayr, and dozens of others continue to tell us that is the way it had to be! They have retreated from all the points which ever lent any semblance of credibility to the evolutionary theory. Now they busy themselves with esoteric mathematical formulations based on population genetics, random drift, isolation, and other ploys which have a probability of accounting for life on earth of **minus** zero! They clutter our libraries, and press on the minds of people everywhere an animated waxen image of a theory that has been dead for over a decade.

"Evolution has no claim whatsoever to being a science.

"It is time all this nonsense ceased. It is time to bury the corpse. It is time to shift the books to the humor-ous fiction section of the libraries." pp. 39, 40.

These examples of evolutionary folly are only the tip of an iceberg, but they reassure us that we have no cause to be embarrassed for our creationist faith. Millions of Christians have been intimidated by the high-sounding technical language of educated evolutionists, many of whom are vitriolic in their attacks on special creation. What we do need is more information on exposing the loopholes in the evolutionary theory; its base is so riddled with unscientific inconsistencies, often concealed under the gobbledygook of scientific jargon.

To follow our ancestry back through the sons of Adam, "who was the son of God," is so much more satisfying than to search through dismal swamps for bleeping monad forebears. The human race has dropped, even in our lifetime, several degrees deeper into moral perversion and violent disorder. Humanists cite our animal ancestry as an excuse for much of this bizarre behavior. Why blame people for action dictated by their bestial genes and chromosomes? This rationalization, like a temporary insanity plea, provides license for further irresponsible conduct. The true cause for evil and the true remedy for it is found only in the Word of God. Sin has defaced the image of God in man, and only a personal encounter with the perfect Saviour will bring a reversal of the problem of evil.

Is it a Sin to be Tempted?

Joe Crews

1 Corinthians 10:13

No growing Christian in the world can be unconcerned about the traumatic problem of temptation. There is no age level when moral choices and struggles of the spirit do not confront us. Temptation may attack at different points on different issues, but it will always be with us as long as we are in the flesh.

When I was a boy back in North Carolina, we could always tell when the fruit was ripe out in the orchards. A certain gang of neighborhood boys would head in that direction, and everyone would say, "It must be that time again." Now, devils are smarter than teenage boys, and as long as the fruit of your life is sour and immature, they may leave you strictly alone. But when that fruit is ripe, all the demons may suddenly appear to try to steal it away from you.

This means that the most spiritual people are the most likely to face the most severe temptations. They have something that Satan would like to spoil or destroy. Stragglers out on the edge of the camp might come off with a whole skin, but the true saints will be under constant harassment.

Does this mean that it is an honor to be especially tempted by the devil? Perhaps so. In a way it is a compliment to have thieves try to break into your house. It shows that you at least have the reputation for having money. And when the demons come around, it may indeed indicate that you are better off spiritually than you have ever been before.

Now we are prepared to look at one of the most astounding texts in the entire Bible. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." James 1:2. Apparently, the Bible writers were also convinced that temptation can be a good thing. Yet, the thought is in total conflict with all the painful human experiences we have suffered in meeting temptation. Most people consider it to be a necessary evil, downright destructive in its influence.

We certainly need to understand that there are some redeeming features about temptation. First of all, it proves that we have moral insight. No one can be tempted unless there are meaningful choices to be made. Issues of right and wrong must be clearly distinguished. People who see everything in the moral realm as a kind of dull gray cannot pass through any great battles of the mind.

One must have a special consciousness of good and evil in order to be tempted. Many modern religionists seem to have only small, average consciences, which may account for the lack of spiritual conflict. What a contrast to the great characters of the past who seem to have had dramatic hand-to-hand combat with the devil. Martin Luther's confrontation with Satan was so real that he is reported to have thrown an inkwell at his tormentor.

You are to be congratulated, then, if you find yourself tempted. It certainly implies that you are seeing the issues correctly. But now comes the most crucial question: After we recognize the true situation before us, how do we find the power to choose the good over the evil? Paul sensed the urgency of this question when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church. No one could have been faced with more obvious choices than those few Christian citizens of Corinth. The pagan world of the flesh stood out in vivid contrast to the self-denying lifestyle of their new-found faith. There was no question with them about right and wrong, and Paul wrote: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13.

This verse contains a wealth of inspired encouragement for anyone who is struggling against a recognized evil. The apostle warned against making an exception of ourselves. It is so easy for us to feel that no one else has ever had to face the enemy in the same way that we have to. Our burden appears heavier and our battle seems more severe than any which others have experienced. Paul said that this is simply not true, and we must not allow ourselves to think it for a moment. This is old stuff. No matter what we suffer, the very same temptation has come upon a million others long before we were born.

How very much we like to consider our situation different from all others! This provides a very clever rationalization just in case we lose the battle and yield to the temptation. If our case is so different, God cannot judge us as strictly as others who have a much easier test. The businessman consoles himself that cheating on taxes is not usually the right thing to do, but he has suffered more shoplifting losses than anyone else. And besides that, he has been more discriminated against by government bureaucrats.

The philandering husband argues, "My problem is unique. My wife is cold and unresponsive, and no one understands the pressures I am under."

Mark it down: Almost every sin will be prefaced by these three words-"I'm an exception." We must constantly remind ourselves that this has been the psychology of Satan for six thousand years. All he tried to do in the wilderness of temptation was to convince Jesus that He was different. Every one of the three approaches Satan used was based on the idea that as the Son of God, He could do things that no one else could do-turn stones into bread or jump off the pinnacle without being hurt.

The Purpose of Temptation

Now Paul hastens to assure us that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." That is reassuring and comforting! But why should He allow any agonizing conflicts to engulf His people? Why not simply remove all temptation? The answer is found in James 1:2-4. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

A new, satisfying picture begins to emerge in these verses. Temptation provides opportunity for spiritual conquest and growth. It is not a disgrace to be tempted. If there are no battles, there can be no victories through strong decision. Neither can there be any nobility of character. Virtue is tried

innocence. Untried goodness may be no goodness at all. I could possibly sequester myself in a solitary cave somewhere and not commit an outward sin for a whole week simply because I would have no contact with any other person. Would that week prove me to be a virtuous individual? Not at all. Christianity is not merely the absence of wrong behavior in the life; it has to do with an aggressive practice of positive virtues as well. My life in the cave might prove more than I would like it to prove. I would be good, but good for nothing! The person who avoids all temptation by avoiding contact with all people may do no harm, but neither does he do any good. He is morally anemic.

Now we are brought to Paul's assertion that God will "make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it." Does this mean there will always be an easy road out of every temptation experience? No. It just means that in every moral trial God will provide us an alternative. There will always be two paths leading out of each temptation-one, the alluring path of evil; the other, an appealing path of good. Paul is saying that we are being drawn in two directions every time we are tempted. At the same time we are tempted to anger, we are also being tempted to self-control. When we are tempted to be dishonest, we are also tempted to use integrity.

A little boy was standing in a store with his hand in the apple barrel, caressing the attractive fruit. Finally, the storekeeper approached the lad and asked, "Sonny, are you trying to steal my apples?" Quickly the boy answered, "No, sir. I'm trying not to." We can easily understand what he meant by that honest rejoinder. All of us have struggled with those two voices and those two choices. We may not have it neatly analyzed and defined, but we are really being tempted by goodness as much as by evil.

He who represses the impulse to steal is expressing the virtue of honesty. He who represses the desire to commit adultery is simultaneously expressing the ideal of purity. The secret is to apply this beautiful principle to our daily experience so that we do not go through life regarding all temptation as a dreadful enemy. In the long run, we may discover that the most intriguing, appealing things are really the good things. D. L. Moody named a certain beautiful hill near his boyhood home Temptation Hill because he reasoned that someday, somebody would be unable to resist the temptation to build a church on top of it. Sure enough, somebody did yield to the temptation, and a lovely chapel stands there to this day.

Now, let's look toward the end of these dual tracks which lead out of each temptation experience. The temptation that makes one character noble by non-consent will make another character mean and ignoble by giving way to it. This law of human nature decrees that we can never be the same after facing temptation. We will either get the victory and be stronger for the next one down the road, or we will yield and be weaker for the next one we face. Our character is built up or torn down depending on the choice we make.

Should We Seek Temptation?

Doesn't this provide a powerful argument to prove that temptation can be a good thing? Indeed, it does. But it also can be abused if we are not careful. Because victory can do so much good for us, should we go searching for an opportunity to engage the enemy? If temptation can be such a glorious opportunity to develop character, why not pray "Lead us into temptation" instead of "Lead us not into temptation"? Some might reason that they need an injection of new strength and begin looking for a nice, juicy temptation so that they can gain a victory and build their character.

What is wrong with that reasoning? Is there a convincing answer to it? Those of us who possess this freedom of choice should pray that we will not misuse it by placing ourselves in the clutch of circumstances that might test us beyond our strength. Fire controlled in the stove is great, but it is not very good out of control on the roof. It is better to shun the bait than to struggle in the trap after it has sprung.

The fact is that we misjudge our own powers. We do not understand our own strengths and weaknesses. For this reason, no one is justified in deliberately seeking for a testing situation. We have no promise of deliverance under those circumstances. The Bible says, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." 2 Peter 2:9. Again, God promises, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." Revelation 3:10. He is the only one who is qualified to arrange the circumstances of our test. He will permit to develop around us only that which He sees we are in need of and have the strength to endure.

Every one of us has particularly vulnerable points of weakness in character. It is also sadly true that there are special moments of time in which we are most liable to be overcome by the enemy. Satan is well acquainted with that very moment when our resistance will be the lowest, and he also understands our individual weakness. We can be sure of one thing-his strongest attack against us will come in our weakest moment and at the weakest point in our character.

What a solemn thought! With such an enemy we can never feel secure in our own strength. We are only as strong as we are in the weakest moment of our life. Our character is only as strong as its weakest link. These facts forever preclude the possibility that we can deliberately and safely expose ourselves to tests in order to build character. God must measure the temptations to our personal need and strength, and He must constantly control the force of those circumstances which try our faith and experience. In this kind of temptation we may rejoice, as James admonishes us to do.

Sin Begins in the Mind

Another interesting fact about temptation is that it always assails the mind first. Every sin has its origin in the thoughts long before it appears as an act of the body. Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." Mark 7:21, 22. Almost every category of evil is included in this long list of sins which come forth from the heart. Paul described lust as "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Ephesians 2:3. The Greek text more accurately says "desires of the thoughts."

Right at this point we must make some careful distinctions. It is very important to understand that desire, in itself, is not wrong. God has actually placed certain powerful appetites and propensities within our human nature. There is nothing wrong with these drives as long as they are properly controlled and directed. This includes ambition, temper, sex, and every other basic disposition. Wrong comes in only one way. When desire oversteps the bounds and seeks gratification outside the will of God, it turns into lust.

Every day we are confronted with pictures, books, words, etc., which are exciting and appealing to the mind. It is through these emotional stimuli that the mind is often presented with unholy desires. The

temptation to lust is present, but this is not sin. As long as those desires are not gratified or fulfilled they are not wrong. It is only when the mind responds to the desire by receiving it and holding it that the temptation turns into sin.

James describes it this way. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." James 1:14, 15. Here the act of sin is compared to the process of conception and reproduction. Just as a bee carries pollen from one open blossom to another to fertilize the flower, so the heart of each individual is open to the introduction of unholy thoughts and desires. If those seeds are allowed to mingle with the carnal nature, they produce an inevitable harvest of sin, and finally, death. Our only protection is to set a guard before all the avenues of the soul to test every entering thought. By the grace and strength of Christ, every evil desire can be recognized and sifted out so that it has no opportunity to linger in the mind as a catalyst of lust and sin.

This touches an issue that often becomes exceedingly sensitive. How easy it is to say that we can monitor the mind and weed out the clamoring thoughts of sin. But can human beings, even in concert with Christ, actually conquer the temptation to harbor impure thoughts? The Bible says Yes. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5.

How is such total victory possible? Is it accomplished through prayer, faith, or personal effort? Basically, we must agree that this kind of deliverance comes only through the enabling, indwelling Spirit of God. There is not enough strength in the flesh to overcome one evil desire. Nevertheless, the victory is not obtained without our strong cooperation and action. God does not work miracles to deliver those who do not use their own God-given power to avoid evil.

Guard the Avenues of the Mind

Again, we are brought back to the question of inviting temptation. How far should we go in protecting ourselves from the vulnerability to sin? Jesus laid down a very clear principle in the sermon on the mount. "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Matthew 5:29, 30.

Obviously, Jesus was not talking about the literal eye or the literal hand. One could violently decimate his body and still be as wicked as ever. Christ was talking about the occupation of the hand and what the eye focuses on. If we find ourselves in a job or any physical situation which opens a door to temptation, the counsel is to "cut it off." In other words, get away from any vocation which involves an enticement that is liable to lead into sin. The Master indicated that any radical means should be used to avoid situations which might overwhelm with soul-destroying sin. Even an employment position should be abandoned rather than risk the spiritual loss of eternal life.

If we find ourselves looking at some scene which is likely to introduce sinful thoughts or actions, Jesus commands us to shut that view away from our sight by any possible means. The term "pluck it out"

conveys the idea of precipitous action if necessary.

What a persuasive argument against the corrupt communication media of today! The alluring appeal of television is probably the most powerful incitement to sin in the twentieth century. The words of Christ have a most explicit application to those who have difficulty controlling the television set. Our Lord's counsel to "pluck it out" would seem to translate into "throw it out" if the eye continues to be offended by provocative pictures on the tube. Much better, Jesus said, to lose the advantage of the educational material than to lose the soul by looking at degrading programs. If it can't be totally controlled, don't take the chance! Pluck it out!

Would Jesus ask us to deny ourselves some good thing just because a small amount of mind pollution might be involved? Yes. It is much better to lead what the world calls a narrow-minded existence—a one-eyed life—than to lead a so-called full life and lose your soul. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23. Saying No to desirable, fleshly things is a basic requirement of a Christian's discipleship if those things present temptations which are likely to lead into sin.

What I am really saying is that even with a spiritual mind, we need to follow the great basic principles of victory over temptation. There are places to be avoided if we want to have total victory. There are devotional requirements if we would be wholly in harmony with Christ. The avenues of the mind must be guarded if we would defeat sin in its inception.

What a tremendous difference it would make if all could clearly understand the priority placed upon a pure mind. Satan has created a deceptive, artificial world of the flesh which makes a powerful appeal to the mind of every man, woman, and child. Only by recognizing the snares and appropriating all the weapons of Christ's warfare will we be successful in resisting temptation.

No Confidence in the Flesh

Although some people seem able to resist anything except temptation, others appear to be almost complacent about the problem. Is it possible to have a misplaced confidence in the flesh and its ability to cope with temptation? Paul wrote, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Corinthians 10:12.

Have you noticed how some of the most unlikely individuals fall prey to the most unlikely sins? It is often the case that a person is overcome in the area where he feels the strongest. How does it happen? Do we become careless on the point of our supposed strength? It appears so. No inspired explanation is given as to how Moses could succumb to impatience or anger. The Bible presents him as the meekest man who ever lived. Such a person might yield to many other temptations but surely not to passion. Yet, that is exactly the sin that shut Moses out of the promised land. He smote the rock in anger instead of speaking to it as God commanded. Numbers 20.

Elijah's great strength was courage. He withstood single-handedly all the entrenched forces of Baal on Mt. Carmel. With incredible boldness he challenged anyone who deviated from a path of full obedience to God. Yet, immediately after his successful contest with the prophets of Baal, he fled like a coward

from the threats of Queen Jezebel. It was so out of character for the fearless Tishbite! Did he drop his guard in the area of his fabled strength?

Abraham was distinguished by his total trust in God. He is called the father of the faithful. Yet he lied to the King of Egypt out of fear that his wife would be taken from him. Do these great Bible characters not demonstrate dramatically how Satan attacks the place in our lives where there is a lack of alertness? No one should think he is immune to Satan's attacks because of some demonstrable virtues.

It is also very interesting to note that no one really anticipates the result of yielding to temptation, since it usually approaches along the line of least resistance. Gehazi saw the flashing colors of the Syrian garments-not the leprous scars which would follow him to the grave. Achan saw the coveted wedge of Babylonian gold-not the anger of a nation which would rise up to stone him. Judas could not see past the glittering silver coins to his fearful remorse and suicide.

Another great truth about temptation, which should bring courage to all of us, is that many temptations will cease to trouble us as we make good choice a habit. Just as our brain is programmed to do wrong by constant yielding to compromise and defeat, so it may be programmed for victory through strong decision and right choices. Most of the terrible struggle will disappear from the experience as our nature adjusts to a program of habitual victory.

Someone wrote an article entitled "Don't Decide to Go to Church," which stirred considerable controversy. But the basic premise of the article was simply that we should not have to debate over the decision to attend church. Just as we don't struggle three times a day with the decision to eat food, so we should not have to make some heavy decisions about going to church each Sabbath morning. Repetition of a practice finally turns it into an automatic response, and the temptation to stay away from church no longer exists. So it can be with many other forms of temptation as we use our wills to establish victorious patterns of thought and action.

Are you sometimes tempted not to pray or read your Bible in the morning? Probably every Christian has faced that temptation at least once. Is it possible to take the strength out of that particular temptation? Yes, it is. Thousands of people have established such a pattern of daily devotion that they don't even consider not taking the time to do it. The temptation no longer really exists for them. They have followed the counsel of Paul, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:21.

Thus far we have uncovered some of the psychological tricks that Satan uses for trapping people into sin. We have also concluded that sin originates in the mind, which means that some very special attention must be given to protecting that vulnerable target of the enemy's attack. We have suggested placing specific guards before the avenues of the mind to shut out suspicious thoughts and desires. We have strongly recommended using the will to say No to the urges of the flesh. All of this counsel is good, but it is also useless if one truth is not recognized. Now we move into the very heart of the temptation/sin problem.

The Power of a Positive No

The power to say No to temptation is only possible for those who have received the mind of Christ through conversion. The carnal mind has no choice whatsoever about sin. It is foredoomed to failure and defeat. All the processes of choice, free will, and decision are centered in the mysterious gray matter of the brain. Here is where Satan made his first attack on Eve. In order to make her sin,

Satan had to influence her to open her mind to someone besides God. And the only way to reach her mind was through the emotional avenue of the senses. Thus, the Bible says that she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise." Genesis 3:6.

Please notice that the serpent was only able to corrupt her mind through the things she looked at and listened to. It was the appealing beauty of the fruit, plus the hypnotizing sound of the flattering voice, which finally led to Eve's downfall.

Mark it down: It is only by utilizing the paths which are under our conscious control that Satan is able to defile the mind. In other words, we must give our consent before an act of sin can be committed. No one compelled Eve to leave her husband, walk to the tree, listen to the serpent, or eat the fruit. Every step was a volitional act in response to some sensory appeal. God had placed within Eve a holy will and a perfect, sinless mind. Through these sanctified powers a total separation from sin was always possible for her. Yet she chose to disobey God.

Our case is not quite so clear-cut and simple. We do not possess by nature the kind of pure and unpolluted mind that Eve had. We have all inherited the weak and compromised bodies and minds which disobedience produced in Adam and Eve. By yielding to Satan and choosing to obey him instead of God, Eve instantly lost her power to resist temptation. Her will became weakened, and the law of sin began to operate in her body to produce death. By that one deliberate act, she forever doomed herself and her off-spring to a life of unrelenting struggle and defeat.

Had God not immediately introduced the plan of salvation in Genesis 3:15, all the human race would have followed Eve's course of willful sin and would have died without hope. The promised seed of the woman offered hope for degenerate men to reverse the effect of Adam's and Eve's sin. Through Christ the death sentence could be lifted and the mind of enmity could be replaced by the mind of Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5.

It would be useless to deal with the subject of temptation without recognizing that the ultimate answer to this problem is a spiritual yielding to Christ. All the counsel in the world, and all the knowledge of sin's devices will be less than useless if the mind is not surrendered to Christ.

The Second Adam's Temptation

Consider for a moment how Jesus made that way of escape from temptation for every one who will accept it. He came as the world's second Adam, and faced the enemy exactly like the first Adam had to meet him. And yet, of course, it was not exactly as Adam and Eve were tested. Jesus did not meet the tempter in a lovely garden surrounded by beauty. He struggled with Satan in a wild, desolate

wilderness. The first Adam had access to every possible variety of luscious food, but Jesus was emaciated and weak from forty days without food or drink.

The first Adam faced the tempter in the strength of a perfect body, untainted by a single hereditary flaw. Jesus took humanity upon Himself after 4,000 years of sin had weakened the human race. He accepted all the hereditary disadvantages and liabilities which sin had imposed upon the physical descendants of the first Adam.

No one will ever fully understand the nature of that wilderness contest. Satan had anticipated this confrontation for years, and perhaps for centuries. In those three subtle temptations he had combined all the psychological expertise that his mastermind could provide. In effect, Satan appealed to the same basic human emotions which had destroyed the first Adam-appetite, presumption, and position. But, thank God, the deceiver could not find one thing in Christ to respond to his enticements. The second Adam utterly disarmed and defeated the devil in the very areas which had been so effective against the first Adam.

We need to stretch our minds in an effort to comprehend this truth. Why was the great Creator-God of the universe willing to submit to the indignities of that agonizing experience? Had He not already proven His power over the evil one by casting him out of heaven? Why should He voluntarily place Himself at such terrible disadvantage in the midst of another conflict with Satan?

The answer is simple. The devil had stolen away the masterpiece of God's creation. Mankind, whom God loved, had been kidnapped by the enemy, albeit willingly, and was held in captivity. Two things happened that day when Adam was conquered by Satan. First, he and his descendants immediately fell under the irrevocable sentence of death which God had pronounced upon transgressors of His law. Second, his entire moral nature became so traumatized and degraded by sin that it would never be possible for Adam or his posterity to refrain from sinning again, and again.

Do you see the problem? What could God do to release the creatures He loved from the devastating consequence of their sin? They were doomed to die and they had forfeited the power to obey. Satan exulted. He reasoned that God Himself could not get man back without changing His law or compromising His justice. At last, Satan had found a way to prove the charges he had pressed against God. In the presence of the holy angels he had accused God of being unfair and requiring an impossible obedience.

Now he gloated over God's dilemma, as these charges seemed to have proven true. Man apparently could not obey. Now God would either have to let man die in his sin, or change His law, or accept transgressors in His kingdom-so Satan must have reasoned.

God met the problem with such an incredible strategy that no devil or man could have faintly anticipated it. Satan was overwhelmed by its implications. Briefly, it involved God's taking man's place and accepting the punishment of death for him. Neither the law nor the sentence for breaking it was changed.

In order to die for man's sin, though, God had to take upon Himself a nature that was subject to death. Deity could not die. Jesus accepted the unspeakable conditions of being born into the lost, condemned family of Adam. In the incarnation, God not only provided for His atoning death for sin but for a dramatic rebuttal of Satan's charge that man could not live without sinning. In order to make the demonstration absolutely unanswerable on Satan's part, Jesus submitted Himself to the same human limitations of every child of Adam. He was tempted in all points as we are tempted, yet He completely overcame every one of them by using the same divine power that is accessible to each one of us. He was still God totally and completely, but He was also totally man. In meeting these temptations, He voluntarily restricted Himself to the same spiritual resources available to man today. Thus, He shattered Satan's lie that obedience for humanity is an impossibility.

All Lost Things Restored

With a life of perfect obedience behind Him, Jesus laid down His life to meet the penalty of the broken law. His death and resurrection gave Him the final authority by which to reverse all the human havoc wrought by Satan's victory over Adam. Now Jesus had in His hand everything man could possibly need to be restored to God's Edenic plan of perfection and holiness. Although it had cost Him an infinite price to obtain, He offered all of it as a free gift to anyone who would receive it.

What did He have to offer? Deliverance from the death sentence through His own assumption of the guilt and penalty, credit for a perfect life of obedience through His imputed righteousness, and victory in the flesh over every temptation Satan can devise.

Many who have joyfully received the first two gifts have been fearful to accept the third. Why should we hesitate to be an exhibit for God? By receiving His power of victory over temptation, we provide a vindication of God's original purpose, and we expose the blasphemous lies of Satan for what they really are.

Right now Satan holds a tenuous position as a temporary ruler of this world. He watches in desperation as Jesus and the Holy Spirit break through the barriers of sin to release multitudes of his captives. The power of the flesh is broken every time self surrenders to Christ.

Temptation loses its power when He enters the life. By one decision right now, victory is assured. The second Adam was to deliver you from the old sinful nature of the first Adam. He wants you to change families. There is no hope for us to overcome temptation unless we get out of the defeated, dying family of the first Adam.

Jesus offers each one of us the victory which He won over Satan in the flesh. We might be suspicious of this gift had He not overcome in the same human nature we possess. Now He wants to enter your life and live out the same victory in you day after day.

One of my favorite stories has to do with Augustine, whose youth was marked by gross licentiousness and immorality. As a young man he was swept by mighty currents of emotion for two women in his life. Like a chip on the tide, Augustine would be drawn toward his godly mother, Monica; and then, toward a dissolute woman who seemed to hold him under an evil spell. In spite of his mother's prayers

for him, Augustine continued a course of miserable compromise. Sometimes he would be attracted to the righteous instruction of Monica, but then, the evil influence of the other woman would draw him back. The battle was long and terrible.

But then came that glorious day when in his garden Augustine was converted through a mysterious voice directing him to Romans 13:13, 14. When he read this text, the scales fell off his eyes, and he rushed to convey the good news to his mother. She was delighted at the dramatic change in her son.

While walking down the streets of Carthage the next day after his conversion, Augustine saw the woman who had been his companion in sin. She was coming directly toward him and there was no way to avoid the encounter. Without even acknowledging her presence, Augustine brushed past her without a word. She stopped, unbelieving, and then ran after him in a state of outrage. Grabbing his arm she cried, "Augustine! Augustine! It is I!" He stopped in his tracks, looked at her, and said, "Yes, but it is not I." Then he walked on down the street and out of her life forever.

Augustine told the truth that day because he was indeed a new person. It is only in the strength of the second Adam that we will be able to turn from temptation. Sin loses its appeal for those who are in love with Christ and have made their decision to serve Him instead of self.

Satan will have no problem overcoming the children of the first Adam. He defeated the father and he can handle the children as well. On the other hand, he will find no way to conquer those who draw upon the strength of the second Adam.

This is the way of escape that is promised to those who will receive it. Jesus simply passes on to His spiritual children the total victory which He won over the devil while living here in human flesh.

This is the heart of the matter. Under this power the Christian uses his surrendered will to choose the lifestyle which avoids the hidden snares of temptation. Both factors are very important in winning the victory-having Christ in the heart and avoiding presumptuous situations of temptation. May God lead us in applying these spiritual principles

Is it Easier to be Saved or to be Lost?

Joe Crews

Romans 5:20

It seems very appropriate that the word *dynamite* is a transliteration of the Greek word *dunamis*, which means power. The word is not a stranger to those who are students of the Scriptures. It is one of the colorful adjectives used in the Bible to describe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power (*dunamis*) of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16.

How few Christians have a true understanding of the explosive power of the gospel they so lightly profess! If Paul's words are true, then everyone who possesses the gospel should also be filled with tremendous power. But is that the case? Unfortunately, the lives of countless church members are flaccid, bland, and miserably compromised. Instead of vibrant power there seems to be discouragement and defeat. What is wrong? Do these people really believe the gospel or not? And why is the dynamite so obviously missing in their lives?

The answer must be that many do not truly believe what they profess. Or else, they have been taught a counterfeit gospel. Some of the greatest spiritual problems of today are rooted in a misunderstanding of the gospel. The sad fact is that millions have no true comprehension of what is afforded through the gospel, and what it is supposed to do for them. Unaware of its full provisions, they stumble along, claiming only what their weak faith is able to encompass. Instead of feasting at the banquet table of the Lord, these people gather crumbs from under the table which barely provides enough strength to survive.

They are very much like the "missing heirs" we have heard so much about. All across America millions of dollars are stacked up in banks waiting for the true owners to take possession of the money. In most cases, the heirs are unaware of the wealth which rightfully belongs to them and which only awaits their demand and reception. But these millions are nothing compared to the spiritual riches which still lie untapped by those Christians who fail to recognize their own unlimited affluence. For no reason, except their own abysmal failure to claim their true possessions, most professed Christians are living in wretched poverty and weakness.

SATAN HAS NO POWER OVER GOD'S CHILDREN

Do you know why these millionaires are living like paupers? Because they have allowed the devil to intimidate them. He has lied to them about one of their most basic privileges. We need to unmask the evil one and expose the false claims he makes concerning his authority. Satan would like for us to believe that he has unlimited control over this world and all its people. That is not true. He is not the master of God's children and has no power at all over the saints. Where Christ lives and reigns, Satan trembles and flees for his life. GOD IS STRONGER THAN SATAN. This glorious truth must fill our minds with constant assurance.

Don't misunderstand me. Satan is powerful. We have all seen the incredible, enslaving influence that he

exercises in the life of a sinner. But when Christ banishes the devil from that sinner and controls his life, the power for good is far greater than the evil. If there is more power in Christ than there is in Satan, then there is more power in grace than there is in sin. Jesus is not just as strong as the devil, else the warfare between them might end in a draw or a standoff. But, thank God, Christ has already won the battle and Satan is a defeated foe right now.

This leads us to the joyful conclusion that the Christian has somebody stronger helping him to follow Jesus than the sinner has helping him to follow Satan. This glorious fact should give tremendous comfort to every child of God. It also raises a very interesting question. If we have such a powerful defender on our side, who desires our salvation, is it correct to also conclude that it's easier to be saved than to be lost? Before any glib response is made to that question, we need to consider the two major aspects of salvation. It is very important to understand whether the question relates to *becoming* a Christian or *remaining* a Christian.

We would like to believe that because Christ is stronger than Satan, He would facilitate the entire process of salvation for His children. Yet, we have experienced first hand the painful struggle with self in making the decision to follow Jesus. There was a titanic battle between the flesh and the Spirit, and Satan exploited every human frailty in seeking to hold us in the bondage of sin. It is doubtful that even one soul would concede that it is easier to surrender fully to Christ than to continue living after the flesh. Satan seems to have hundreds of enticing allurements to make it difficult to break away from the ways of the world.

Furthermore, the devil has one advantage over God in that he can lie, and make things appear exactly opposite of what they really are. He can make sin appear unobjectionable and beautiful. The fallen nature of man, with its powerful propensity to sin, has a natural bent toward things which are evil. And even after conversion, that lower nature can be appealed to by the delusions and deceptions of Satan. This means that the Christian must be constantly on the alert for subtle or oblique attacks from a very clever enemy.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD; NOT THE WAY OF THE OBEDIENT

Does this mean that it will be discouraging to follow the Christian lifestyle? Will the harrassments of temptation make it miserable to live for Christ? On the contrary we can rest in the settled assurance that we are on the winning side of the great controversy. He that is for us is greater than he that is against us. Isn't that exciting good news? The conversion experience transforms the mind and will into a veritable spiritual fortress. From that control center the Holy Spirit exercises a subduing influence over the lower fleshly nature. As long as the faculties are yielded to God the Christian finds relief from the burden and guilt of sin.

Is this not what the Master meant when He spoke these words: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me. ... and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."? Matthew 11:28-30. Certainly Jesus was not saying that hardships and conflicts would disappear from the lives of His followers. Rather He was describing the joy and peace of mind that would mark the path of the obedient. When Jesus met Saul on the road to Damascus He said, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The meaning of these words is obvious. He was telling Saul that it was hard to resist the Holy Spirit. The misery and

struggle lay in the path of disobedience. The way of the transgressor is hard; not the way of the obedient.

We must stop allowing Satan to brainwash us with the exaggerated claims of his authority. It is true that under the reign of sin it is easier to do wrong than it is to do right, but it is also true that under the reign of grace it is easier to do right than it is to do wrong. Why should we not assert the prerogatives that belong to us as the children of God? The Bible writers did not hesitate to challenge the limited authority of Satan, and neither should we. Paul wrote: "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:20, 21.

Note the expression, "as sin hath reigned." How did sin reign? As a controlling power, did it not? Driving back every spiritual impulse, the carnal nature overpowered all the efforts of grace to enter the heart. But notice that grace abounds "much more" than sin, and "as sin hath reigned...even so might grace reign"! Obviously, grace will also be a controlling power which can overpower all the efforts of sin to enter the life. Isn't that a fantastic assurance? The devil has no dynamite that compares with the shattering dynamite of the gospel in a surrendered life.

So we are brought back to the question again: Is it harder to serve Jesus or Satan? It is undeniable that we have access to more good power than bad. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Someone might answer, "Satan." And I say, "So what? He flees at the very name of Jesus." Of course, he wants you to be lost, but God wants you to be saved. You can win every time by being on the side of the stronger. Jesus referred to His mastery of devils in these words: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him,...he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." Luke 11:21, 22.

The strong man referred to is Satan, of course. He is stronger than the wisest man who ever lived (Solomon), and the strongest man who ever lived (Samson), and the most perfect man who ever lived (Adam). But he is not stronger than Jesus. Christ is that stronger One who "overcame him" and delivers the captives out of his hands. What an exciting reality!

ALL WILL BE SAVED WHO DO NOT RESIST

Not only does God have the power to save us, but He has the desire to do it. It is His will that all should come to repentance and be saved. What produces repentance in the life? Paul assures us that "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Romans 2:4. How many does He lead toward repentance? Everyone, of course, since it is His will to save all. Christ said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32. His love does not appeal to a select few only, but to ALL men. His goodness LEADS every soul to repent, and His love DRAWS all men to the cross. If this is true, why are not all men saved? Because they resist the sweet drawing influence of the Holy Spirit. There is absolutely no doubt that God actively seeks the salvation of every soul on planet earth, and He will continue to convict those who have not hardened themselves in unbelief.

What a thought! The difficult thing to do is to fight against salvation. Unless we resist, God will persist

in drawing us to Himself. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Titus 2:11. To how many men? ALL men! Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus tasted death "for every man." Again, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. The only reason all the world is not saved is simply because the great majority resists God's provision of saving, sanctifying grace.

So the really hard thing about the way of transgression is the binding hold that sin has fastened on the mind and body. This is why it is easier for the unconverted to continue their course than to turn from death to life. There is nothing within them capable of challenging the will of the flesh. But we affirm just as confidently that the born-again Christian will quickly grow to abhor sin, and will find it an absolutely miserable act to compromise the conscience by willful disobedience.

So what is the answer to the question, Is it easier to be saved or to be lost? We must truthfully say that it is difficult to make the initial turn from the self-life, but after the heart is surrendered, the path of the Christian, in every way, is happier and easier to maintain. Let's consider the theology behind this glorious fact.

The Bible speaks of "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Romans 3:24-26.

Please notice that only those who "believe in Jesus" will be personally justified, even though the cross provides it for everyone. The text says there must be "faith in his blood." The utility company provides abundant power and light to my home, but I receive no benefit whatever unless I push the switches in my home. All of God's saving, cleansing, justifying power is of no benefit to me in salvation unless I accept it in a personal way.

Our text also speaks of "remission of sins that are past" as a part of this justification experience. What really happens in this act of remission or forgiveness of sins? Many believe that this is something which happens outside the life of the believer. They consider that forgiveness changes God's attitude toward the transgressor because of some celestial accounting carried out billions of light years away. Is it true that forgiveness affects God so that He no longer holds something against me? This is decidedly not the case. Forgiveness does not change God toward us; it changes us toward Him. God didn't need to change. He was never wrong. Man was the sinner who needed to change. He stood condemned before a broken law that could offer no grace or forgiveness. There was absolutely no righteousness to be drawn from the law. It could not provide any strength for right-doing. The sinner was powerless, condemned and helpless under the scourging of that law.

Paul's terminology makes condemnation to be the opposite of justification. In Romans 8:1-4 he describes what justification subjectively accomplishes for the individual. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin

in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Immediately, we can see that the problem lay in the flesh which was too weak to obey the law. Something had to be done in man to bring him back into harmony with God. The Greek word for *righteousness* in this verse is *dikaïma*, which means *just requirement*. How could the weak-flesh problem be remedied so that man could fulfill the requirements of the law?

God provided the full solution when He sent Jesus in the flesh to obey the law perfectly. It was only because Christ lived a perfect life of obedience that He is able to impute justification to each one of us. If that plan of sending Jesus had not taken care of my weakness in the flesh, then the plan would have failed. When Christ moves into the life, the condemnation is removed, the sins are forgiven, and we are empowered to fulfill the requirements of the law through Christ in us. This is the change which forgiveness makes in the life.

Forgiveness does not change God, but us. He justifies the ungodly by taking away the ungodliness. He justifies the rebellious sinner by taking away the rebellion. When He declares us righteous, His self-filling word makes us righteous. He does not declare something which is not true. The One who conquered Satan now moves into the human heart to provide victory over the power of sin. The miracle of the new life is described in the Bible by utterly fantastic expressions. We can have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), partake of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19), and be made free from sin (Romans 6:18). All this is possible as grace begins to rule the life, and under this power, Satan doesn't have a ghost of a chance.

CHRISTIANS NEED NOT CRINGE OR COWER

All who do not resist the goodness of God will be led to repentance and salvation, and they should not be intimidated by the pretended authority of a defeated foe. We must recognize our position as the sons of God. We should also be unafraid to acknowledge our authority in Christ over Satan. It is time for God's children to stop trembling before the threats of a conquered enemy. Too often in evangelism we watch in dismay as the devil arranges his competing attractions to take people away from the Word of God. We say, "Oh my, what are we going to do? The circus is coming to town during our crusade." The truth is that Satan should be worried instead of us. He ought to tremble and say, "What am I going to do? The evangelistic meetings are coming to town."

God's Spirit-filled children must learn to be more confident, more aggressive and bold in their assertion of truth in the name of the mighty, conquering Creator God. We are not operating in the strength of the flesh but in the power of the Holy Spirit. He that is for us is greater than he which is against us. Praise be to God for such assurance!

Now let us consider the question, WHY IS IT NOT HARD TO SERVE CHRIST WHEN YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN? Please don't mistake the language of this question. We are talking about a born-again Christian following Jesus. There is no contention that anyone else will find it easy to live the Christian life. In fact, there is probably no more difficult task in the world than trying to live for Christ in the strength of the flesh. It is quite possible that many of the degenerative diseases and weaknesses of the

body have been produced by generations of struggle to please God by human effort. People are wearied and worn out by such futile activity.

I am not saying that there will be no effort or struggle, but for the committed Christian the way of obedience is a joy and delight AND VICTORY IS ASSURED! "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3. The great disciple of love declares that it is not hard to obey God's law when it is the fruitage of a love relationship. The Psalmist wrote, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Psalm 40:8. There are two strong reasons why it is not grievous for the true Christian to serve the Lord. First, he is absolutely confident that God loves him and will do only what is good for him. Second, he loves Christ supremely and chooses to run no risk of displeasing Him.

RESTRICTIONS CAN BE A DELIGHT

Someone may raise a question about the demands laid down in the Bible and the penalties attached for transgression. None can deny that they are there. Do these requirements and threatened penalties make obedience a hardship? Let me answer that question with two imaginary interviews. Suppose I have just submitted to a complete medical examination and the doctor is giving me a report of his findings. He says, "Joe, I have bad, bad news for you. Your tests indicate that you are going to die unless you follow my orders exactly. To save your life, you must obey what I'm going to tell you, and you must continue to follow my orders every day for the rest of your life. I've found that you will be required to eat two or three times a day in order to save your life. And you must force yourself to do it day after day as long as you live."

Think about it for a moment. Those are strict rules with heavy penalties attached. I can lose my life by violating the law laid down by the doctor. But will it be difficult for me to follow those orders? Of course not! Why? Simply because there is a higher law leading me to eat every day anyway. The physical laws of my being demand that I eat regularly, and I enjoy doing it. It is for my own good to eat, and I do not have to force myself to comply with the doctor's rigid requirements.

In the same way there is a law of love operating in every Christian life which is the natural extension of a personal relation with Jesus. The commandments and penalties of the Bible are no threat whatsoever, because the Christian recognizes the higher law leading him to do these same things that are for his best good. He does not obey for fear of the penalty, but because he is happiest obeying the One he loves.

Let's imagine another conversation that will never actually take place. I am preparing to leave home for a month of evangelism. My wife tells me goodbye and then solemnly holds a paper before my face. "Joe," she says, "you will be gone for a month, and your check will be mailed out before you return. I just want you to read this paper very carefully. It is a copy of Maryland Statute No. 392, and it states that you will be put in jail if you don't send me money to operate the home. It's not very pleasant in that county jail, so I'll be expecting you to send that money as soon as you get your check."

What she says is true, but do I need the threat of that law to make me support my family? No, there is a higher law of love which makes me want to take care of my loved ones. Love turns duty into a joyful privilege. I remember walking ten miles in the pouring rain to keep a date with the girl I loved. I had no

regrets. My love for her overruled the hardship. We can make anything a burden by the attitude we have toward it and by the way we relate to it. It is a burden to serve Jesus only if the relationship is wrong.

IS THE NARROW ROAD HARD AND UNHAPPY?

I have heard people say, "But Christianity is so restrictive." True. But marriage is even more restrictive than religion. Does that make it miserable? Do brides and grooms complain about the narrow promises they make to each other? I have performed many marriages and have never seen newlyweds unhappy about their commitments. They are always radiant, even though they have just promised their lives away.

Imagine someone approaching the new bride with these discouraging words: "Oh, my! You really are in a bad situation now. Just think, you've got to cook for this guy every day of your life. You'll be required to clean the house, mend his clothes, and put up with his untidy habits. This marriage thing is bad news." Do you know how that new young wife would respond? She would say, "Wonderful! I love it!"

Suppose someone should try to discourage a newly baptized Christian, who has just been "married" to Jesus, with these words: "Oh, you've got yourself into a miserable mess. Just think, you can't go to the bars and dances anymore. You can't go to the ball games on Sabbath, and you won't be able to eat pork and shrimp anymore." Without question that beaming newborn Christian would answer, "Wonderful! I love every moment of it!"

The explanation for this response is made in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us." Love propels and compels people to do anything and everything to please the One who died for them. No burdensome yoke binds such disciples to the path of service and obedience. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14. That word *blessed* really means *happy*. The commandments may be restrictive, but it is a joy to be restricted by love.

To the unconverted these thoughts are alien and contradictory. People who are not in love cannot appreciate the selfless involvement of those who are happily married. Some married couples have destroyed their love for each other, and they look upon marriage as a galling bondage. *The fault is not with the marriage, but with the attitude.* When Christians fall away and lose their relationship with Jesus, they also begin to complain about the burden of religion. The fault lies not in the religion but in the loveless hearts of the complainers.

Does all of this stand in opposition to the teaching of Christ concerning self-denial? Jesus did say, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23. Did He mean that the way of obedience would be hard and unhappy? No. He was simply picturing the reality of competing attractions in the life of a Christian. There will always be allurements of the flesh and of the world appealing to self and trying to draw me away from Christ. Without the compelling influence of a higher affection, the emotional appeal of those things might be overpowering. Here is where the lines of love's authority are revealed. The powerful love of Christ

constrains me to cling to Him and say "No" to the incessant invitation of the flesh, the devil, and the world. Those foolish challenges to my relationship with Christ will always be present, but I will always be able to choose to stay with Him for two reasons: I love Him more than anything or anybody else in the world, and I know He will do only what is best for me.

Satan will utilize feeling as one of his most effective weapons against the saints, but a true Christian will recognize that the flesh and feelings cannot be trusted. We must serve God because of right and truth and not because we feel in the mood. Moods have led millions to deny the Lord and live for the flesh. Most of those who serve the devil today are doing so because they have been deceived and blinded by feeling. It is a constant marvel to watch people follow the shallow artificialities of sin in pursuit of happiness. Obviously, they do not derive any true pleasure out of smoking, drinking, and otherwise destroying themselves by indulgent behavior; yet, robot-like, they go through the motions dictated by their carnal desires.

Walter Winchell summed it up when he wrote in his newspaper column: "The saddest people in the world are those sitting in joints making believe they are having a good time. This Broadway Street is full of amusement places trying to make people happy, yet its people are drenched in unhappiness."

The problem is that those millions have no power of a higher law of spiritual love operating in their lives. With no competing force to oppose it, the flesh holds a controlling influence over the mind and body. Self responds to the emotional appeal of external stimuli and has no choice but to be captured by the flesh. It reminds me of a story I heard about a concentration camp. A man stood looking through the barbed wires of an overcrowded death camp. Inside, the prisoners stood with emaciated bodies, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes. As the man on the outside gazed at the spectacle of those starving inmates, one of the prisoners called to him and said, "Ha! You can't come in here, can you?" Immediately, the self-nature reacted to the challenge. "Who says I can't? I'll show you." And the man crawled through the wire to join the other sad-faced internees.

That is probably as close as we can come to explaining the senseless carnival of death that leads millions every year into presumptuous violation of the laws of their being. Incredible as it may seem, self is willing to make itself miserable in order to have its own way, and those in the flesh have no power to resist its dictates. It is much easier for them to do wrong than it is to do right. But let us repeat and reaffirm the glorious truth that for those who are deeply in love with Christ, it is easier to do right than it is to do wrong.

Here is the good news of the full gospel of Jesus Christ, and I hold it out to every reader of these words right now. Jesus came to provide the dynamite power by which we can be both justified and sanctified. We may have deliverance from the guilt of sin and also from the power of sin. By accepting the simple, free provisions of the gospel, salvation is assured in all three tenses of our Christian experience - past, present, and future. May God help us not to be satisfied with a partial understanding or application of His grace. Let us lay hold of the incredible riches and power (*dunamis*) which have been given to us as the sons and daughters of God.

HOW TO CLAIM VICTORY OVER SIN

Have you heard about the evolutionary way of getting the victory over bad habits and sins? It is sometimes called the *tapering* method or the *trying* method, but generally, it just doesn't work. Oh, it partially works, of course, because old age takes care of some temptations and sins, and time settles the rest when death comes. But do you know why *trying* does not work in overcoming the devil?

Why can't we fight the devil for a few months and finally drive him away? Because the devil is stronger than we are. We could fight him for a year, but he would still be stronger than we are at the end of that year. Trying will never break the power of sin in a single instance because we are facing an enemy who will always be stronger than we are. What, then, is the answer to our weakness and defeat? This question leads us to the sweetest and most sublime secret in the Word of God.

First of all, one must understand that all of Heaven's gifts are available to us through the promises of the Bible, and we receive them by faith. Peter describes the "exceeding great and precious promises" and assures us that "by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." 2 Peter 1:4. Mighty power is stored within the promise to fulfill itself to all who claim it in faith. So few are willing to believe that the promised blessing becomes theirs the very moment they believe it. Why is it so hard to believe implicitly that God will do what He promises?

Now, let us come down to the very heart of victory and consider the four simple scriptural steps that any believer may take in claiming God's power. Four texts will illuminate the amazing transaction. FIRST: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57. Allow your mind to savor the fantastic message of these words. VICTORY IS A GIFT! We do not earn it by our efforts or deserve it because of any supposed goodness. The only thing we need do is ask for it, and the victory will be given to us freely by Christ. He is the only One who has ever gained the victory over Satan, and if we ever possess the victory, it will have to come as a gift from Him.

Let me ask you something. Do you need victory in your life over some binding, miserable habit of sin? Some are slaves to appetite, to alcohol, or tobacco. Others are struggling helplessly against impurity, anger, or worldliness. The Bible says you may have the victory as a gift through Jesus Christ. Do you believe He will give you that power if you ask Him? How certain can you be that God will answer your prayer for victory immediately? Here is how sure you can be - just as sure as Christ's words are true!

Our SECOND text is Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Is it a good thing when you ask for victory over tobacco or any other fleshly or moral evil? Of course it is! And you don't even have to ask if it is God's will! He has already told us in the Bible that it is His will to destroy the works of sin and the devil. If we pray for more money or a better job, we should always ask according to His will, but the victory over sin is promised to everyone who asks in faith. Will God give the victory when we ask Him? Jesus said He is more willing to give this good thing than we are to feed our children when they are hungry. He is waiting to honor your faith and to supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19. These assurances are so open-ended and unlimited that our minds are staggered by it. Why have we been so reluctant to apply for the provisions of grace? Why is it so hard to believe that God means exactly what He says?

Here is the next question. How do we know we have the victory after we ask Him? Simply because He said we would have it. We know God does not lie. We can believe His promise. The very moment we ask, we should accept the fact of fulfillment, thank Him for the gift, get up and act as if it has been done. No kind of proof-feeling or sign should be demanded or expected. The self-fulfilling power in the promise is released in response to our faith alone.

This brings us to the THIRD text found in Romans 6:11, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The word reckon means to believe, or to consider it done. Every practice of faith should be focused on that one request for victory, and then, it should be accounted as done. Do you remember how Peter walked on the water? He asked Jesus if he could step out of the boat onto the raging sea, and Jesus told Peter to come. But how long did Peter do the impossible by walking on the water? The Bible says, "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." Matthew 14:30. What was Peter afraid of? He was afraid of sinking and drowning. In spite of Christ's assurance that he could safely walk on the water, Peter began to doubt the word of the Master. That is when he began to sink. As long as he believed the promise of Jesus and acted in faith, he was safe. When he doubted, he sank.

Now, what is the impossible thing as far as you are concerned? It is not walking on water. It is overcoming that tobacco habit or other besetting sin. And Christ says, "Come to me. I will give you victory." As long as you believe that you have been delivered, you will have the victory. It is as simple as that. The very moment you ask for victory it will be placed in your life as a reservoir of power. You won't feel it, but it is there. It will remain there as long as you accept it in faith.

For some people the deliverance is so dramatic that they lose even the appetite for the sin. Tobacco addicts have sometimes been delivered from the craving. BUT THIS IS NOT THE USUAL WAY GOD DOES IT. Usually, the desire remains, but in the moment of temptation, the power to walk past the temptation springs forth from within. Faith accepts the fact of deliverance and constantly claims the victory which is in the secure possession of the believer.

The final step to victory is described in our FOURTH text, Romans 13:14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." So strong is the confidence in the appropriated power of God that no consideration is given to falling under the power of that sin again. Under the old trying plan, provision was made to fail in most cases. Cigarettes were placed on a shelf, and the smoker said to himself, "I'm going to try never to smoke again, but if I don't make it, I know where they are." But under the trusting plan, we have no reason to fear failure on the grounds of human weakness. Victory does not depend on our strength but on God's power. We might fail, but He cannot fail. Cigarettes are thrown away. All plans that might involve any degree of compromise are abandoned.

Little Jimmy was in trouble because he had gone swimming against his mother's orders. When asked why he had disobeyed her, Jimmy answered, "Because I got tempted." Mother then said, "I noticed that you took your bathing suit with you this morning. Why did you do that?" Jimmy answered, "Because I expected to get tempted." How typical of those who do not quite trust their own strength to win the victory. They make provision to fail.

Someone might raise the objection that this could be discouraging. Suppose the person does fail? Even Peter began to sink. Would it not shake confidence in God if the victory was not maintained? No. Peter's sinking had nothing to do with the failure of divine power. It did not change Christ's will for him to walk on the water. It only pointed up Peter's need of stronger faith to enable him to obey Christ's command. Our faith could weaken. We might need to be reminded of our total dependence upon His strength. But this does not diminish from the beautiful plan of God to impart power and victory through "the exceeding great and precious promises" of the Bible. Without faith by the receiver, not even God's promises can be appropriated. The limits are clearly defined in the words of Jesus, "According to your faith be it unto you." Matthew 9:29.

There it is, friend, in all of its simplicity. AND IT WORKS! If you are willing to be delivered, it works. Nothing will help the one who is not willing to give up the sin. But if you want it, it is there. VICTORY, POWER, DELIVERANCE? just reach out in faith and it is yours. Believe it and claim it this very moment. God wants you to be free.

Is it Possible to Live Without Sinning?

Joe Crews

Hebrews 7:25

Recently I read the amazing account of a man who submitted to a scientific hypnosis experiment. While under the influence of a light hypnotic trance the subject was ordered to pick up a glass from the table. Although he was a strong, athletic type, the man could not budge the glass from its position. His most strenuous exertions could not lift the glass that was light enough for any child to remove.

Why could he not do it? Because the scientists, after placing him in the trance, had told him that it was impossible to pick up the glass. Because his mind was convinced that it could not be done, his body was unable to carry out the command to lift it. What a dramatic demonstration that no person can really obey commandments which he believes to be impossible of performance!

Is this the reason so many Christians are living weak, defeated lives? There is no question that the popular, modern theology has been teaching millions that no one can really live without sinning. The Ten Commandments have been portrayed as an idealistic code produced only for the purpose of making people conscious of their need.

Many modern Christians are turning more and more to a soft, lenient stance on the subject of law-keeping. They believe God's love is incompatible with strict rules and penalties for violation.

That is a very comfortable doctrine but completely foreign to what the Bible teaches. Millions are being conditioned to break the great moral law of the universe - without feeling any guilt! The Word of God gives no one an excuse to feel relaxed about sin. It is the central problem of every person who has been born. Like a highly contagious disease, sin has infected every soul with the germs of death, and no earthly cure or deterrent has been found to halt the fatal progress of the sickness.

From the first appearance of sin in the Garden of Eden it has been totally disruptive of everything good. Never in one instance has it been able to coexist with righteousness and holiness. The requirements of God make it utterly impossible for sin or disobedience to be a part of the Christian lifestyle. The new tolerance for it is not biblical in any sense of the word. Jesus came to save people from it; He came to destroy it. It will never enter into Heaven. Our attitude toward it must be uncompromising. There can be no question of making it more acceptable by diminishing the amount of it or changing its form. *It must be destroyed.* And the only means of eradicating it is by receiving the fullness of Jesus Christ and His grace into the life.

How strange it is that so many church members have now become apologetic for sin, as though it cannot be prevented from triumphing in the life of a Christian. How dare we misrepresent the power of God's grace in the gospel! Jesus has already defeated the devil, and no Christian should be intimidated by an inferior, defeated foe. We have no business justifying the transgression of the Ten

Commandments.

It is serious enough to engage willfully in an act of sin, but it is infinitely more deadly to defend it as something which cannot be prevented. To say that victory is impossible is to deny the adequacy of the gospel and to negate a large portion of the inspired Scriptures. In addition, it adds support to the original charge of Satan against God, and gives a paralyzing, false security to everyone who believes in it.

Often people are defensive of sin because they have not been able to stop doing it in their own strength. For example, when they can't stop smoking, they must find a rationalization for its presence in their lives. Instead of making the humiliating confession that they can't conquer it, they fabricate arguments that it really doesn't hurt them or that no one can be perfect. Or the popular, convenient doctrine that no one can really live without sin anyway.

It is probably safe to say that the majority of Christians today are resigned to falling short of the moral law. In fact, they are quite satisfied that God doesn't even expect them to fulfill that law completely, either in the flesh or in the spirit.

The effect of such a teaching is exactly what one would expect - multitudes of emotionally happy, but disobedient, church members who feel that any concern about keeping the commandments is nit-picking and legalistic.

What a delusive strategy of Satan! As the inventor of the doctrine, the evil one is simply supporting his ancient accusation that God was asking too much. He accused God of being unfair by requiring something that was impossible.

He was able to convince a third of the angels that God was unreasonable to expect obedience to His law, and he has been trying to make everybody else believe it since that time. Think about it for a moment, and the entire scheme begins to make a lot of diabolical sense. Satan knows that sin is the only thing that will keep anyone out of heaven. Since sin is the "transgression of the law," he had to perfect a plan to make people look lightly upon breaking the law and also cause it to appear unobjectionable. 1 John 3:4. To make the idea acceptable to Christians, Satan actually was able to disguise it as a doctrine and foist it upon a compromised Christianity.

In every evangelistic crusade, we meet it in one form or another, usually at the point of the law and the Sabbath. The inconvenient claims of obedience are shrugged off with a "Well, nobody can keep the Ten Commandments, anyway."

But the problem doesn't end there. Even Christians who have accepted the claims of the moral law are not too concerned about how well they fulfill it, either. In a subtle way they have been affected by the prevalent belief that too much concern about obedience is a form of salvation by works. Incredibly, some seem to be so fearful of keeping the law too closely that they actually make provision to break it.

By doing so they perversely comfort themselves for not being legalistic.

How could people committed to commandment-keeping ever come to such a confused contradiction within themselves? Exposure to a false concept of righteousness by faith is only part of the answer. Much of the problem is based upon human failure and weakness of the flesh. Because they found themselves stumbling in their efforts to be perfect, they finally concluded that it was impossible not to sin. From that point it was easy to start interpreting Bible texts to support their weak experience. Satan exploited the psychological bent of the human mind to rationalize, and soon they had developed a comfortable doctrine that accommodated their occasional deviations from the law. Consequently, most Christians today are resigned to an alternating experience of victory-defeat, victory-defeat. To them it is the approved life-style of normal Christianity.

But something is fearfully wrong with this position. In the first place, doctrine should never be based on feeling or human experience. It must be rooted in the plain, unequivocal teaching of the Word of God. It is true that Bible texts can be assembled which seem to support the doctrine of spiritual imperfection. We are assured that all have sinned, that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and that man's righteousness is as filthy rags. But all the verses about failure, sin and defeat are in reference to the *unregenerate* experience of a person. There are literally scores of other texts which describe an opposite experience of total victory and sinless living. In every case they are referring to the Spirit-filled life of a converted, committed child of God.

This distinction must always be recognized in the reading of the Scripture. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the *power* of God unto salvation. His grace is stronger than all the concentrated forces of evil. Jesus came to save His people from their sin. No one who reads the sixth chapter of Romans intelligently can believe that the Christian is free to practice sin. Paul utterly devastates the doctrine that a believer should keep on falling into sin.

It is true that provision is made for cleansing *in case* sin is committed, but God's perfect plan made it possible for man to overcome every sin and to live a life of perfect obedience through Christ. In fact, the promises of the Bible are so clear and specific on this point that it is hard to get confused. No secret meaning or hidden reservation can be found in the myriad of texts which describe the victorious experience of the born-again child of God. And just because one may not have grown into that fullness of faith which brings constant victory, he should not, therefore, deny the power of God to give such deliverance. When Peter began sinking in the Sea of Galilee, it was not because God's plan or power had failed. Peter could have rationalized, like so many modern Christians, and said, "God didn't want me to walk on the water, and besides, it's impossible for anybody to do such a thing anyway." Like our first parents we still tend to place the ultimate blame on God when we fail to follow His plan of holy living.

Total Victory Promised

The Spirit of God seemed to anticipate the struggle many would pass through in accepting the biblical assurances of total victory. Consequently the inspired writers were moved to use almost fanatical language in describing the possibilities for overcoming sin. Superlative expressions are utilized which actually boggle the mind. Instead of saying we may be saved, the Bible says we can be "saved to the uttermost." Hebrews 7:25. Instead of saying we may conquer, it assures that we can be "more than

conquerors." Romans 8:37. Instead of being told that we can just triumph, we are told that we may "always triumph." 2 Corinthians 2:14. Instead of promising whatever we might ask to help us in our spiritual battles, the Bible says He will give us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Ephesians 3:20. And the verse just prior to that one clearly guarantees that we may "be filled with all the fullness of God." Verse 19.

Admittedly, many of these promises are too vast for our human minds to comprehend fully, but surely they are intended to impress us with the magnitude of God's resources in our behalf. If the language sounds exaggerated it is only because we are too feeble in faith and too weak in the flesh to believe such purity and sanctification could ever be fulfilled in us. We tend to trust our feelings quicker than the Word of God.

Is it important to believe the promises exactly as they read? Yes, because it is only through those promises that deliverance can be accomplished. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." 2 Peter 1:4.

Notice that it is "by these" that we escape the corruption of sin. What are "these"? The promises of God. The sequence of victory is plainly marked out in this fantastic text. By faith in the promise we become a partaker of the divine nature, and through the power of that new nature in us we are able to escape the corruption of sin. In other words, everything depends on the surrender and commitment of one's self to the indwelling Spirit of Christ. "Without me," Jesus said, "ye can do nothing." John 15:5.

Equally important is the inspired comment of Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13. That little expression "all things" is the key to victory for every one of us. It includes power over drugs, immorality, appetite, pride, and every act of sin that would rob us of eternal life.

All Things Available

The big point here is that when you get the power of Christ in your life, you have everything else you could ever desire. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32. There is that term again - "all things." You will find it also in 2 Peter 1:3: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness ... "

When you put those texts together, an incredible picture emerges. By claiming the presence of Christ in your life, you also receive everything that Christ possesses. Paul described it this way: "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Here the "all things" are broken down into very particular, individualized experiences, and we begin to see that Peter was right in stating that God has given us all things that pertain to godliness. Those Christians who doubt the possibility of overcoming sin completely should read these verses carefully.

What do those words "righteousness," "redemption," and "sanctification" include? All three of those words promise us more than deliverance from the guilt of our past sins. The word "redemption" is not limited to redemption from the guilt of sin, but from the power of sin also. "Sanctification" is a word that describes continuous, daily growth in overcoming sin. "Righteousness" literally means right-doing and applies to a dynamic fulfillment of God's will. They are all big words, but they all have the connotation of being set free, both from the guilt and the practice of sin.

Every child of Adam needs two things desperately - forgiveness for the past, and power for the future. Redemption includes both of them; and the idea that *full* deliverance from the guilt of sin is included, but only *partial* deliverance from the power of sin, is a perversion of the gospel. Jesus did not come to save us from the consequences of sin only, but to save us from the sin itself. Salvation is not a negative thing; not just the absence of something. He did not come just to take away something - our guilt, but to give us something - victory over sin. For God to forgive us and leave us under the power of continued sin would make God an accomplice of sin. He not only *counts* us righteous through the imputation of His atoning death, but He *makes* us righteous through the impartation of His victorious life.

After thoughtfully reading the entire sixth chapter of Romans, if you need more assurance that victory can be yours, read the following:

1 Corinthians 15:57 - "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

1 John 5:4 - "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Philippians 2:5 - "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

2 Corinthians 5:21 - "... that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

1 John 3:6 - "Whatsoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

Let us return for a moment to the analogy of the hypnotized man. He could not physically lift a small glass from the table because his mind was so fully convinced that it couldn't be done. Has Satan been able to immobilize the church through the power of his hypnotic, lying assertion that obedience is impossible? It certainly seems so.

No one is going to put forth any serious effort to do something that he believes to be impossible. Obviously then, those who believe they cannot live without sinning are not attempting to live without sin. No reasonable person will waste time and effort in a vain struggle to accomplish nothing.

That brings us to an interesting question: Can a person believe that there is no way to stop sinning, and yet make plans not to sin? Logically, it would seem highly unlikely, if not impossible. Yet the Bible commands us to "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Romans 13:14. Do we indeed make provision for sin by holding that it is impossible not to sin?

To Him That Overcometh

The entire book of Revelation is addressed to the seven churches of Asia. In each of the churches certain ones received high commendation and glorious promises of heavenly reward. Without exception the blessing was extended "to him that overcometh." Those seven churches symbolize every period of the Christian church from the apostles to the end of time. If victory over sin is not possible, no soul will be saved from those centuries of time.

To deny the possibility of total victory over sin is to rob God of the glory of His mission. He came, the Bible says, to destroy the works of the devil. Those works are the works of sin. If no one claimed His power to overcome sin completely, the devil's accusation would be confirmed. The requirements of God would be exposed as too difficult to obey.

Jesus stated that He had come "to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10. Here He indicated that more than just people needed to be restored. "That which was lost" included a sinless character. His mission was to counteract and neutralize the entire program of sin-defilement introduced by Satan. Restoring the image of God in man is a very important part of the everlasting gospel. That work of the gospel must be done before Jesus comes and not as some magical afterthought of our returning Lord.

The book of Revelation identifies the crowning characteristic of the redeemed as obedience. "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," Revelation 12:17. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14.

How significant it is that man's condition for remaining in Eden is also the condition for being restored to Eden. Anyone who believes obedience is unimportant should read again the dramatic story of Adam and Eve. A tiny, physical act of sin led to all the stark tragedy of the past 6,000 years. Those who are restored to that lost paradise will have demonstrated that they can be trusted with eternal life. Through faithful obedience in the face of death, they will have proven Satan's charges to be utterly false. Their steadfast loyalty will be an eternal guarantee of the security of God's restored dominion.

What can we say, then, concerning those who look so lightly upon the good works of obedience? They are subjects of grave deception and are playing into Satan's deadly sin-trap. The most glorious experience of the truly converted is to break the pattern of self-indulgence and sin. Under the rule of the Spirit of God, fleshly habits may be conquered and expelled from the life. Through faith in the promises unbelievable power may be released into the life of one who is willing to give up the enjoyment of sin.

The heart of God longs for us to take Him at His word and to claim the power He has promised. It is the only road to real victory. But no one can experience victory who does not believe victory is possible. Read again the assurances of the Bible. Do not try to twist them to match the weaknesses and failures of your human experience. They mean what they say. Deliverance is yours for the believing and the asking.

Right here we need to pause and consider an objection which is always brought against those who believe in total victory.

It goes something like this: If you believe it is possible to live without sinning, are you able to say that your own life is free from sin?

Although the question deserves an answer, it should be pointed out that the objection is not relevant to the issue. If the Bible establishes a truth, it should be received on the grounds of its inspired authority and not on the basis of the messenger's experience. If victory over all sin is possible through Christ, it is true, whether the preacher has claimed it or not claimed it. Further, the work of sanctification is a progressive, lifelong experience and can never be considered as finished in point of time. Even if one could be unconscious of any known sin, he could never boast of being sinless. In fact, the person who is closest to perfection would surely be the least likely to recognize it. Because the nearer he gets to Jesus the more imperfect he will appear in his own eyes.

The claim might also be made that the doctrine of victory over sin is highly idealistic and too theologically complicated to be practical. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Even a child can understand the simple faith-transaction of appropriating the promises of the Bible. There is not a habit or sin known to man that cannot be conquered through faith.

In the next few minutes you will be able to appreciate the beauty of this divine victory plan. You will learn how to stop smoking, cursing, overeating, gossiping, or committing any other sin. Let nothing distract you as you proceed to the next paragraph. It could be the turning point of your life and mean more than all the money in the world. Since so many are struggling with cigarettes, I will use that indulgence as an illustration of the victory we are describing. Put your own problem into the text, and then take the four steps to glorious victory.

The Secret of Victory

Have you heard about the evolutionary way of getting the victory over tobacco, or any other sin? It is sometimes called the "tapering" method, but generally it just doesn't work. Oh, it partially works, of course, because old age takes care of some temptations and sins, and time settles the rest when death comes. But do you know why "trying" does not work in overcoming the devil?

Why can't we fight the devil for a few months and finally drive him away? Because the devil is stronger than we are. We could fight him for a year, but he would still be stronger than we are at the end of the year. Trying will never break the power of sin in a single instance, because we're facing an enemy who will always be stronger than we are. What, then, is the answer to our weakness and defeat?

This question leads us to the sweetest and most sublime secret in the Word of God. Let us study it thoughtfully and with much prayer.

First of all, one must understand that all of Heaven's gifts are available to us through the promises of the Bible, and we receive them by faith. Peter describes the "exceeding great and precious promises" and assures us that "by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." 2 Peter 1:4. Mighty power is stored within the promise to fulfill itself to all who claim it in faith. So few are willing to believe that the promised blessing becomes theirs the very moment they believe it. Why is it so hard to believe implicitly that God will do what He promises?

Now let us come down to the very heart of victory and consider the four simple scriptural steps that any believer may take in claiming God's power. Four texts will illuminate the amazing transaction. *First*: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57. Allow your mind to savor the fantastic message of these words. *Victory is a gift!* We do not earn it by our efforts, or deserve it because of any supposed goodness. The only thing we need do is ask for it, and the victory will be given to us freely by Christ. He is the only one who has ever gained the victory over Satan, and if we ever possess the victory, it will have to come as a gift from Him.

Let me ask you something. Do you need victory in your life over some binding, miserable habit of sin? Some are slaves to appetite, to alcohol, or tobacco. Others are struggling helplessly against impurity, anger, or worldliness. The Bible says you may have the victory as a gift through Jesus Christ. Do you believe He will give you that power if you ask Him? How certain can you be that God will answer your prayer for victory immediately? Here is how sure you can be - just as sure as Christ's words are true! Our *second* text is Matthew 7:11, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

Is it a good thing when you ask for victory over tobacco, or any other fleshly or moral evil? Of course it is! And you don't even have to ask if it is God's will! He has already told us in the Bible that it is His will to destroy the works of sin and the devil. If we pray for more money or a better job we should always ask according to His will but the victory over sin is promised to every one who asks in faith.

Will God give the victory when we ask Him? Jesus said He was more willing to give this good thing than we are to feed our children when they are hungry. He is waiting to honor your faith and to "supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19. These assurances are so open-ended and unlimited that our minds are staggered by it. Why have we been so reluctant to apply for the provisions of grace? Why is it so hard to believe that God means exactly what He says? He will keep every promise.

Faith Makes It So

Here is the next question. How do we know we have the victory after we ask Him? Simply because He said we would have it. We know God did not lie. We can believe His promise. The very moment we ask, we should accept the fact of fulfillment, thank Him for the gift, get up and act like it has been done. No kind of proof-feeling or sign should be demanded or expected. The self-fulfilling power in the promise is released in response to our faith alone.

This brings us to the *third* text, found in Romans 6:11, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The word "reckon" means to believe, or to consider it done. Every particle of faith should be focused on that one request for victory and then it should be accounted as done. Do you remember how Peter walked on the water? He asked Jesus if he could step out of the boat onto the raging sea, and Jesus told Peter to come. But how long did Peter do the impossible by walking on the water? The Bible says, "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." Matthew 14:30.

What was Peter afraid of? He was afraid of sinking and drowning. In spite of Christ's assurance that he could safely walk on the water, Peter began to doubt the word of the Master. That is when he began to sink. As long as he believed the promise of Jesus and acted in faith, he was safe. When he doubted, he sank.

Now, what is the impossible thing as far as you are concerned? It is not walking on water. It is overcoming that tobacco habit. And Christ says, "Come to me. I will give you the victory." As long as you believe that you have been delivered, you will have the victory. It is as simple as that. The very moment you ask for victory it will be placed in your life as a reservoir of power. You won't feel it, but it is there. It will remain there as long as you accept it in faith.

For some people the deliverance is so dramatic that they lose even the appetite for the sin. Tobacco addicts have sometimes been delivered from the craving, *but this is not the usual way God does it*. Usually, the desire remains, but in the moment of temptation, the power to walk past the temptation springs forth from within. Faith accepts the fact of deliverance and constantly claims the victory which is in the secure possession of the believer.

The final step to victory is described in our *fourth* text, Romans 13:14. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." So strong is the confidence in the appropriated power of God that no consideration is given to falling under the power of that sin again. Under the old "trying" plan, provision was made to fail in most cases. Cigarettes were placed on a shelf, and the smoker said to himself, "I'm going to try never to smoke again, but if I don't make it I know where they are." But under the "trusting" plan, we have no reason to fear failure on the grounds of human weakness. Victory does not depend on our strength but on God's power. We might fail, but He cannot fail. Cigarettes are thrown away. All plans that might involve any degree of compromise are abandoned.

Little Jimmy was in trouble because he had gone swimming against his mother's orders. When asked why he had disobeyed her, Jimmy answered, "Because I got tempted." Mother then said, "I noticed that you took your bathing suit with you this morning. Why did you do that?" Jimmy answered, "Because I expected to get tempted." How typical of those who do not quite trust their own strength to win the victory. They make provision to fail. They take their bathing suit along. With God there need be no provision to fail.

Someone might raise the objection that this could be discouraging. Suppose the person does fail? Even Peter began to sink. Would it not shake confidence in God if the victory was not maintained? No.

Peter's sinking had nothing to do with the failure of divine power. It did not change Christ's will for him to walk on the water. It only pointed up Peter's need of stronger faith to enable him to obey Christ's command. Our faith could weaken. We might need to be reminded of our total dependence upon His strength. But this does not diminish the beautiful plan of God to impart power and victory through "exceeding great and precious promises" of the Bible. Without faith by the receiver not even God's promises can be appropriated. The limits are clearly defined in the words of Jesus, "According to your faith be it unto you." Matthew 9:29.

There it is, friend, in all of its simplicity. *And it works!* If you are willing to be delivered, it works. Nothing will help the one who is not willing to give up the cigarettes. But if you want it, it is there. *Victory, power, deliverance* - just reach out in faith and it is yours. Believe it and claim it this very moment. God wants you to be free.

Is Sunday Really Sacred?

1 John 5:3

One of David's most beautiful prayers is recorded in Psalm 43:3. "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles."

This same earnest petition to understand God's Word should be in the heart of every sincere seeker for truth. A willingness to learn and to obey must characterize all of those who expect to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. To such, the beautiful promise of the beatitude will be fulfilled. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.

But it does no good to pray for the truth if we have no intention to obey it when God answers our prayer. One of the greatest favors God can bestow upon us is to give a knowledge of His Word. And the most presumptuous thing anybody can do is to pray for an understanding of God's will and then refuse to obey, for any reason whatsoever, when the answer comes.

Many people are guilty of pulling the Bible down to match their poor, weak experience, instead of bringing their experience up to meet the requirements of the Word. There is only one great acid test of truth, and that is the Bible. Every religious thought, every book we read, and every sermon we hear should be measured by the infallible rule of the inspired Scriptures. It does not matter what we were taught as children, or what the majority is following, or what our emotional feelings lead us to think or believe. Those factors are perfectly invalid as a test of absolute truth. The ultimate question must be answered: What does the Word of God say on the subject?

Some people think that if they are sincere in what they believe, God will accept them and save them. But sincerity alone is not enough. One can be sincere, and be sincerely wrong. I remember driving to West Palm Beach, Florida, several years ago. At least I thought I was going there. It was night, and I had not seen any road signs for quite awhile. Suddenly my car lights picked up a sign which read, "Belle Glade 14 miles." Heartsick, I realized that I was traveling in the opposite direction from West Palm Beach. I was on the wrong road. No one could have been more sincere than I was that night, but I was sincerely wrong. Now, I could have continued on down the road saying that somehow, somewhere up ahead I might find West Palm Beach. Instead, I turned the car around and went back to the place where I took the wrong turn and got on the right road leading to West Palm Beach. That was the only right thing to do.

Closed Minds and Majority Rule

God's Word has a lot to say to those who are willing to be corrected. The people to be the most pitied are those who have closed minds. They will resist any information which varies from their personal views. Their minds are made up, and they don't want to be bothered by the facts. This is especially true concerning the subject of the Sabbath.

Multitudes have inherited opinions about the day to be observed weekly, and they find it very difficult to look objectively at any other viewpoint. Many of them know that one of the Ten Commandments requires the keeping of the seventh day of the week. They also know that the seventh day is Saturday. Yet they tenaciously follow the tradition of observing a different day from the one God commanded. They worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, for which there is no biblical command.

Why do they do it? Most Sundaykeepers have simply accepted the practice of the religious majority in the community where they were raised, assuming that it has to be right because so many are doing it. Is this a safe assumption? Has the majority usually been right in religious matters?

The Bible clearly answers these questions in the negative. Every available source of information reveals that in religious matters, at least, the majority has always been wrong. Jesus Himself said, "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." Luke 17:26. Only eight people went into the ark to be saved from the flood. Christ taught that only a comparable few would be saved at the end of the world. Said He, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matthew 7:13, 14.

It is very true that the great majority of Christians today, including many famous evangelists and theologians, are keeping Sunday instead of the seventh-day Sabbath. That fact alone should not over impress anyone. Taken by itself, in the light of Christ's words, it should raise a flag of warning. Truth has never been popular with the masses. And those in the majority today, as in all past ages, are not really looking for truth as much as they are looking for a smooth, easy, comfortable religion which will allow them to live as they want to live.

What, then, should be the test of the Sabbath truth? Just one thing, and one thing only, the Word of God. Unfortunately, millions have never studied the Bible for themselves on this subject. I propose that we test the Sundaykeeping practice of this majority group and find out if it is correct. If it is biblical, then all of us should accept it and faithfully keep every Sunday. If it is not supported by the Scriptures, then we should diligently search the Word until we find the day which our Lord has endorsed for us to keep.

The most honest way I know to approach this subject is to take a look at absolutely everything that the Bible says about the first day of the week. There are only eight texts in the New Testament which make any reference to Sunday, and by carefully studying these verses we can be certain that all the evidence for consideration is before us. If there is any biblical authority for keeping the first day of the week, it will have to be found in one of these verses.

Are we willing to face the consequences of this kind of exhaustive study? Here is where our prejudice will be tested! Can we open our minds completely to whatever this objective search reveals? These are not trick questions. Personally, I do not care which day is found to be the Sabbath. If the Bible teaches it, I will gladly keep Monday, Thursday, Friday, or Sunday. Long ago I decided to be a Christian and to follow the Word of God wherever it would lead, regardless of my feelings. It makes no difference to me which day I keep holy, *as long as it is the one commanded in the Bible!* I hope you feel the same

way as we begin our examination of every single reference in the New Testament which mentions the first day of the week.

Resurrection on Sunday

Let's begin with the first Gospel. Matthew writes, "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." Matthew 28:1. Here we have some very interesting proof that the Sabbath could not possibly be the first day of the week. According to this record the Sabbath was ending when the first day was beginning. They are two successive days. On the basis of Scripture no one could truthfully call Sunday the Sabbath. It would be both confusing and unbiblical.

The substance of Matthew's testimony is simply that the women came at dawn on the day following the Sabbath and found that Jesus was already risen. This harmonizes perfectly with the next Gospel, which adds a few more details. Notice that Mark equates the dawn with "the rising of the sun." He wrote, "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Mark 16:1-3.

These parallel Gospel accounts clear up a common misconception that has arisen over the meaning of Matthew's words "as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." Some have interpreted this to be just before sundown on Saturday evening. Since the Hebrew reckoning would establish the end of the Sabbath at sunset, they assume that the women came just before the first day was ushered in at sundown.

>Here we see the value of comparing text with text. Mark's words make it impossible to hold the view that the women came Saturday night and found the tomb empty. The very same women are listed by him as coming at sunrise Sunday morning, but they were asking the question, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" Obviously, if they had been there the night before and discovered an empty tomb, they would have known that the stone was already removed from the door. Thus, we can understand clearly that Matthew's "dawn" is referring to the early morning visit at sunrise on Sunday morning.

The third New Testament reference to the first day is a simple narrative statement in Mark 16:9, "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." Little comment is needed here, because the verse is only repeating the same story of the resurrection early on Sunday morning. The important thing to note is that nothing is said in any of these texts about the first day of the week being holy. There is no intimation of anyone observing the day in honor of the resurrection.

Locating the True Sabbath

One of the most complete word pictures of resurrection events is found in the Gospel of Luke, and here we read the fourth reference to the first day of the week. "This man (Joseph of Arimathea) went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the

preparation, and the sabbath drew on." Luke 23:52-54.

Before reading further, let us carefully examine the inspired description of this crucifixion day. The vast Christian majority agrees that these events transpired on the day we now call Good Friday. Here it is called the "preparation" day, because it was a time for making special arrangements for the approaching Sabbath. In fact, the text states very simply that "the sabbath drew on." This means that it was coming up next.

What else happened on that day Jesus died? "And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment." Verses 55, 56.

During the rest of that fateful Friday the devoted women bought the anointing materials and made further preparation for their Sunday morning visit to the tomb. Then, as the Sabbath was ushered in at sunset, they "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment." This identifies that holy day as the specific weekly Sabbath of the Ten Commandments and not the Passover or some other feast-sabbath which could have fallen on any day of the week.

The very next verse tells what the women did on the day following the Sabbath. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre." Luke 24:1, 2.

First of all, we notice that the women came to do their regular labor on the day of the resurrection. Modern churches refer to that particular first day of the week as Easter Sunday. There can be no doubt that Jesus was raised sometime during the dark hours of that early morning. In none of the Gospel recitals do we have any evidence that the women, or anyone else, attached any sacredness to the day on which the resurrection took place.

Luke's account of that eventful weekend proves beyond any question that the true seventh-day Sabbath can still be precisely located. He describes the sequence of events over three successive days - Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Jesus died on the preparation day, and the Sabbath was approaching. Christians now refer to it as Good Friday. The next day was the Sabbath "according to the commandment." Since the commandment plainly designates that "the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord," that Sabbath had to be Saturday.

It is very interesting to note that Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath from His work of redemption, just as He had rested from His work of creation on the Sabbath.

On the day following the Sabbath, Jesus rose. Today it is referred to as Easter Sunday, but the Bible designates it "the first day of the week." In the light of these indisputable, historical facts to which all Christianity subscribes, no one can plead ignorance of the true Sabbath. It is the day between Good

Friday and Easter Sunday. Luke's record is such a perfect chronological account of those three days that even the most simple and uneducated can locate the biblical seventh day on our modern calendar.

Now we are prepared to examine the fifth New Testament statement concerning Sunday. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre." John 20:1. There is very little new information in John's description of the resurrection. Like all the other writers he gives no indication whatsoever that the first day of the week was ever counted holy or kept holy by anyone. So far, the significant common thread in all the Gospel stories has been a total absence of such evidence.

For Fear of the Jews

John mentions the "first day" again in the same chapter, and this has often been misinterpreted as a reference to Sunday worship. "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." John 20:19.

Even though this gathering behind locked doors took place on the same day as the resurrection, was it a special commemoration of that event? The circumstances make it impossible for such to be the case. The text plainly states that they were gathered there "for fear of the Jews." The frightened disciples had already learned that the tomb was empty, and they expected momentarily to be charged with stealing away the body of Jesus. They huddled together in the locked room for protection and reassurance.

The fact is that they did not believe Christ had been resurrected from the dead. Mark's account reveals that they totally rejected the testimony of Mary and the other disciples who brought word of actually seeing the resurrected Lord. "And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." Mark 16:10-14.

On the basis of these words, we must quietly pass over that embarrassing Sunday afternoon meeting in the closed room. It was not an occasion of unrestrained joy over the resurrection, as some have portrayed it. In fact, there was not even any recognition on the part of the disciples that a miracle had taken place. They were fearful, depressed, and unbelieving. When Jesus appeared to them He spoke words of strong rebuke because of their lack of faith and because they had rejected the testimony of their own companions. How misleading it is to make this a happy memorial service honoring the resurrection!

Thus far we have carefully studied six of the eight New Testament references without finding a single instance of Sunday observance. In fact, every one of them reveals a consistent, total ignorance of any recognition of the first day of the week for worship, prayer, rest, or honoring the resurrection. The Gospels were written several years after the events transpired, giving ample opportunity to the Holy Spirit to inspire the authors with the full facts. Jesus told His disciples that the work of that Spirit was

to "guide you into all truth." John 16:13. If first-day observance had been any part of truth, then the Holy Spirit would have been divinely obligated to reveal it to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So said our Lord.

Now we turn to the two remaining references. If we find no evidence in these texts, we will have to abandon the search, for there is nowhere else to look. Paul and Luke are the final witnesses who mention the first day of the week, and both of them have been grossly misrepresented in what they said.

No Sunday-keeping in Corinth

In 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 Paul wrote: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come ... whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem."

Please carefully notice what the apostle said, and also, what he did not say. Many have assumed that a religious meeting was held and a collection plate passed. This is not the case. Paul was writing special appeals to the churches in Asia Minor, because many of the Christians in Jerusalem were suffering greatly for lack of food and daily necessities. Paul asked the church at Corinth to gather food, clothing, etc., and store it up at home until he could send men to transport it to Jerusalem. The expression "lay by him in store" in the original Greek gives the clear connotation of putting aside at home. Even Sunday advocates agree to this.

There was no service held on the first day of the week. The gathering up and storing was to be done on that day. Why did Paul suggest that this work be done on Sunday, and what was involved in getting it done?

First of all, the letter would have been shared with the church on the Sabbath when they were all gathered for worship. The first opportunity to do the work would be the next day - the first day of the week. Keep in mind that there was an apparent food shortage in Jerusalem, and the need was not primarily for money. Such famine conditions were not unusual in areas of the Middle East, as Luke reminds us in Acts 11:28-30.

The church in Rome gives a clue as to the special needs of those suffering Christians "But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain." Romans 15:25-28.

Here the apostle touches a tender spot in his eloquent appeal. The Roman Christians owed a great debt of gratitude to the mother church in Jerusalem which had sent teachers to evangelize them. Paul urges them to return carnal, or material, gifts in appreciation of the spiritual truths received from them. What kind of gifts did Paul have in mind? It is very interesting that he describes it as sealing to them "this

fruit." The Greek word used here is "karpos," which is the universal term used for literal fruit. It can also have the connotation of "fruits of one's labor."

This throws light on Paul's counsel to the Corinthian Christians to do their work on the first day of the week, "so that there be no gatherings when I come." Such work as gathering and storing up produce from garden and field would certainly not be appropriate on Sabbath. In these verses, Sunday is identified once again as a day for secular activities and gives no indication of religious observance.

Paul's Longest Sermon

This brings us to the final reference which could provide any support for Sunday sacredness. In Luke's history of the early church he describes the dramatic farewell meeting which Paul had with the believers in Troas. This account in the book of Acts has been grievously distorted by those who grasp for any tiny excuse to justify their disobedience of God's commandments. Because it is the only record in the New Testament of a religious meeting being held on the first day of the week, we should examine it with special care and interest.

The full context reveals that it was a night meeting. "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: ... and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted. And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot." Acts 20:6-13.

There are some very unusual things about this all-night meeting in Troas. First of all, it had to be a solemn, poignant occasion for the speaker and congregation, as well. In verse 25 Paul declared, "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more."

It is obvious that this farewell meeting was held on the dark part of the first day of the week. There were lights in the room, and Paul preached until midnight. It is important to understand the Jewish way of reckoning time. Days were not counted according to the pagan Roman method, from midnight to midnight. In the Bible the day begins at evening. Genesis describes all the days of creation week in the same way - "The evening and the morning were the first day ... the evening and the morning were the second day," etc. In other words, the evening always comes first in the day.

This explains why the Sabbath is described in these words, "It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, ...

from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath." Leviticus 23:32. But when does the evening begin according to the Bible? "And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils." Mark 1:32. Since the Pharisees taught that it was wrong to heal on the Sabbath, the people waited till the Sabbath was over before bringing their sick to Jesus. So they brought them "at even, when the sun did set." Moses wrote, "Thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun." Deuteronomy 16:6.

In Nehemiah we are given another description of the beginning of Sabbath. "And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath." Nehemiah 13:19. This definitely places the first moments of the Sabbath at sunset, when it is beginning to be dark.

Now we are ready to apply this sound Bible principle to the first-day meeting of Paul in Troas. The night setting would require that it be held on Saturday night. The Sabbath ended at sundown, and the first day of the week began. Paul, who had stayed a full seven days so that he could be with the people over the Sabbath, decided not to leave with the ship on Saturday night. Instead, he fellowshiped all night long with the believers and then walked twenty miles across the peninsula on Sunday morning to join the boat at Assos.

Incidentally, this boat was manned by Paul's missionary companions, including Luke, who chronicled the highlights of the carefully scheduled voyage. It is very significant that they would not go out to sea until the Sabbath was over on Saturday night. Toiling at the oars and sails would have been no more proper for a holy day than Paul's twenty-mile walk across the isthmus on Sunday morning. Neither Paul nor his fellow travelers would have indulged in those secular activities on God's holy Sabbath.

Why Eutychus Dropped Out of Church

The New English Bible actually states that the meeting was held on Saturday night. The chief focus of the story seems to be upon the raising of Eutychus from the dead after he fell out the window. The dauntless Paul, after ministering on Sabbath and all night Saturday night, walked twenty miles on Sunday morning to join his companions in Assos. They had stayed with the ship as it sailed around the peninsula on Saturday night, after the Sabbath was over. That long journey on foot by Paul the next day would have been totally inappropriate on any kind of holy day.

Some have equated the breaking of bread with the communion service, but such a view cannot be supported from the Scriptures. Luke assures us that those early Christians broke bread daily. "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Acts 2:46.

The contention that Paul celebrated the Lord's Supper with the believers in the upper room cannot be confirmed by the Bible. The wording seems to indicate that it was a common meal they shared together. "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten ..." Acts 20:11. Here we find that eating was associated with the breaking of bread. It is unlikely that the communion meal would be referred to in this manner.

But even if that farewell meeting had included the celebration of Christ's suffering and death, it would not lend any credence to Sunday observance. We have seen from Acts 2 that bread was broken daily, and nowhere is the Lord's Supper linked to any particular day. It is surely obvious to anyone that the Troas meeting was not a regular weekly worship service. The importance of that all-night session appears in the miraculous raising of the young man Eutychus, and also in the fact that Paul would never see them again before his death. The particular time frame - all Saturday night - has no spiritual significance whatsoever. Luke, the careful historian, does not even record any of the content of Paul's marathon sermon, although he faithfully documents the miracle of the resurrected youth. Apparently, it was the *way* Eutychus dropped out of church, and not the *day* on which it happened that Luke is seeking to establish.

We have now completed an intensive examination of each one of the eight New Testament references to the first day of the week. Not one of them has offered the slightest evidence that Sunday was ever sanctified by God or celebrated by man. God's great infallible test-Book has revealed that the majority is following tradition instead of truth. Millions have been deceived into blind adherence to an empty pagan symbol.

I am reminded of the story of a Russian czar who took a walk one morning in the border area of his extensive palace grounds. There he saw a soldier with a gun on his shoulder marching up and down near a deserted corner of the courtyard wall. He asked the soldier, who was apparently on sentry duty, what he was guarding. The man replied that he was only following orders and did not know why he was assigned to that particular spot. The czar asked the captain of the guard what the soldier was doing, but he had no idea either. The general in charge of the palace security was consulted, but he could give no reason for the assignment. Finally, the king ordered a search of the dusty military records, and the mystery was unfolded. Years and years before, the queen mother had planted some rose bushes in that corner of the courtyard, and a soldier had been sent to protect the tender plants from being trampled. Later, someone had forgotten to cancel the order, and the daily sentry ritual had continued through the years - soldiers with their guns, guarding nothing but an empty rose plot.

Today there are millions of sincere Christians who are religiously trying to protect the sanctity of Sunday, not realizing that there is really nothing to guard. The first day of the week is just as devoid of holiness as the deserted courtyard of roses. Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Matthew 15:13.

The Day They Kept

Now that we have exhausted all possible sources for Sundaykeeping without finding the smallest favorable evidence, let us turn to the inspired history of that early church. If they did not keep the first day of the week, which day did they observe? The book of Acts establishes a consistent pattern of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping. On one occasion Paul was petitioned by the Gentiles to hold an exclusive service for them on the Sabbath. "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. ... And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." Acts 13:42, 44.

There are some very interesting points in these dynamic verses which validate the Sabbath practices of

Paul and his fellow Christians. After preaching in the synagogue, where the Gentiles were not permitted to enter, Paul was besieged by the Gentiles with an appeal to preach to them "the next Sabbath." Many have charged that Paul only preached in the synagogues on the Sabbath because he had a ready-made crowd of Jews to work on. This is a false claim. In this instance, Paul made an appointment to minister to the Gentiles on the following Sabbath, and according to verse 43, many of those who heard him that day were "proselytes" to the faith. This means they were converts to Christianity, and Paul and Barnabas "persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."

How interesting it is that their Sabbath worship is spoken of in the context of continuing in God's grace! Modern critics of the Sabbath try to label Sabbathkeepers as legalists who are aliens to the grace of the gospel. Not so the writers of the Bible, who constantly associate obedience with true salvation by faith.

In Acts 16:13 we have positive proof that Paul kept the Sabbath even when there was no synagogue and no Jews. He was ministering in Greece, where there were only a few scattered Jews and no synagogue at all. What did he do on the Sabbath? "And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spoke unto the women which resorted thither."

Even with no church to attend, the apostle sought out a spot where religious worship was carried on - a place of prayer by the river - and preached to those who went there. Surely no one can fail to discern Paul's deep commitment to the Sabbath as we follow him in this unusual outdoor mission. Just suppose this Macedonian experience had taken place on the first day of the week instead of the Sabbath. Without question it would be cited as absolute evidence for Sunday worship, and we would have to concur. But what possible argument can one present against this example of Paul in true Sabbathkeeping?

Again, we read about Paul's customary practice in these words, "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures." Acts 17:2. "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." Acts 18:4.

Finally, we cite the great apostle's personal testimony that he never kept one Sunday holy in his whole life. Just before his death, Paul made this emphatic statement to the Jewish leaders, "Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." Acts 28:17.

Think for a moment! If Paul had ever deliberately broken the Sabbath, or kept another day than the seventh, he could not have declared truthfully that he had done nothing against Jewish custom. On the strength of this unqualified declaration by a man of unimpeachable integrity we close the search for Sundaykeeping authority in the Bible. It just is not there.

Had we been able to find it, our religious obligation would, without doubt, be much easier to fulfill. We would have the support and example of most of the great religious institutions of the land, both

Protestant and Catholic.

But we are not looking for the most popular way or the most convenient way; we are looking for the Bible way. And we have found it. In all honesty, we must declare that the prevailing custom of keeping a different day from the one commanded in the great handwritten law of God is contrary to the Word which will finally judge us. No amount of popular, majority opinion can annul the weighty testimony of a plain "Thus saith the Lord." We must stand upon the Bible and the Bible alone for our doctrine on this subject.

The Word of God declares, "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." Exodus 20:10. Until we find some indication in the Bible that God retracted that moral law which He introduced to the world with such a fanfare of power and grandeur, we will accept the Ten Commandments as still relevant and binding today. God said what He meant, and He meant what He said.

Some argue that God exempts us from the fourth commandment because it is impossible to keep the seventh day in the competitive, industrialized society in which we have to earn a living. It is undoubtedly true that Satan has manipulated the economic world to the distinct disadvantage of the Sabbath-keeper, but God has never required the impossible. It is never necessary to break one of God's commandments for any reason.

You may say, "But my employer requires that I work on Saturday, and I can't let my family starve." The answer to that dilemma was given by our Lord long ago in the Sermon on the Mount. He said "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33. The preceding verse defines "these things" as food, clothes, and job. Jesus is simply telling us that if there is ever a conflict between obeying Him and obeying our employer, we should put Him first. Material considerations should never be made more important than doing God's will.

In every case God honors the faith of a Christian who decides to keep the Sabbath regardless of what happens to his job. Many times God works miracles by making special arrangements for the Sabbathkeeper. In some cases He allows His children to be tested by losing their jobs, and then opens up better ones in response to their faith. But the "things" are always added when we trust Him and obey, regardless of the circumstances.

The real secret of keeping the Sabbath of the Lord is to have the Lord of the Sabbath in our hearts! It is love which leads God's children to choose death rather than disobedience to one of His commandments. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. The apostle John defined love in these words, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." 1 John 5:3.

Thus, it is not so much the question of a day as it is of a way - the way of obedience through love, or of disobedience through lack of love. Mark it down and never forget it! Keeping the Sabbath, even the true seventh-day Sabbath, is an operation in futility if it does not proceed from a heart full of love and devotion to God. Without love, all law-keeping becomes mechanical and miserable, but with love,

every commandment becomes a joy and delight. Make this kind of personal love relationship the basis of your Sabbathkeeping, and it will be the happiest day of your week, for the rest of your life!

Jewelry – How Much Is Too Much

Matthew 7:20

I am intrigued by clever oxymorons. An oxymoron is a statement or pairing of two words that contradict each other, such as "black light" or "pretty ugly." A few humorous, personal favorites are "military intelligence," "criminal justice," "civil disorder," and "rap music" (the rap I've heard does not even slightly resemble music). Some oxymorons are more serious, like "little sin," "innocent gossip," and "safe premarital sex."

A few years ago, while wandering through a Christian bookstore, I came upon a glass display case with a sign above it that read "Christian Jewelry." I thought to myself, "Now there's another intriguing oxymoron-something like 'Christian rock.'" How can jewelry be Christian when the Bible strongly admonishes believers not to wear it? Clearly, "Christian jewelry" is a conflict in terms.

I realize this topic has been hotly debated within recent years, but my purpose is not to pour fuel on the fire. I hope to shed light, not heat. My desire is for people to find their faith and practice in the Word of God. The Scriptures plainly address the subject of a Christian's external appearance and adornment. But unfortunately, many churches are strangely silent on this subject.

Jewelry has been described by some as a small issue. No doubt someone is thinking, "With all the problems in the church, why would you want to focus on something so insignificant and widely accepted?" Well, friends, remember that Jesus said, "For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Luke 16:15. Often, it is the things that seem small on the surface that have major implications. And I believe this is just such an issue.

There are unseen and subtle dangers connected with the wearing of jewelry. So if you are a converted Christian who seeks to know how to better reflect the Lord in these last days, please keep your mind open as we reason together from the Scriptures.

The Fruit, Not the Root!

The power of the gospel begins on the inside, transforming the heart while unseen by human eyes. But then it continues to flow and seep into every area of the life, producing obvious external changes. Just like a plant, the seed first comes to life below the earth. But if the root is healthy, the plant will soon become visible and bear fruit above ground. Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Matthew 7:20.

Notice that He did not say you will know them by their roots that grow underground. He said the fruit, not the root! Therefore, we are commanded to be aware of the external, visible evidence of our faith.

When a person accepts Christ as Lord, the Holy Spirit begins impressing that individual to make

dramatic adjustments. There will often be changes in what appears on the table during dinner and on the television after supper. (In fact, He may lead some to get rid of the television altogether.) From the bookshelf to the closet, Jesus will penetrate the whole life. When He is in the heart, He influences every other area.

This is a basic teaching of Christianity. The apostle Paul warned Titus of those who "profess that they know God; but in works they deny him." Titus 1:16. And James is crystal clear that a relationship rooted in Jesus will produce external evidence. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." James 2:18. You can't be a Christian in your heart without it showing on the outside.

God's Ambassadors

We, the Church, are the hands and feet, the eyes and mouth, and yes, even the ears of Jesus in the world today. We are the Body of Christ. Our Lord said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." John 20:21.

We have been sent into the world to demonstrate who Jesus is and what He is like. Through the Holy Spirit we become His representatives-to reflect His image in everything from the way we talk and work to the way we eat and dress. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, God says that "we all ... are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

A few years ago, shameful scandals surrounded several well-known television evangelists in North America. Those opposed to Christianity rejoiced, mocking the immorality and hypocrisy exhibited in the lives of these men and their wives who professed to speak for Jesus. During this tragic time, the secular media often made reference to their flamboyant dress and gaudy jewelry as proof that these professed Christians were not genuine. These inconsistent TV preachers even inspired one famous musician to write a popular song entitled "Would Jesus Wear a Rolex?" I'm sure angels wept as Christian leaders, due to their immodest appearance, became a deserving target for the lost. It is a sad day indeed when Christians win the medal for opulent external adornment!

Wearing Our Wealth

Let's take a look at the origin of jewelry. God made all of the gold, silver, and precious jewels in the world, and He intended for them to have a practical use. Since even small amounts of these minerals are so rare and valuable, long ago they began to be used as money.

Over time, people began wearing their money in order to impress others with their wealth. When shoppers went to the market to buy an expensive item, they would simply pull off one of their rings or bracelets to pay.

After Rebecca had watered the camels for Abraham's servant, the Bible says that he paid her in this way. "And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold." Genesis 24:22.

When the children of Israel brought an offering to the Lord to build the tabernacle, they used the jewels they had received from the Egyptians. It was their money. "And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted, and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered an offering of gold unto the Lord." Exodus 35:22.

There is obviously nothing wrong with having money. But the question is, does God want Christians to wear their wealth for all to see? Of course not. "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith." 1 Timothy 6:10. Since it is a sin to covet, why would you want to entice a brother or sister to covet your money by wearing it for all to see? What could possibly be the motive for a Christian to do this?

The reason gold and jewels are so valuable is that they are rare and expensive to mine from the earth. Angels must marvel when they see us put on jewelry to signify value and wealth. In heaven, gold is used for pavement, and diamonds are the stones that form the walls of its mansions! Just think of it. From heaven's perspective, gold is asphalt and diamonds are blocks! How silly it must appear to heavenly beings when we dangle asphalt and bricks on our ears and wrap them around our fingers. Wouldn't you look twice if someone walked into your church next week wearing a black asphalt pendant and a matching tar ring?

In evangelism, I've met many sincere people who had attended the popular churches in their towns only to turn away disappointed because they discerned a spirit of pride and display among the members. These genuine seekers of God entered the sanctuary hoping to find a church home, but instead they found extravagance with which they could not compete.

How happy I've been to offer them a church where the wealthy and the poor choose not to parade their status by wearing fancy clothing and jewelry. These individuals have been thrilled to worship where they don't feel that they're looked down on if they don't wear the latest fashions. I hope that my church will always stay with the Bible truth on this subject. We have too much to lose otherwise.

Justified Jewelry?

Those who seek to justify the wearing of jewelry usually point to Bible stories in which God's children wore gold, silver, or jewels. For example, the Scriptures report with no comment that Joseph wore a ring and "a gold chain about his neck" (Genesis 41:42), that Saul wore a bracelet (2 Samuel 1:10), that Mordecai was given a ring by Ahasuerus (Esther 8:2), and that King Belshazzar gave Daniel a scarlet robe and "put a chain of gold about his neck" (Daniel 5:29).

But, remember, just because we see something done in Bible times does not mean that God condoned it. The Scriptures simply record a faithful history of God's people-including all their failures. Noah drank wine and became drunk (Genesis 9:20, 21). Lot had sex with his daughters and got them pregnant (Genesis 19:30-38). Judah hired a prostitute for a night, impregnated her, and later discovered she was his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:12-26). We cannot assume that God condones such unsavory practices just because these incidents were mentioned in the Bible. Other passages of Scripture clearly tell us that God condemns alcohol, incest, prostitution, and jewelry as anti-productive to accomplishing His purposes for humanity.

One story that is often cited to justify jewelry is that of the prodigal son. Since the father "put a ring on his hand," some say that we can assume God wants us to wear jewelry. Obviously, as we've just seen, this parable is not an inspired comment on whether Christians should wear rings. Furthermore, the ring the father gave his son was most likely a signet ring. Signet rings contained the family seal. People used them to press this unique seal onto official documents. It was the family's signature. Rather than an ornament for display, signet rings were a tool for officiating documents and were usually worn on the index finger.

Before the prodigal son left home, he asked his father for his share of the inheritance. Once he received his money and goods, he left home to spend it all on "riotous living." Luke 15:13. Out of money and destitute, the foolish prodigal later found himself flat broke, hungry, and poorly clad. In desperation he returned home, trusting in the goodness of his father to at least take him in as a servant. The prodigal felt that he no longer deserved to be a son, since he had squandered half of his father's hard-earned savings.

But instead of rejection, his father showed him unlimited acceptance. He replaced the prodigal's rags with a comfortable and clean robe and put shoes on his bare feet. He filled his son's empty stomach with a feast. And to the son who just wasted his riches, this father gave the signet ring-the family checkbook- with free access to his remaining fortune.

Why Be a Stumbling Block?

One reason I do not drink any alcohol is because one person in seven who imbibes will eventually become an alcoholic. Even though I might be able to drink moderately, I do not want my bad example to cause another person's downfall-especially for something so unnecessary as intoxicating beverages.

The same principle holds true for jewelry. We have all seen people who cover themselves with gold and precious jewels-gem-aholics, if you will. Most people who wear lots of jewelry do not sense their personal worth. They hope to feel more valuable by covering themselves with expensive articles. Others believe they are unattractive and hope to increase their perceived beauty by adorning themselves with beautiful gems. They can't control themselves. They think that if one is good, then 10 would be better. (Just for the record, I have never heard a man say: "Isn't she beautiful? Just look at her jewelry!") I'm sure everyone would agree that there is a point when enough is enough!

Well, here is the big question. What is that point? If it's okay for women to wear earrings, then who is to say it's wrong for men? If one ring or earring is acceptable, then why not three or four? If the laymen can wear jewelry, why not the clergy? If a ring in the ear is all right, then what's wrong with a bone in the nose?

Perhaps you have noticed the modern craze of body piercing. Four earrings in one ear and rings in the nose with a chain between them. People are now piercing their flesh and wearing rings in their eyebrows, navels, tongues, and other places we can't mention in a Christian publication. Why would a Christian want to be a stumbling block for someone else and encourage this trend by wearing any jewelry? It's all unnecessary. Especially for people who are preparing to meet Jesus.

Speaking of people living in the time of the end, the prophet Ezekiel warns, "They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity." Ezekiel 7:19.

If I were to wear any jewelry, I would instantly open the floodgates of inconsistency by my example and cause many to stumble. If I really love my brother, why would I insist on taking that risk for something so frivolous and unnecessary as jewelry?

Whenever you are unsure about which course to take on a spiritual issue, take the safe position. I know that on the judgment day, God will not condemn anyone for not wearing enough jewelry. So the safe thing is to not wear any.

Modesty and Humility

The original purpose for clothing was to cover the nakedness of our first parents. Adam and Eve never would have dreamed of hanging gold or silver on their bodies to accent their fig leaves! Clothing was for modesty and to protect them from the changing climate. Someday God will place a golden crown of victory on the brow of the overcomers. Yet even then the saved will remove their golden crowns in God's presence (Revelation 4:10, 11).

Notice what God told the prophet Isaiah about jewelry and fancy clothing. "Moreover the Lord says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, And walk with outstretched necks And wanton [seductive] eyes, Walking and mincing [swaying] as they go, ...' In that day the Lord will take away the finery: The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the crescents; The pendants, the bracelets, and the veils; The headdresses, the leg ornaments, and the headbands; The perfume boxes, the charms, and the rings; The nose jewels, the festal apparel, and the mantles; The outer garments, the purses, and the mirrors; The fine linen, the turbans, and the robes." Isaiah 3:16-23, NKJV. A woman in Bible prophecy symbolizes a church. In this prophecy, the women (churches) were to be severely judged because of their pride, which is directly connected with external adornment.

Because we wrestle with sin and temptation, now is not the right time to glorify our exteriors. The supreme goal of the Christian is to attract attention to Christ, not to self. Decorating our mortal bodies with glittering gems and minerals usually springs from pride and is diametrically opposed to the spirit and principles of Jesus. "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Matthew 23:12.

Pride of appearance was a large factor in Lucifer's fall and rebellion. When God originally created Lucifer as a perfect angel, He gave every precious stone as his garments-"the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold." Ezekiel 28:13.

Unfortunately, Lucifer chose to misappropriate God's gifts. Filled with pride, he decided he was beautiful enough to have God's place on the throne of the universe. "Thine heart was lifted up because

of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." Ezekiel 28:17. Pride led to rebellion. Rebellion led to war in heaven. And war in heaven led to sin on earth.

Ever since Adam and Eve's fall into sin, we humans have had to struggle with the same sinful nature that has pride at its root. God, therefore, has commanded us to not wear jewelry. In our sinful condition, we are no better able to resist the tendency to sinful pride than was Lucifer. When our physical bodies are changed at the second coming of Jesus, we will no longer be tempted to sin. Only then will Jesus consider it safe to place a crown of gold on our heads.

So until then, we would do well to follow the counsel given by the apostle Paul on the subject of adornment: "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." 1 Timothy 2:9, 10, NKJV.

Poor "Investments"

Christians are to be faithful stewards of the means God entrusts to their care. Some display gems on their bodies that, if sold, could build an entire church in the mission field. Our money should be spent to spread the gospel in a practical, effective way. The Lord asks, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" Isaiah 55:2. (See also Matthew 6:19-21.)

No doubt you will find glaring examples among church members (and in churches) where money has been squandered on some needless extravagance. I confess that I too have been guilty of this. But one inconsistency never justifies another. God's money should not be spent for parading diamonds and gold or even cheap costume jewelry. All the jewelry will melt when Jesus comes, and I would prefer not to be wearing any when that happens!

The Bible declares the folly of such "investments" in James 5:3: "Your gold and silver is cankered [corroded]; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days." The only valuables going to heaven will be transformed people.

Little Idols

When I present the Bible truth regarding jewelry, I rarely hear complaints from those who are newly converted. But the folks who have been in the church for years will often pout and argue, "Doug, it is such a little thing!" My response is, "If it is such a little thing, then why is it so hard for you to take it off?" A little gold or silver can become a big idol.

Perhaps the most striking demonstration of this fact was the experience of the Israelites with the golden calf. The Bible records: "And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Exodus 32:2-4.

When the children of Israel passed the offering plate, they had enough jewelry to make a small calf. I fear that if we were to pass the plate today in the churches of those who profess to follow God's Word, we would have enough jewelry to make a whole golden buffalo!

After the golden calf experience, God commanded the people to remove their jewelry lest they be consumed. "For the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiff-necked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb." Exodus 33:5, 6.

Notice the similar warning God gives to His people living in the last days: "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the rugged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth." Isaiah 2:20, 21.

Dressing for the Occasion

There was a time when God winked at the wearing of jewelry and other evils such as slavery and polygamy. It was not because He approved of these practices, but because His people had bigger problems to deal with at that point in time.

Acts 17:30, 31 tells us: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." Why? "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness."

We are living in the days just before the coming of Jesus—a time in which the church is being judged. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." 1 Peter 4:17.

As an illustration of the judgment process, God gave to His people the Day of Atonement. It fell on the tenth day of the seventh month in the Jewish year and was a solemn day on which the Lord would sanctify and judge the children of Israel. In preparation, the people conducted a thorough personal examination. They were filled with an attitude of confession, repentance, and humility. "For it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people." Leviticus 23:28, 29, NKJV.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest—who normally wore a jeweled vest and fine garments that were symbolic of the glories of heaven—changed into a simple, white linen robe. It is his plain dress that we should emulate, because we live during the prophetic Day of Atonement. Just as the entire camp of Israel was required to clean and change their clothes on Judgment Day, so are we who live in the judgment hour just before Jesus returns to earth called to purify our hearts and to separate ourselves from all pagan influences.

Other Bible stories further illustrate how people changed their dress when they prepared to meet God.

Here is one from Genesis 35:1-4: "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange [foreign] gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem."

We can learn two very important lessons from this story. First, notice that the foreign gods and jewelry were classified and buried together. Pagan worship and jewelry have always enjoyed a close association. And in order for Jacob and his household to commune with God, they had to abandon all such influences. Thus God ordered Jacob to make not a temporary removal of these articles, but a permanent burial.

Secondly, the word Bethel means "House of God." We are now living in the time of judgment and are preparing to meet with the Almighty in His heavenly house. Now is not the time to adorn our mortal exteriors. Before we go there, God wants us to separate from the things of this world that will compromise our relationship with Him. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." 2 Corinthians 6:17.

We Are God's Temple

The most beautiful building of antiquity was the temple of God built by King Solomon. Its exterior was covered with precious, pure white marble stones. Interestingly enough, the gold was on the inside of the temple. The Bible says that this is a good pattern for living temples, as well. "Your beauty should reside, not in outward adornment-the braiding of the hair, or jewelry, or dress-but in the inmost centre of your being, with its imperishable ornament, a gentle, quiet spirit, which is of high value in the sight of God." 1 Peter 3:3, 4, NEB. Like Solomon's temple of old, our gold should be on the inside!

Friend, your body was made by God in His image. To try to improve human appearance by poking holes in the ears or nose from which to dangle lifeless minerals would be like trying to improve on the perfect beauty of Solomon's temple by releasing a street gang in the marble courtyard and telling them to express themselves with spray paint. "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God." 2 Corinthians 6:16.

I believe angels turn away their faces and weep when professed Christians pierce, scar, chain, mutilate, and tattoo their bodies as a sacrifice to the gods of fad and fashion. God plainly says of His people: "They shall not make ... any cuttings in their flesh. They shall be holy unto their God." Leviticus 21:5, 6. And if God says we should not cut our bodies, what makes us think that piercing the ears is somehow permissible?

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17. In essence, you should not poke holes in priceless marble. Our bodies are to be

holy, not full of holes.

The Bible principles against the wearing of jewelry have been a blessing to God's cause. They are liberating to the members. God's people have more money to spend on sharing the gospel and relieving the needs of suffering people. They are freed from feelings of insecurity. No longer do men need to worry about whether the ring they give their wife or girlfriend is large enough or makes a big enough social statement. And women don't have to invest an ounce of emotional energy in comparing their jewelry with others. God's standard has been a tremendous blessing, and we need to keep it!

First Appearances Do Count!

Two symbolic women appear in Revelation chapters 12 and 17. They represent the two great religious powers that are in conflict throughout church history. Although neither of them ever speaks, we know that one is true and one is false. How? The primary way the Bible identifies who they are is by what they are wearing.

Revelation 12:1 says, "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." The first woman, who represents God's church, is wearing natural light. His church is clothed with the pure, unadulterated light that He made.

By contrast the second woman, who represents an apostate church, is bedecked with jewelry and fine apparel. Her beauty is external and artificial. Revelation 17:4 says, "The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication."

Obviously these things are associated with an appearance of evil, and we are commanded to "Abstain from all appearance of evil." 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

Jesus Himself commanded: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16. God's Word tells us to let our inner light (not our external jewels) shine so that others might see our works (not our wealth) and glorify God (not ourselves).

Wedding Rings?

At this point someone might be wondering, "What about a wedding ring?"

Very simply, support for the wedding ring cannot be found anywhere in Scripture. The Bible doesn't say that some rings can be worn and that others shouldn't. It simply includes rings in a long list of jewelry and ornamental clothing.

The wearing of wedding rings is strictly a tradition that springs from paganism and has since been

embraced and "baptized" by many churches. Cardinal John Henry Newman points out that the wedding ring, along with many other pagan customs, infiltrated Christianity through the compromising influence of his church. "The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness; holy water; asylums; holy days and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage, turning to the east, images at a later date ... are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church."¹

Of course, today we have found the wedding ring to be a deeply ingrained tradition. But if sincere seekers of God's will study this topic and are convicted to remove all jewelry, God will give them the grace to follow Him above tradition. "And he [Jesus] said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Mark 7:9.

Christ Is Our Example

I've also been asked many times if wearing a cross would be okay. Well, Jesus never asked us to wear the cross. He asks us to bear the cross. Taking up our cross and following Jesus is much more challenging than wearing a bumper sticker, tee shirt, or little golden cross as frivolous advertising. Jesus said that bearing the cross means a Christian will "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23.

Whenever in doubt, ask this question: "What would Jesus do?" If we follow Jesus, we are always safe. Personally, I cannot picture my Jesus drilling holes in His ears, nose, or anywhere else in order to hang glittering minerals from His extremities. The example of Jesus in the Scriptures is consistently one of practical simplicity and modesty. When He was crucified, the Roman soldiers divided his garments among themselves. Notice that they did not cast lots for His jewelry. He didn't have any. Instead, they had to settle for His most valuable piece of clothing—a modest, seamless tunic (John 19:23, 24).

Here is a message that bears repeating. When we love Jesus, we will want to follow His example. "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." 1 John 2:6, NKJV.

Change of Ownership

In the small town where I used to live, there was a house that was well known for its dilapidated appearance. Broken-down trucks, garbage, and miscellaneous junk cluttered the yard. The peeling paint, broken windows, and hungry yard dogs were an embarrassment to the entire community. Then one day, after taking an extended trip, I drove back through town and was stunned by the dramatic change that had come over this infamous structure. The old, peeling paint had been stripped off, and a beautiful natural stain now covered the wood. Clean, new windows had replaced the broken ones, and all the junk and old vehicles were gone! The yard was clean and covered with new grass. I didn't even have to ask what had caused the change. Instantly I knew that the house had a new owner.

All of us have at one time or another resembled that old, broken-down house. Sin reigned in our hearts, leaving us broken, filthy, and cluttered. But whenever a person allows Jesus to take over the heart, a cleansing process begins immediately. Jesus will remove those things that distract from the Christian's inner beauty, and people will notice the outer improvement as well!

Jesus laid aside His heavenly throne and crown when He came to our world to save us. Then He surrendered His earthly garments when He died on the cross for our sins. Is it too much for Him to ask us to lay aside our lifeless baubles and beads that we might better reflect His simple purity in this lost world?

As we have seen in this study, there are many good reasons for Christians to abstain from wearing jewelry. But if I had to pick two of the best, it would be these-love for God, and love for our neighbors.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Romans 12:1, 2.

Life In The Spirit

2 Peter 1:2

The greatest need of the church today is for a genuine spiritual revival and reformation. This is what true Christians have been praying for through the years - in the family circle, alone in the closet, and with the church body on Sabbath. There is a deep sense of inadequacy when we sit in a home giving a Bible study or stand before an audience where hundreds need to make a decision for Christ. We know that there is no human way to win a soul or convict of Truth. Only the Holy Spirit can really soften hearts for acceptance and stir the soul with conviction. So we pray as we reach out with weak faltering words that the power of God will break forth in that moment of sharing.

Sometimes, of course, we see the answer to those prayers. People are converted, the sick are raised up, and decisions are made for baptism. But why don't we see it more often? Is this on-again, off-again witness of the Holy Spirit everything we can expect from God? Why doesn't it happen every time we pray and claim the promises?

There are special seasons when our hearts burn within us, and we leave a prayer meeting rejoicing over the refreshing ministry of the Spirit. But how did God feel about that meeting? Was He able to accomplish His perfect will in that service? When the fullness of God's power is revealed no one will go out to talk about it in tame, lifeless tones. Like a fire from heaven the Spirit will flash and illuminate from heart to heart until the earth itself will be lighted with the glory of it.

But why are we still waiting for the fulfillment of the promised Spirit in all its Pentecostal power? Probably not one knowledgeable Christian will contend that the fullness of that promise has been realized today. This is not to say that there have not been exciting glimpses and momentary revelations of that blessing which will bring all other blessing in its train. But hungry, longing Christians everywhere concede that we have only scratched the surface of God's promises.

In fact, there is a general consensus that the church is standing on the threshold of its most unique, predestined mission. The "latter rain" of the Spirit is to provide an explosive entry into the final harvesting phase of the everlasting gospel. And if the exact time of that visitation is not known, there are scores of texts depicting the spiritual consequences of such a breakthrough.

Many believe that the "times of refreshing" have arrived already and that our own lack of faith and preparation has held back the baptism of the Holy Spirit in its final manifestation. When we read the scriptural promises of God's willingness to work through His committed people there seems to be no doubt that the fault lies with us and not with Him.

The inspired description of our assigned role under the Holy Spirit leaves us almost breathless. Words and phrases are used which seem utterly fanatical and super-exaggerated. Our minds are boggled by the incredible scope of the promises which apply to the people of God right now. We blink our eyes and think there must be a mistake, or else there has to be some secret meaning or hidden reservation in the words. Again and again the Bible uses superlative expressions in defining the victorious experience of

believers. God does not say that we can be conquerors; He says we can be "*more* than conquerors." He doesn't merely say we can be saved, but rather "saved to the *uttermost*." He will not just cause us to triumph, but "*always* to triumph." Do those words truly mean what they say?

I submit to you that God does not multiply euphonic phrases in order to make an impression. There is built-in, self-fulfilling power in every single promise of the Bible. No matter how extreme the text may sound to our ears, whatever is promised shall be precisely fulfilled as soon as we believe. No matter how impossible it may seem to be, we can believe because God says it.

Consider the extravagant nature of the promise in 2 Peter 1:3, 4. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." Please notice, first of all, that "divine power" is referring to the Holy Spirit. He has already been sent to continue the work Jesus did while here on the earth. The text does not say that the power "will give," but "hath given" already. We do not need to look for some possible future supply of power. It is ours *now* for the asking and claiming. We simply need to possess our possessions!

But what has that divine power of the Holy Spirit already made available to us? The text says, "All things that pertain unto life and godliness." Doesn't that stagger your mind? It is like a blank check on the bank of heaven, isn't it? It is not for material things like houses, cars, and lands, but it absolutely includes anything and everything you might need to live a godly life.

Have you longed for victory over sin, for sanctification, holiness, Christlikeness, purity, and perfection of character? It is included in the "all things" of this verse. And don't try to reason away the words and make them say something besides what they say.

Faith Brings the Power

I repeat that this is a signed check from God drawn on the mighty, inexhaustible resources of the bank of heaven. God tells us to fill it in as to the amount. It is already signed and certified by Him. What a promise! But you might ask, "How is this check to be processed?" The next verse explains the cashing procedures. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Verse 4.

There it is! The power is in the promise itself. As soon as we *believe* it our lives may immediately begin to share in His divine nature. Can there be any higher privilege than to actually participate in the very life of our Lord Jesus? His omnipotence is joined to our finite weakness, and we are empowered to live out the victory He gained when "tempted in all points like as we are tempted." We do not have to yield to corruptions and lusts of the world; we can "escape" them by claiming the "divine power" of that "divine nature."

Many professed Christians cannot muster the faith to believe promises like this. They prefer to believe that our fallen natures are just too depraved to ever be totally victorious over sin, even through the power of the gospel. What a tragedy! They have to trust the words of Scripture to mean something

besides what they actually say. In essence, they are magnifying the power of Satan over the power of God, and making it impossible to ever fully stop sinning.

Incredible Promises

Now consider with me one of the most extraordinary promises found anywhere in the counsels of God. "That he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, *that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*" Ephesians 3:16-19.

It is that last phrase that we need to examine carefully. How could such a statement be true? I don't begin to grasp the magnitude of those words. In fact, I seem to be standing on the shore of a vast restless ocean, watching the waves receding into infinity. To be filled with all the fullness of God is one of those unsearchable gems of Truth that we can only accept by faith. We will never be able to *understand* it, but we can *believe* it anyway.

What is all the fullness of God? Surely it includes His righteousness, His victory, and His divine nature. We can only begin to comprehend the scope of this promise. Apparently, He wants us to receive and share all that He has. As sons and daughters of God we belong to a royal family, and are fully entitled to participate in all its divine prerogatives.

But now let's read the grand climax of this pyramid of promises in Ephesians 3. Paul writes, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Verse 20. And what is that power? The Holy Spirit, of course. When we analyze this verse our amazement increases.

Wouldn't it be wonderful enough if God just promised to give us all that we asked for? Surely such an open-ended offer could be limited only by our reluctance to ask. But our wonderful, beneficent Father assures us in this text that He is willing to give "*above*" all that we ask. He must realize that we are too easily satisfied, and would not be bold enough in our petitions. In fact, He not only will exceed "*all*" our requests for spiritual blessings, but will bestow "*abundantly*" above all we could ask. But that is not all! In the fervency of His love for us, God promises to do "*exceeding abundantly above all*" we could ask. What a dramatic parade of powerful adjectives to describe the spiritual riches so easily available to all of us. And you could add twenty or a hundred more colorful words and it would not make the promise any more certain than it now stands.

If you feel that nothing could make this text more fantastic than what we have already observed, take another look. Two more little words in the verse make it the most astonishing in all the Bible - "or think." Not only will He supply "exceeding abundantly above all" we can ask, but even above all we could *imagine* in our wildest dreams. Unbelievable! Sometimes we have deep spiritual longings which are too intense to express. We fear it would be presumptuous to even utter the words. Yet, our loving God desires to surpass the most profound reaching out of the soul for spiritual help. We stand awed and ashamed in the light of His extravagant provision for our needs. What a Saviour!

A Taste of Heaven Now

At this point it would seem wise to read the Bible definition of the Spirit's sealing work upon the soul. One of the shortest and most succinct descriptions is found in Ephesians 1:13, 14. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is *the earnest of our inheritance*." There it is in four simple words! The sealing or filling of the Holy Spirit is the "earnest of our inheritance." What does that mean? What is our inheritance? And, what is an earnest?

Simply speaking, heaven is our inheritance. That includes eternal life and fellowship with Jesus. This is our reward or inheritance which shall be fully realized when Jesus returns. But, in the meantime we may receive an "earnest" of that inheritance through the filling of the Spirit. An earnest is a down payment which constitutes a guarantee that the full amount will be paid when the job is done.

So, putting it all together, we have an astounding statement that heaven can begin right here on the earth while we wait for Jesus to come. Through the Spirit-filled life we may experience an actual foretaste of the immortal joys and thrills of being in the presence of our Saviour.

Someone may object that such heavenly bliss is reserved only for the redeemed, and that the Bible itself declares that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." 1 Corinthians 2:9. But such fail to take into account the next verse which continues, "But God hath revealed them into us by His Spirit." Verse 10.

In other words, through the divine anointing of the Holy Spirit we may now begin to experience a measure of that quality of life which is designated in the Bible as "eternal life." What an exciting concept! Please keep in mind that we are still only talking about an advance deposit on the real thing, and heaven itself will be far in excess of anything we can experience here.

Purpose of the Latter Rain

But what is the purpose of this baptism of the Spirit's power? We often hear it spoken of as the "times of refreshing," the anointing, the latter rain, or the promise of the Spirit. The Scripture often uses the Middle Eastern terminology for the seed-sowing and harvesting. Soon after planting, a seasonal rain provided moisture for germination and initial growth. This was called the "early rain." Later, near the time for harvest, another copious watering was referred to as the "latter rain." Biblical writers adopted these expressions to describe the visitation of the Holy Spirit upon the church in a dispensational sense. The "early rain" came at Pentecost to give impetus and vigor to the inaugural witness of the gospel. Another such prodigious outpouring is scheduled near the reaping of earth's final soul harvest, just prior to Christ's return.

Some may assume that the purpose of such an end-time bestowal of spiritual blessing is to provide victory over sin, preparatory to translation. But this is not the case. The truth is that no one will receive the "latter rain" who does not already have the victory over sin through the "early rain" deployment of power.

On an individual basis each Christian experiences his own Pentecost at the time of conversion. Under the strength of that spiritual baptism, power is available for complete sanctification. As we consider the purpose of the "latter rain" it becomes even more clear why separation from sin is required under the early rain (conversion) ministration.

Jesus enunciated clearly why the Spirit is needed in its fullness. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8.

How interesting that the promised blessing has nothing to do with sensation or personal achievement. It is to qualify believers as witnesses. It is to provide power for them to tell something. A witness, of course, is someone who can personally verify an act or event. No judge would accept the testimony of a witness who had only second or third hand information to share.

What do we have to share from our personal experience which merits the mighty witness of the Spirit of God? I'm afraid that too many of God's people need something to tell more than they need the power to tell it. They already have all the power they need to tell about their defeat and discouragement.

The Blessing of Abraham

One of the clearest texts in the New Testament gives an exact description of what we are required to know and experience before we can qualify as a Spirit-filled witness. The amazing mandate laid down in this verse identifies the only group who will receive the latter rain. "That the blessing of Abraham may come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Galatians 3:14.

A careful analysis of this verse reveals that only those who possess the "blessing of Abraham" will receive the "promise of the Spirit." One thing is given (the blessing of Abraham) in order that we might receive another thing (the promise of the Spirit).

Since this is such a crucial verse we need to study it most carefully. What is the "promise of the Spirit"? We have already determined that it is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in its fullness to empower us for witnessing. But, according to this text, one must first receive the "blessing of Abraham" in order to be baptized with the Spirit. Whatever that "blessing" includes it surely must be the most urgent need of every life. Here is an absolute requirement for every soul who aspires to being filled with the "latter rain" experience.

To understand the blessing of Abraham we must carefully read Romans 4:19-22. "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

From these words we understand that the blessing of Abraham was righteousness by faith. Can we reduce that phrase to a more simple equation? Consider the promise God made to this aged patriarch and his 90-year-old wife. How could Sarah conceive and bear a son when the Scripture clearly states that her womb was dead? Both of them knew, beyond any question, that they were too old to have any children. It was a physical, biological impossibility for Sarah to become a mother. *Yet, God had said she would bear a son!*

What did Sarah finally do as doubts continued to assail her concerning the promise? She proposed to Abraham that he take Hagar, her handmaid, and try to have a son by her! If it worked, at least a part of God's promise would be fulfilled. It seems that Sarah was trying to bail God out of a very embarrassing situation in which He had gotten Himself. Even if she couldn't produce the child, it just might be that Abraham could be a father, and thus partially salvage the integrity of God.

As we all now recognize, Abraham did have a son by Hagar whose name was Ishmael, but did God ever acknowledge that son as the child of promise? Never. He came back to the old couple and reaffirmed His promise that they would have a baby. And this time they began to believe that if God said it, the miracle would have to take place. In simple, raw faith they stepped out on the promise as though it had already happened. And, by a creative act of God Sarah brought forth the son from whose descendants the Saviour of the world would be born.

Because of his absolute confidence in the Word of God - trusting it to be fulfilled against all odds - Abraham became the "father of the faithful." God imputed to him credit for right-doing because he counted things that were not, as though they already existed.

This explains the "blessing of Abraham" as far as the patriarch was concerned, but what is it as far as we are concerned? We have learned from Galatians that none of us can receive the baptism of the Spirit unless we first experience the "blessing of Abraham," or righteousness by faith, also.

How do we meet this precondition for the Holy Spirit baptism? Have we also had some incredible promises made to us? Indeed we have, and some are so extravagant that we struggle, like Sarah, to believe that they mean what they say.

One such promise is found in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What an unrestricted assurance! But how do we know that forgiveness has taken place? Only through faith in the promise. Like Abraham we must accept the Word of God as already accomplished, just because God said so. We refer to that faith transaction by the theological name "justification by faith." It simply means that through repentance and confession we have been forgiven for all past sins, and have entered the new born-again relationship.

Justification and Sanctification Together

Now the question: Is this experience of justification by faith the same as righteousness by faith? The answer must be no. It is only a part of righteousness by faith, and so the two things are not exactly

equivalent. The truth is that we all need more than just forgiveness for the past; we need power for the future also. There are more promises in the Bible, and they apply to victory over sin. For example: "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy." Jude 24.

What happens when we kneel in faith and claim the power to stop yielding to sin? God places a reservoir of strength in our life, and in that moment we can claim deliverance from any habit of sin. A long theological title has been attached to this experience by the scholars - sanctification. It simply means that God has now entered the life to impart power over the inherited and cultivated tendencies of the fallen nature. Like justification it is also received by faith in the promises.

Now we are ready to put these two faith processes together and get the true definition of righteousness by faith. When justification and sanctification unite to function in an ongoing love relationship with Christ, you see the "blessing of Abraham" in the full sense. Now you really have something to tell! And according to Paul you also qualify to receive the power to tell it.

If you meet someone who has not accepted Christ as Savior you can mightily bear witness to your own personal joy and assurance in Him. You can also give first-person witness to the simple steps which lead from death to life!

On the other hand, if you meet someone who is struggling with a personal weakness or habit, you can powerfully share the secret of claiming victory through the self-fulfilling promises. By experiential involvement in these two prerequisite relationships you are now ready to apply for the final step of Holy Spirit baptism. Please take note that this infilling also is received as "the promise of the Spirit through faith." Galatians 3:14. This gives us a clear conception of how and when it is bestowed. It must come by promise, and it has to be by faith.

Immediately we can see that many modern churches have a distorted understanding of this subject. Those groups who demand some physical "evidence" of the baptism are not biblical. Faith and feeling are opposed to each other in this setting. The purpose of this anointing is not for sensation, but for service. To require some sensory or emotional feeling is to negate the explicit designation, "by faith."

Is this failure to claim the gift of righteousness by faith responsible for the lack of power in the church today? To a very large extent it certainly is true. The Scriptures repeatedly assert that the Holy Spirit cannot dwell with those who are disobedient. "And we are his witnesses of these things and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." Acts 5:32.

The Spirit may convict sinners and draw them to repent, but there can be no ministry of witnessing power until the witness is thoroughly furnished with something to tell. And the Bible defines that something as justification and sanctification. Are there some who have received both of these qualifying experiences who still may not be filled with the promised power? Indeed, it is possible that some have not received simply because they have not asked. We are talking about a very special, specific gift which requires total surrender as well as total faith in asking. Let's review the steps again

which head up to this outpouring of power.

The first level of preparation for this divine anointing is to claim the gift of justification. At that time a measure of the Holy Spirit is supplied to the believer which makes it possible to overcome every inherited or acquired weakness. In the strength of that conversion experience (early rain) the second level of preparation is made possible - sanctification. This consists of appropriating the "early rain" power for Christian character perfection, and reflecting the righteousness of Christ fully. Both justification and sanctification are faith transactions.

Level number three involves an exercise of the same kind of faith for sharing with others the beautiful experiences of levels one and two. It consists of actually claiming the promised power to make our words convicting and fruitful. Nothing is more sterile than a testimony devoid of the Spirit of God, and nothing is more humbling than to see what God can do with the halting speech of a sincere, spirit-filled saint.

Recently a young minister friend told me a story that illustrates what God can and will do for us if we are willing to be used of the Spirit. Tony had been converted from Catholicism on the streets of New York, and almost immediately he came under an inescapable conviction to be a minister. With two small children and little money there seemed to be no possibility for Tony to attend college or seminary. Yet the call was so strong upon the tender heart of this newborn youth that he decided to step out in faith.

Before enrolling at a Christian college Tony promised the Lord that he would accept every opportunity to speak in front of an audience. He realized how much he needed the experience of thinking on his feet, and articulating his thoughts to a listening congregation.

Soon after moving his family into the college community, Tony learned that there were many small churches surrounding the campus, and that fledgling ministerial students tried their wings in those country chapels. It wasn't very long before Tony was approached on a Friday afternoon with an invitation to preach in one of those churches. Although he had only the evening hours to prepare for the Sabbath appointment, Tony remembered his promise to seize every opportunity for speaking. So he accepted the appointment. He did his best to put a sermon outline together as he prayed and studied late into the night. But, alas, he was only able to produce notes for a ten minute message at the most. Hoping against hope that he might be able to pull some more thoughts into his sermon notes during the Sabbath School class study, Tony left early the next morning for the frightening rendezvous. As a very immature young Christian he had almost no previous experience in pulpit speaking and was almost paralyzed with fear that his ten- minute sermon would be more humiliating than enlightening.

Arriving at the church, Tony slipped into one of the classrooms, hoping for a chance to blend with the group and study his meager notes during the lesson. But it was not to be. In the class that day was an obstreperous man who was creating turmoil. He constantly disputed points with the hard-pressed lady teacher and seemed to do everything possible to embarrass her. Tony spent much of the class time helping her fend off the man's distracting and irrelevant attacks against the issues under discussion.

Afterward as he waited to walk onto the platform Tony's mind was still whirling from the emotional confrontation, and even his brief sermon outline was not very clear in his thinking. With earnest prayer he committed himself to God and stepped up to the podium.

Somehow Tony struggled through the ten minutes of sermon notes, and just as he stood desperately groping for further words a loud anguished cry came from the audience. Looking down the center aisle Tony saw that a man had fallen out of his seat at the end of the pew and was crawling on hands and knees toward the front of the church. He was weeping at the top of his voice, and his wife was trying in vain to pull him back toward his seat.

One quick glance identified the man as the relentless debater in the Sabbath School class. By then, between broken sobs, he was pleading that the church pray for him. "Your sermon has spoken to my heart and the Holy Spirit has convicted me of my sins. I've been breaking God's law and now I want to make things right. Please pray for me."

In a moment the congregation melted into tears also, and the meeting closed on a glorious note of victory as the audience joined hearts and hands to pray for the penitent seeker.

What an encouragement for a young preacher! Tony told me that he could not even remember a word he spoke that day. But God simply added the Holy Spirit to the stammering efforts of a surrendered heart, and a miracle resulted. When Tony returned to that church a year later he found that man serving as the head elder of the congregation.

Do you see now what a difference it makes to be filled with the Spirit? This is God's will for every one of us and He has made it possible through the beautiful promise of Galatians 3:14. Reach out right now and fasten your faith on the blessing of Abraham. In the strength of that righteousness, imputed and imparted by faith, you may be empowered to speak words that will change lives.

Pending Your Case in Court

John 1:29

At the age of thirty, Jesus left the carpenter shop in Nazareth and made His way to the Jordan River where John the Baptist was preaching his stern message of repentance. This was probably the first time these cousins had ever met, but as soon as Jesus walked into the circle of listeners, John pointed at Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29.

What did the prophet mean by those cryptic words? Why did he call Jesus a lamb, and how could He take away the sins of the world? To get the answers to those questions, we must leave the banks of the Jordan River and travel back hundreds of years in time to the banks of the Red Sea.

The children of Israel had just escaped their bondage in Egypt and were beginning that long, weary trek through the Sinai wilderness. God had worked miracles to deliver them from their cruel taskmasters, and now He called Moses up into the mountain for some very important instruction. There in the lonely solitude of Mount Sinai, God opened before human eyes for the very first time the mysteries of His own dwelling place in the heavens. Moses was given a miniature blueprint of the great throne room in the heavenly sanctuary. His instructions were, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle. . . ." Exodus 25:8, 9.

When he returned from the mountain, Moses had the exact specifications for constructing a wilderness church where God would commune with His people during their desert sojourn. By necessity it had to be made of light-weight materials which could be easily dismantled and reassembled wherever the wanderers camped on their journey.

For such an important assignment, Moses called together all the skilled craftsmen and artisans of Israel, and they began the building process, carefully following the exact instructions which had been copied from the pattern shown to Moses in the mountain. About six months later it was completed and God showed His approval by sending a cloud of glory to envelop the sacred structure.

The portable tabernacle was roughly fifty-five by eighteen feet in size with a surrounding enclosed courtyard facing the east. The rectangular building was divided into two apartments separated by a heavy veil which extended from near the ceiling to the floor. The larger first room was called the holy place and contained three special articles of furniture—a candlestand on the left, the table of shewbread on the right, and a golden incense altar directly in front of the veil.

In the second apartment, called the most holy place (or the holy of holies), there was only one article of furniture—the ark of the covenant. This was a gold-covered chest of acacia wood which was to contain the tables of the ten-commandment law. On top of the ark was the mercy seat representing the corresponding place in heaven where God's presence was manifest. A bright spot of glory called the Shekinah abode in that most sacred of all locations on earth. On either end of the ark were two carved cherubim of gold, one wing of each overarching the mercy seat while they gazed reverently down upon the ark and its contents.

Why were the requirements for this temporary structure so exacting, and why did God command Moses to make it precisely after the pattern which he was shown in heaven itself? The answer will become self-evident as we understand the daily symbolic worship rites which were divinely ordained for every Israelite to carry out in that tabernacle.

Through the prescribed ceremonies and sacrifices forgiveness for sin was available, and atonement could be made for both personal and national guilt. Briefly, the confessional system worked in this manner: if a man or woman sinned, they had to bring a lamb without spot or blemish into the courtyard of the sanctuary. There, by the altar of burnt offering, they were required to confess their sins over the animal and then slay it with their own hand. The flawless lamb, of course, represented the future Messiah, and through faith, they were transferring their sins to the lamb, accepting the substitutionary death of the Saviour in their place. By shedding the blood themselves, they were constantly reminded that sin means death and that they could only be forgiven through the atoning death of another.

The priest then placed some of the blood on the horns of the altar in the outer court and ate a small piece of the meat, thus taking upon himself the sins of the individual worshippers. Afterward, the priest killed a sin offering for himself, and carried the blood into the holy place where it was sprinkled before the veil. Thus all sin, either directly or indirectly, eventually found its way into the sanctuary where it was recorded through the sprinkled blood.. Day by day, for an entire year, the sins accumulated in the sanctuary by the daily ministry of the priests in the holy place.

Then came the annual Day of Atonement when a final disposition was made of their record of sin in the sanctuary. It always fell on the tenth day of the seventh month and was called the "cleansing of the sanctuary." To this day, that solemn observance (Yom Kippur) is regarded by every Jew as a day of judgment. Symbolically a blotting out of the blood-recorded sins took place as the high priest, alone, entered the holy of holies to sprinkle the blood of a goat.

It is significant how that special goat was selected from the two which were brought into the courtyard on the Day of Atonement. Only one man, the high priest, was involved in the ministry of this annual observance. He cast lots to determine which animal would be slain as the "Lord's goat" and which would be banished as the scapegoat.

While the high priest killed the animal by the courtyard altar, the entire congregation were afflicting their souls in fasting and prayer. Their fate was about to be determined before the mercy seat of the sanctuary. If one person had sins which had not been confessed and recorded in the sanctuary, those sins would not come under the blood of atonement. That man or woman would be cut off from Israel and put outside the camp.

The high priest alone passed through the veil to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and to cleanse all the record of sin from the sanctuary. When he emerged from the holy of holies, the final atonement had been completed and a symbolic judgment had been made concerning sin and its penalty.

The last act of the high priest was to place his hands on the head of the scapegoat in the courtyard who

was then led off into the wilderness to perish alone. Thus was vividly represented the ultimate assignment of guilt and punishment to Satan who shares in the sins of every individual. The scapegoat could not represent Christ, because His goat was chosen out of the two by lot earlier. Also, the scapegoat sheds no blood and, therefore, has no part in the atonement. Satan, on the other hand, must finally suffer the penalty for his involved participation in every sin committed. He could never bear the guilt of the people, because their guilt has already been canceled by the sprinkling of the blood of atonement. He will bear his own guilt and punishment at the end of the thousand years of "wilderness" desolation. All this is symbolized by the banishment of the scapegoat to die in the wilderness.

Time does not permit us to examine the wealth of symbolisms in the desert tabernacle which illuminates almost every aspect of the great plan of salvation. Christ, the sacrificial Lamb, was foreshadowed in the bread, the incense, the lamps, the mercy seat, but most of all, by the high priest who carried the blood into the Shekinah presence of God. We shall soon discover, from the book of Hebrews, that all the earthly types had to be fulfilled by the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary. How and when Jesus entered that priestly work is the thrilling subject of Daniel's most impressive vision. As we look into Daniel 8 and 9, the importance of the sanctuary will become more and more apparent.

Daniel's Vision of the Cleansing

Daniel 8 opens with a view of the prophet serving as a prisoner of war in Babylon. Jerusalem has been left in ruins and most of Israel have been carried into Babylonian captivity. Although Daniel was forced to serve as a physical slave in Belshazzar's palace, his thoughts are now especially fixed upon the desolated temple in Jerusalem. He recognizes that the prophesied seventy years of exile are almost ended, and his heart yearns to see a restoration of the beautiful temple and its services.

In this setting, Daniel had a vision in which a ram and he-goat were battling to the death. The ram with two horns came forth first and did "according to his will, and became great." Daniel 8:4. Then a goat with a prominent horn between its eyes came rushing from the west and attacked the ram. In the skirmish the goat prevailed, breaking the ram's horns and as a result he became "very great." But "when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones. . . ." Daniel 8:8.

As the vision continued, Daniel saw a little horn come out of one of the four horns of the goat. To his amazement, this small horn "waxed exceeding great" and even set itself up against God, casting "down the truth to the ground."

Finally, in the vision, Daniel heard a conversation between two saints. One asked a question, and the other gave an answer which sent a thrill of hope through the captive prophet. The question apparently concerned the very thing Daniel was concerned over □ restoration of the Jerusalem temple. "How long shall be . . . to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?" Daniel 8:13. The answer was, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Daniel 8:14.

When the vision ended, God sent the angel Gabriel to explain the meaning of what Daniel had seen. Concerning the animals he said, "The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media

and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king." Daniel 8:20, 21.

The explanation of successive empires was not new to Daniel because of previous visions relating to world history. He was well acquainted with both Medo-Persia and Alexander's kingdom of Greece which were to follow Babylon. He had also been informed about the fourth kingdom of Rome, and how the blasphemous little horn would come forth afterward to challenge God's law and government. Gabriel's explanation of those future developments were of vital interest to Daniel, the statesman, but his deepest concern was for the restoration of the temple. He wanted to hear more about the end of the desolation and the cleansing of the sanctuary. Anxiously he waited for the angel to explain the meaning of that cryptic conversation between the two saints. Imagine his disappointment when Gabriel dismissed the entire matter with these words: "And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days." Daniel 8:26.

So great had been Daniel's expectation that he was devastated by the suggestion that this cleansing was in the far distant future and to be "shut up" from his understanding. He described his reaction thus: "I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." Daniel 8:27.

Please take note that the only part of the vision which had not been explained was the very last segment dealing with the sanctuary. It concerned the time period of 2300 days and the implementing of temple worship which burdened his soul. So Daniel began to pray for God to satisfy his longing desire to understand that part of the vision. Much of chapter 9 is taken up with the prophet's earnest prayer for God to forgive his people of their apostasy and to restore the beloved city and temple. "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate . . . behold our desolation, and the city which is called by thy name." Daniel 9:17, 18.

While he was praying, Gabriel, "whom he had seen in the vision at the beginning," touched him and said, "I am come forth to give thee skill and understanding . . . therefore understand the matter and consider the vision." Daniel 9:22, 23. What vision was Daniel asked to consider? In which one had Gabriel appeared to him earlier? And which part of the vision had been left unexplained? The answers to these questions are obvious. Gabriel was talking about the time element in the vision of Daniel 8. We can now expect him to finish the explanation about the 2300 days, at the end of which the sanctuary will be cleansed.

Daniel was not disappointed this time. Gabriel immediately began to deal with that time prophecy. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city." Two important facts are revealed in these words of the angel. The word "determined" actually means "cut off" in the original Hebrew. But what were 70 weeks to be cut off of? Remember that this is the explanation of the mysterious conversation about the 2300 days. So the 70 weeks is cut off of the beginning of that time table and is assigned to Daniel's people, the Jews, for a certain purpose. The next words of Gabriel reveal why this particular period was set up for them. "To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." Daniel 9:24.

We perceive immediately that all those phrases have to do with the Messiah. He was to come through the chosen people—Israel's people—the 70 weeks was a probation on the Jewish nation to see what they would do with the Messiah. In order to understand when this probation would begin and end, we must consider an important principle of prophetic interpretation. In symbolic prophecy, a day always represents a year. In Ezekiel 4:6 God said, "I have appointed thee each day for a year." The same principle is repeated again in Numbers 14:34.

This means that we are actually dealing with a time period of 2300 years instead of that many literal days. No wonder the angel told Daniel that these things were for "many days." The fact is that this vision constitutes the longest time prophecy in the entire Bible.

But now we need to find out when this long span of years begins and ends. We already know what happens at the end — sanctuary will be cleansed — also that the first 70 weeks has been cut off for a Jewish probation. The next words of Gabriel begin to untangle the puzzle, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks." Daniel 9:25.

Now we have a specific event to mark the beginning of the prophecy. Gabriel explains that sixty-nine weeks will elapse from the restoration order to the appearance of the Messiah. Here the beginning of the 2300 years is clearly pinned down. The starting point is tied to the command of Artaxerxes recorded in Ezra 7:12, 13: "I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee." The full context of this decree provided for the rebuilding of both the wall and the temple of old Jerusalem. The date of that commandment is historically established at 457 B.C.

A bit of arithmetic will now unveil the actual date for Jesus to begin His ministry. The angel had said the Messiah would appear sixty-nine weeks from the date of 457 B.C. By following the Bible rule of a day for a year, this figures to 483 years and brings us to the year 27 A.D. Did the Messiah appear at that exact time? The word Messiah means "the anointed one," and it was in that very year of 27 A.D. that Jesus received His heavenly anointing after being baptized in the Jordan. The Spirit of God descended upon Him, and He went forth to begin His ministry as the anointed of God. By studying this prophecy, the Jews could have known the very year their Saviour would appear.

Now we notice a very interesting fact. Seventy weeks (or 490 years) had been cut off of the 2300 days/years as a special assignment to the Jews, and sixty-nine weeks (or 483 years) had been predicted for the Messiah to come. The sixty-nine weeks ended in 27 A.D. and one week later (or seven years) the Jews' allotted time expired in 34 A.D. In that very year, probation ended for the nation of Israel. They had rejected the Messiah and stoned Stephen to death. From that scene of martyrdom, a converted Saul was sent forth as the apostle to the Gentiles. Declared he, "Seeing ye put it from you . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles." Acts 13:46.

Special attention should now be focused on that seventieth week, the seven-year span from the baptism of the Messiah to the rejection of the Jews. A very significant event was to mark the midpoint of the seventieth week. Gabriel continued his explanation to Daniel by describing when the Messiah would be

cut off. He said, "In the midst of the week he shall cause the oblation to cease." Daniel 9:27.

It is recognized by all that the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom the very moment Jesus died (Matthew 27:50, 51), thus indicating an end to the sacrificial system. Type had met antitype. The true Lamb had now been offered and no more shadows were needed. So Jesus was to be cut off in the midst of the week to cause the sacrifices to cease. It is not hard to figure that the middle of these seven years would be three and one half years from either end. In other words, it would be exactly halfway between 27 A.D. and 34 A.D. Did Jesus die at that time? It is a fact of history that Christ lived to preach only three and one half years after His baptism. In 31 A.D. He was crucified. What an amazing fulfillment of one of the most precise prophecies in the scriptures! Just as the prophecy predicted, the anointed One appeared 483 years from the order to rebuild Jerusalem.

Some have tried to separate the seventieth week from the preceding sixty-nine weeks of the prophecy, pushing it into the future and claiming a 2000-year gap between the sixty-nine weeks and the seventieth week. Not only is there no biblical basis for such wresting, but it would render almost meaningless the beautiful Messianic message of this Christ-centered prophecy. The seventieth week has nothing to do with any pre-rapture coming of Christ or the work of the antichrist. As a part of the seventy weeks, it marked off a period of test for national Israel concerning their relation to the Messiah. The assigned years have long ago been fulfilled. The Saviour was cut off in the middle of the seventieth week, and the Jews were rejected as a nation.

The Sanctuary Cleansed in 1844

We note that a remaining span of 1810 years brings us to the end of the 2300-year prophecy. The terminal year is 1844 A.D. According to Daniel's prophecy, that is the date for the sanctuary to be cleansed. The prophet had eagerly expected the yearly Day of Atonement services to be restored in the Jerusalem temple, but now he could see that Gabriel had properly placed it far into the future. It was obvious that the prophecy extended hundreds of years beyond the coming of the Messiah.

But now we face a perplexing question. How could the record of sin be cleansed from the most holy place of the sanctuary in 1844? History reveals that there was no earthly sanctuary in existence at that time. The temple had been destroyed for the last time in 70 A.D. True! But was there another sanctuary besides the earthly temple? Indeed, Moses had copied the earthly from the PATTERN in heaven. It was the TRUE TABERNACLE, and it was just as real as the two-apartment copy which Israel had fabricated in the wilderness. Therefore, it had to be the heavenly sanctuary which was cleansed in 1844. According to the type, or shadow, the high priest was to accomplish a final atonement or a work of judgment during that solemn annual visit into the holy of holies. The antitype fulfillment required the true High Priest, Jesus, to do the same thing in the pattern temple above.

The book of Hebrews assures us that all which was foreshadowed in the earthly sanctuary must be carried out in the heavenly sanctuary by the heavenly High Priest. "We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man." Hebrews 8:1, 2.

Here is an important question: Did the prescribed services in the earthly sanctuary relate to the work

Jesus would perform in the true temple in the heavens? Hebrews describes the Levite priests as those "who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God, when he was about to make the tabernacle: for see, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." Hebrews 8:5.

Here the inspired writer explains why God required Moses to carefully copy the pattern revealed in the mountain. The earthly was to serve as an "example and shadow" of the ministry of Christ before the Father. By observing the work of the priest in the two apartments here on earth, men would understand the special intercessory work of Christ after He ascended back to heaven. In Hebrews 9:1-10 we read in much detail how the daily service and the once-a-year cleansing service was conducted in the earthly sanctuary, which was an example and shadow of the heavenly. Here, after describing the solemn entry of the high priest into the most holy place on the Day of Atonement, Paul wrote: "The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." Hebrews 9:8.

Clearly, this verse is saying that Christ's ministry in the true heavenly sanctuary would only begin after the earthly had fulfilled its typical role as an example and pattern. When He ascended, Jesus entered the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary as evidenced by John's description of Him walking among the candlesticks (Revelation 1:13). This fulfills the example of the holy place ministry on earth. When He entered into the heavenly holy place, He did not carry the blood of lambs or goats, "but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Hebrews 9:12.

But just as surely as He fulfilled the type of the daily ministry in the holy place, Christ also must fulfill the example of the most holy place mediation. Paul wrote: "Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Hebrews 9:25-28.

Do not overlook the connection of that word "judgment" with what Jesus does in the most holy place. He did not need to go in every year but only once "in the end of the world." His work of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary of the record of sin was absolutely necessary to fulfill the example and shadow of the earthly-type Day of Atonement. The biblical statement to this effect is unequivocal and undeniable. "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore *necessary* that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Hebrews 9:22-24.

What was necessary? That the patterns in heaven be cleansed, just as the earthly was cleansed. But cleansed of what? The record of sin, of course. That record was made in the earthly tabernacle through the sprinkled blood. It is made in the heavenly sanctuary through the books described in that great judgment scene of Revelation 20:12, "And the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books,

according to their works."

When was the earthly record cleansed? On the annual Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, and it was called the great judgment day. When is the heavenly sanctuary cleansed? It would be cleansed when Christ our High Priest would pass from the holy into the most holy place of the temple above. When does the prophecy indicate that this cleansing would occur? "Unto two thousand three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Daniel 8:14. Without question we have proven that the 2300 day/year prophecy ended in 1844 A.D. What a solemn thought that since that year we have been living in the time of the judgment! Christ has now entered His most-holy-place ministry, and the record of every individual must come into review during this time of judgment.

Someone might ask why such a pre-advent judgment is necessary. Why did Paul declare that "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified"? Because the record of sin must be examined to determine who will be saved. Remember that "the dead were judged out of those things written in the books." This investigative judgment must take place before He comes to execute the sentence. At His coming the wicked are slain by His bright glory. A separation is made between the saved and the lost at that moment. Obviously, the books had to be investigated before that time to determine who would be saved and who lost.

When Jesus leaves the most holy place, the final atonement has been made. Probation closes for the world, just as it closed for the Jews on the Day of Atonement after the high priest finished his work in the earthly sanctuary. Then Christ will lay aside His priestly garments and put on His kingly robes. Then the edict goes forth, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he which is righteous, let him be righteous still. . . . And behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:11, 12.

Christ who was "once offered to bear the sins of many . . . shall appear the second time *without sin* unto salvation." At that time, He will not be our sin-bearer. His work as Mediator will be ended, and He will come "without sin" to bring His rewards and execute the judgment determined by the books.

What, then, has been the work of Christ since 1844? Daniel described the dramatic scene in these words: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened." Daniel 7:9, 10.

You and I will not be present in person while this investigative phase of the judgment is taking place. It is all done out of the books. It is going on right now. Soonⁿy soonⁿ the last case will be considered, the last record of sin blotted out of the book of deeds. Then, the investigation can only focus on the book of life, "And whosoever was *not found* written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:15. Daniel declared, "At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be *found* written in the book." Daniel 12:1.

There is no more dramatic scene in the entire Bible than this courtroom description of Daniel 7. The awful grandeur of the Father's majestic throne and glorified person dominates the sanctuary setting of books and judgment. Myriads of angels are standing by as the witnesses. Then in verse 13, the defense attorney is brought forth to represent those whose records will be examined. Daniel "saw . . . one like the Son of man came . . . to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him." Daniel 7:13.

Whose names will be considered in that "cleansing of the sanctuary" judgment which is now transpiring in the throne room of heaven? All who have made a profession of Christ and have had their names inscribed in the book of life. Paul wrote about his faithful co-workers as those "whose names are in the book of life." Philippians 4:3. John makes it very clear that other books are also to be scrutinized, "and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books." Revelation 20:12.

Here in the books are the life records of all individuals who have claimed the saving merits of Christ. From the first man who died to the last one living before probation closes, the profession is compared to the record of words, thoughts, and deeds. The Master Himself said, "Not everyone that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven." Matthew 7:21.

Now the books reveal with terrible exactness whether the sins have been confessed and forsaken. Those who have received Christ in all of His saving fullness of faith and cleansing have been written in the books as forgiven. In this work of final atonement that record of sin must now be blotted out and their names retained in the book of life, or else their names must be blotted from the book of life and their sins retained in the book of deeds. John wrote, "He that overcometh . . . I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." Revelation 3:5.

Let us picture the beginning of that judgment as it focuses upon Abel, the first faithful one to die among men. When his name is considered, the record of his sins are exposed in the books, but by each one is found the word "forgiven." Abel had faith in the coming Redeemer and showed that faith by bringing a lamb for a sin offering. Jesus, the Advocate, steps before the Father, extending His hands, and presents His blood in behalf of faithful Abel. The record of his sins are blotted out of the book and his name is retained in the book of life.

The next name called might well be that of Cain, who also made a profession of faith in a Saviour. His sins also are recorded in the book of deeds, but there is no record of forgiveness beside those sins. Cain did not show faith in a divine substitute. Instead of a lamb, he brought fruit from his garden, and "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." The Intercessor longs to step forward in behalf of Cain, but He cannot plead His blood for one who sought acceptance by some other means than the atoning death of a substitute. Sorrowfully, Cain's name is blotted from the book of life and his sins retained in the book of deeds.

This cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary has been in progress since 1844 and will continue until the great High Priest stands up and proclaims, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still." At that time, the destiny of all, both living and dead, will be sealed and settled on

the basis of that judgment.

What should our attitude be in this special time when our cases are pending in the great heavenly tribunal? During the typical Day of Atonement in Israel it was a time of afflicting the soul, praying and fasting, and solemn heart-searching. Surely this spirit should characterize all those today who recognize that we are living in the antitypical Day of Atonement. The perfect atoning Sacrifice has been made in the death of Jesus. A complete forgiveness has been ministered by our faithful High Priest since He ascended back to heaven. That ministry continues to this day. But since 1844 a work of judgment has been carried forward in the most holy place that affects each one of us. In this cleansing of the sanctuary, only those sins can be blotted out which have been confessed and forsaken. Faith in the blood alone will bring vindication and deliverance. Our Lawyer has never lost a case. He is committed to clearing your record and mine before the universe, but He can only accept the cases of those who have faith in the blood. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16.

What a comfort and encouragement to know that the Mediator is really on our side, ministering in our defense and for our vindication. Because He was once a man in this world, with our human nature, He is capable of total empathy for our temptations and stresses. Let us rejoice in the glorious truths we have learned about our mighty defense Attorney who "ever liveth to make intercession for us," and who also, at this moment, may be claiming the merits of His atoning blood to blot out your sins or mine. What a Saviour! What a Lawyer! What a Friend!

Point of No Return

Matthew 12:31

The most fateful words ever spoken by Jesus had to do with the fearful possibility of committing the unpardonable sin. He said, "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." Matthew 12:31.

No one can misconstrue the clear message of these verses. There is a sin unto death. A man or woman may pass over a line which separates God's mercy and His wrath and not be able to come back. These chilling words of our Lord stand in stark contrast to His usually benevolent utterances. For this reason, if for no other, they should be examined with great care.

What is this sin which Heaven regards with such abhorrence and loathing? Why will God deal so severely with those who are guilty of this sin? To the human mind a great number of depraved and cruel acts might fall into such a category but which one of them would God count so heinous and horrible that it could never be forgiven?

Occasionally, one meets an individual who wonders if he has committed this sin. His prayers seem to bounce back from the ceiling, and he feels no hope of God's favor or forgiveness. Yet he can't identify any particular act of sin that severed him from the hope of salvation. How can he tell if he has actually committed the unpardonable sin? Can a person really know?

Before answering all the troubling questions people ask about the unpardonable sin, a glorious truth needs to be recognized. We serve a God of infinite love and compassion. It is not His will that anyone should be lost. He has made provision in His Word for every soul to be cleansed and sanctified. The incredible promise of 1 John 1:9 applies to every man, woman, or child in the world today: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

On the condition of sincere confession, God promises to forgive any sin, regardless of its nature. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18.

What a special assurance for those who have violated every law of God and man in their wild plunge into degradation. God loves them still! There is no guilt too great for Him to cleanse away. He waits with outstretched arms to receive any who take the first step toward His forgiveness and mercy.

Such a picture of God seems totally at odds with the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:31, 32. If the Father is so willing to forgive and save, why should there be such a thing as an unpardonable sin? The answer

is simple. This sin is never forgiven because it is never confessed. It is never repented of. God will not force His pardon upon sinners. They must repent and confess. Even the beautiful promise of 1 John 1:9 contains that significant little word "if" - "if we confess our sins. ..." On the authority of God's Word, we can be assured that every sin will be forgiven if confessed in faith and repentance.

Various opinions have been put forth as to why this one sin is never confessed. Some believe it to be suicide; others, that it must be some dreadful immorality or cursing of the Holy Spirit.

One thing is certain - it is a *sin*! That is a good starting point, because the Bible gives a simple definition of that ugly little word "sin." "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." 1 John 3:4. Paul enlarges on that statement by declaring that sin is the breaking of the Ten-Commandment law. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Romans 7:7.

Not only does the unpardonable sin have something to do with the breaking of God's great moral law, but it also is an offense against the Holy Spirit. The nature of that offense is tied closely to the primary functions of the Spirit. Jesus said, "But the Comforter which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John 14:26.

Besides teaching us all things, Jesus indicated that the Spirit will also "guide you into all truth." John 16:13. Every searching student of the Word has probably experienced this teaching, guiding influence of the Holy Spirit. There can be no true insight into biblical truth without the enlightenment of this Spirit of God.

The third mission of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin. Jesus said: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." John 16:7, 8.

It is the special work of the Spirit to reprove or convict us of sin. When wrongs are committed, the conscience is pricked with a sense of guilt. Please take note that as long as we allow the Holy Spirit to teach, guide, and convict, we could never be guilty of committing the unpardonable sin. But suppose we refuse to acknowledge these three offices of the Spirit in our own personal experience with God? That is when people approach the deadly parameters of the worst sin on record.

It is intriguing to study the actual incidence of this sin in the Bible record. At one time practically everyone in the world passed over that point of no return. "And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." Genesis 6:3.

Here God speaks of the antediluvian world which perished in the flood.

For over a hundred years the Holy Spirit pleaded with that wicked generation through the preaching of Noah. Although the very imagination of their hearts was evil continually, a small remnant of eight responded to the Spirit and entered the ark. All the rest were swept away in the raging waters which covered every inch of the earth's surface. After years of patient striving, the Spirit withdrew to leave the stubborn resisters to their chosen fate.

Could the same thing happen again? There is an amazing parallel between the days of Noah and today. Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." Luke 17:26. The very same gross excesses are being committed right now in all the great cities of the world. Perversions of the worst degree still mark the carnal course of every nation under the sun.

Why did the vast majority of pre-flood people refuse to enter the ark of safety? Many of them actually helped Noah in the construction of the huge boat. The Holy Spirit deeply stirred them with conviction, but they would not move out to obey the message. Finally, God said, "Let them alone. My Spirit will no longer strive with them."

Is there going to be another flood? Indeed so. But it will be a flood of fire, utterly destroying this planet and its contents. How is the world responding to the call of God to enter the ark of protection and safety? The same Spirit pleads today; a similar message of separation and revival is being sounded; and the Spirit of God is being treated exactly as in Noah's day.

Insulting the Holy Spirit

I read in the Bible three things that people are doing to the Holy Spirit. First of all, in Ephesians 4:30: "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Notice that people can grieve the Holy Spirit, and the Bible says it will be done in these last days.

What else will they do to God's personal representative? In Hebrews 10:29 we are told that men will despise the Holy Spirit. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" That word "despite" means the same as despise. Just think of it! They will despise the Holy Spirit. And then let's get one other thing before us. This is in Acts 7:51: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." So there we have three things that men will do to insult the Spirit of God: they grieve, they despise, and they resist Him just as they did back in the days of Noah.

What effect does all this rebellion against the Spirit have upon the person who does it? Almost imperceptibly the conscience is seared and the heart is hardened. In fact, this is why it is counted such a terrible sin. Sometimes people say, "I don't understand why God should consider this the worst thing that can be done." I'll tell you why: because the Holy Spirit is the only way God can reach an individual. There is no other way for God to save a person except through the Holy Spirit. That is the way we are led to repentance. If we do not have the Holy Spirit, there is no hope for us.

It's like a man out in the sea who is drowning alone, and somebody throws one life preserver to him. If the man will lay hold of that life preserver, he can be saved, but if he refuses to take hold of the only link to the shore, he will perish without hope. In the same way, we are in this world, and the only way God can reach us is by the Holy Spirit. If we turn away from that Spirit and refuse to listen and obey, God will have to let us go and be lost. This is why David was so deeply concerned in his great prayer of contrition. While pouring out his heart to God in Psalm 51, David said, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." Verse 11. He realized that if God removed the Holy Spirit, he was lost. He would be left alone with no way of being saved. And that's why Jesus said that it's the unpardonable sin. When you cut yourself off and refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit, there is no hope for you.

Three Ways to Offend the Spirit

I've marked down three ways that people can commit this sin. The first way is for a man simply to say, "I don't want to be saved; I don't want to be bothered with God and the Bible." Once in a while you'll find a person like this. I'm glad to tell you that it's not very often. Most people really want to be saved, but now and then you'll find some who just aren't interested. They are perfectly satisfied with their materialistic world of the flesh. Notice what it says in Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Those who don't want to give up their sins will finally convince themselves that they are happy without Christ. They will eventually feel no conviction, and the Holy Spirit will leave them alone.

The second group which is so vulnerable to this sin reaches the same state of rejection by a different route. They really want to be saved and will tell anyone that it is their primary future priority to get right with God. Unfortunately, this class keeps waiting for that opportune time to step out into the path of total surrender. With all good intention, they allow the golden moments to slip by them until their wills have been paralyzed by indecision. Such people still talk about following Christ all the way, but their ability to act has been destroyed by procrastination. At last they linger too long and pass the point of no return.

Without doubt the largest group of unpardonable sinners is to be found in the third group I want to talk about. Strangely enough, these folks appear to be the most unlikely ever to commit the unpardonable sin. They are church members - perhaps even pillars in the congregation. Does that shock you? Why should these Christians stand in greater danger of this sin than the other two groups? Because they do not understand that truth is progressive. Millions of Christians have settled back in their comfortable pews, complacent about being saved. They feel absolutely secure in their conformity to a church, not realizing that baptism is only the beginning of a long, growing experience.

Said the psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm 119:105. The farther we walk into the Bible, the more truth is revealed, and the more accountable we become before God. He has never unfolded all the truth to any one person at any one time. A lamp only shines far enough to expose one safe step. As we move into that step, another one is revealed. As we grow in grace and knowledge, God requires us to move with the advancing light of truth.

Conscience Seared by Disobedience

Now suppose that I see the light from the lamp of God's Word, but refuse to obey it. Let's say that the

Holy Spirit has convicted me, and I understand perfectly what He requires of me, but it is unpopular and inconvenient. What happens if I disregard the light and reject the truth which the Spirit has revealed - for any reason whatsoever? The Spirit continues to speak, of course, and for a time there is a battle in my conscience. I feel miserable and guilty. Days pass by, and even months, while I keep on violating my conviction of what is right. Gradually, the conscience begins to adjust to what is being done in the physical body. Slowly the guilt feelings begin to subside and the acts of disobedience appear less and less objectionable.

Finally, the truth which seemed so clear and uncomplicated in the beginning turns into a muddle of uncertainty. Rationalizations spring forth to justify disobedience, and the early convictions of sin fade away. Life is almost as comfortable as it was before the light came. What has happened? We have sinned against the Holy Spirit and are sinking into the state of the unpardonable sin.

You see, this deadly sin is not any particular act which can be isolated and labeled. It can be any sin which is cherished in the face of light and knowledge. It actually is a condition of seared sensitivity brought on by persistent disobedience to recognized truth. The reaction is similar to ignoring an alarm clock. The conscience becomes more and more tolerant of the pricking reminder of transgression until, finally, it no longer even recognizes the unwelcome sting of conviction. Like the clock it runs down, too, and just as well, because no one is listening any longer.

Do you begin to see that every-thing really depends on what we do with truth? James wrote, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17. It doesn't matter an iota whether we are rich or poor, Catholic or Jew or Protestant; the big issue is whether we are acting upon what we know.

Jesus expanded on this crucial principle. He said, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin." John 15:22. Who, then, is accountable and chargeable before God? Those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit out of the Word. The sincere souls who are faithful to all they know, be it much or little, will be accepted. Sin will only be counted against those who have heard truth and rejected it.

Christ said, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." John 9:41. This whole problem of the unpardonable sin revolves around the issue of obeying what we know. On another occasion Jesus said, "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." John 12:35.

Where does light come from? It is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. When we refuse to obey the truth, we are rejecting the ministry of the Spirit who is our only link to salvation. We literally drive away the one Person whom God has sent to save us. Can you now see how self-destructive that can be? God's special messenger is grieved away by our deliberate refusal to respond to His invitations of mercy. God said long ago, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." He will say to the Holy Spirit

at last, "Let them alone. If they insist in having their own way, do not pursue them any longer."

Parent's Religion May Not Be Good Enough

Probably the most accurate description of the unpardonable sin in the New Testament is found in Acts 7:51: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye." How were these people fighting the Spirit of God? Stephen says they were doing it by hiding behind their fathers' religion. They simply followed in the same religious path that their parents had walked. Is there anything wrong with that? In this case there was, because the text goes on to describe them as those "who have received the law [of God] by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." Verse 53.

Do you get the picture? Regardless of what their fathers had understood, these people received a law which God required them to obey. Every generation and every individual will be judged on the basis of what they know and how they obey it. Nobody's religion is good enough for anybody else because there are varying degrees of accountability for each person. My grandfather could be saved by following the light he had, but I couldn't be saved doing the same thing. I have a different measure of revealed truth for which God will hold me personally responsible.

The truth is that any person rejects and despises the Holy Spirit when he willfully disobeys any of God's commandments. According to the Bible, the Spirit cannot abide in the life of anyone who does not obey. "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." Acts 5:32. Again, Jesus said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." John 14:15, 16.

Known Sin Drives Away Spirit

Please notice that disobedience immediately disqualifies one to be Spirit-filled. This remarkable representative of God is offended when His primary function is denied. His very nature is to make sin appear exceedingly sinful. Sin cannot comfortably remain where the Holy Spirit abides. Either the sin is renounced or the Spirit finally will be rejected and depart.

Refusing to walk in the light does not bring an immediate separation from God, but persistent disobedience continues to harden the conscience to the seriousness of sin. That state of darkness developed by repeated violation of known truth is what we refer to as the unpardonable sin.

Are church members and religious people really in danger of committing this sin? In one of my crusades a dear lady shook my hand at the door and told me how excited she was about the Sabbath truth she had learned that night. When I encouraged her to make a decision to keep the Sabbath, she earnestly replied, "I'm going to pray about it, and if God impresses me to do it, I certainly shall."

That answer may have a good sound to it, because it speaks of prayer, but it disappointed me greatly. Even though the truth was clearly revealed out of the Word, she was going to ask God for a final

evidence before obeying. What was to be the acid test? A feeling. Is it safe to trust impressions as the criteria for truth? Never. Satan can create feelings as well as God. I was not surprised a few days later when she told me that God had impressed her that she did not have to keep the Sabbath.

Her mistake has been repeated by millions of good people. They do not understand that every impression from whatever source, must be tested by the infallible Word of God. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. God never contradicts Himself. To lead anyone contrary to His Word would be a violation of His nature. The Holy Spirit always speaks in perfect harmony with the Bible. Paul asks his hearers to take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Ephesians 6:17. This reveals that the Bible is the cutting edge of the Holy Spirit. The two work together in convicting people of sin.

If a person decides that he is not going to obey the truth, will God recognize that decision and allow him to follow it? Yes, God will even permit a person to believe a lie if he chooses to do so. Paul spoke of those who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they might believe a lie." 2 Thessalonians 2:10,11.

Those who love a lie more than the truth will gradually be confirmed in it as the Spirit of God is grieved away. The thief who continues to steal after he has been convicted by that Spirit will finally see nothing wrong with stealing. The Sabbath-breaker who willfully continues to violate the Sabbath will someday begin justifying his sin. After a while his con-science becomes seared and insensitive to the influence of the Holy Spirit. There comes a day when God speaks for the last time, and the will, paralyzed by indecision and continued transgression, is unable to respond. Furthermore, the Spirit does not tell us when He begins to make that final invitation. We only know that the Holy Spirit will not always strive with man. At last God will say, "Let him alone."

Obedience Not Optional

The greatest mistake people can make is to believe that they can come to God whenever they choose. The truth is that you can only obey God when the Spirit is speaking to your heart. As a farmer, I knew there was a time to sow wheat and get a harvest of wheat, and there was another time to sow wheat, and get nothing. As an evangelist, I know there is a time you can say yes to God, and there is another time you cannot say yes.

One of the strongest statements Jesus ever made is found in Luke 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." That text confused me for a long time. How could a loving God hold anyone out of His kingdom who was seriously seeking to enter in? It just didn't make sense. Then I noticed the words, "shall not be able." This placed the problem on the people instead of God. God was willing and able to take them in, but they were not able to accept His salvation. They had become so settled and hard in their long-term disobedience that they were incapable of true repentance. Like the seekers of the Old Testament "they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." Amos 8:12.

Someday it will be too late to find salvation. Someday the door of probation will close, and no one will

be able to enter in. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. No wonder Jesus called this the sin that can never be forgiven. It is the sin of waiting too long to obey, until the soul is set in its mold of stubborn delay.

I repeat that you can only obey God when the Spirit is convicting you to come. When that Spirit is driven away and rejected, there is no possibility for repentance.

The interesting story is told of a great eagle who spotted the carcass of a calf being swept along the Niagara River on an ice floe. Swooping down on his mighty wings the eagle settled on the ice and began to feed on the carcass. Trusting the strength of those wings, he continued to feast until just before the deadly plunge over the cataract. Then he spread those powerful wings to make his escape, but alas, his talons had frozen into the ice, and he could not move. He was swept over the precipice and crushed on the rocks below.

I've also known people who waited too long to make a decision. Over and over again men have spoken to me at the door after a crusade meeting: "I know what you're preaching is the truth, and I'm planning to do something about it." Others tell me that they really are thinking about the things they have heard.

Is God looking for people who will be great talkers about the truth? And what about those who are always thinking about the truth? Jesus will never welcome anyone into the Kingdom with these words: "Well said, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Neither will the Master ever say, "Well thought, thou good and faithful servant." But He will say to all who enter there, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matthew 25:21.

The most presumptuous thing anyone can do is to pray for an understanding of the truth, and then refuse to obey when God answers that prayer. It is better not to know the truth than to reject it after knowing. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." James 1:22.

Hearing and Not Doing

The real test of love is what we do with the truth we understand. It is really not very hard to convince people of what is right, but it is very difficult to convince them to obey. Doesn't that tell us something important? Satan knows that faith without works is dead, and he also knows that continued transgression grieves away the Holy Spirit. His most concentrated attack is upon the will, and obviously, he is having great success in causing people to postpone obedience. The longer they wait, the greater their chance of waiting longer, and the greater their danger of driving away the Holy Spirit.

Jesus faced the same problem in His own ministry. He had to taste the bitter heartache of seeing people turn away from truth. The crowd stayed until He got into some hard thing that required sacrifice and action. Then they all left. That is the most shattering experience for any preacher or teacher. I know because I've seen a few walk out, too. I'm not comparing myself with Jesus, but every soulwinner can empathize with Christ when He asked His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" Then Peter answered, "Where would we go?" What a question! Where do you go after hearing the full, unadulterated truth? Surely there is no need to look further for it, and additional light will only come after you obey what

you have.

There is only one safe thing to do with truth - obey it! You cannot get over it, around it, or through it. It won't go away, and it will not change. We don't break God's law; it breaks us if we disobey it.

How can a person know if he has committed the unpardonable sin? The answer to that question is simple and easy. No one has grieved away the Holy Spirit who still has a conviction of sin and a drawing to God. Those who search and seek after truth have not yet passed the point of no return. But since the Spirit does not announce when the last, pleading call is made to the heart, no one should be presumptuous enough to disobey willfully a single known truth. The most deadly danger facing anyone today is to insult the Spirit of God by refusing obedience to His conviction. The results are the same regardless of the words we might use to justify it. The end is always separation from God.

The most deceptive aspect of the unpardonable sin is the seeming comfort with which people are able to live without God. Their lives are finally free from the conflicting turmoil of struggling with conscience. It did not happen overnight, but the nagging convictions grow fainter and fainter, blending at last into a very comfortable, satisfied lifestyle.

No Christian should marvel at this amazing peace of mind which the unconverted seem to display. That deadly malaise is only apparent in those who no longer have two voices and two natures contending for the mastery. With the Holy Spirit gone, the flesh enjoys uncontested control over the heart and life. No more spiritual battles rage, and the unpardonable sin appears to have brought a measure of relief. But that mirage covers an empty soul, bereft of any capacity to pray or to trust.

Often, in my public crusade meetings, people express concern that they might have driven away the Holy Spirit. Even while they listen to the messages night by night, they are filled with fear that they have committed the unpardonable sin. To such I can give a clear and positive assurance that they are not guilty of this sin. If so, they would never be concerned about the things of God. Certainly they would not be found in the place of prayer and Bible study, expressing concern over their relationship to God. Obviously, the Holy Spirit is still drawing them and creating a desire for truth and salvation.

On the other hand, no one should feel secure from this sin who is walking contrary to the light God has revealed. Every person who is deliberately sinning will continue moving inexorably toward that fatal moment when the conscience is no longer able to respond to the Spirit's call. Our only safety, each moment, is to know that we are claiming the grace of God to obey every ray of light and truth which falls upon our pathway.

Remember Lot's Wife

Luke 17:28

"Remember Lot's wife," said Jesus. That is probably the most dramatic, potent illustration the Master ever used in a sermon. As we read the context, it is very obvious that the words were being applied to those living on this planet right now. "In that day" refers to the "day when the Son of man is revealed." Here is what Jesus actually said:

"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." Luke 17:28-32.

What did Jesus mean by that cryptic expression "Remember Lot's wife"? What does that woman of long ago have to do with people who are watching the closeout of history? Why did the Master relate Mrs. Lot to our day? Jesus used her as a fearful warning. That woman became cold, careless, and disobedient. Finally the judgments of God fell upon her, and she became a pillar of salt on the plains of Sodom.

I gather that one of the most deadly perils for God's people in the last days will be to slowly slip away from the truth as Mrs. Lot did. Jesus warned that the loss of spiritual power takes place almost imperceptibly: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:12. As pressures of conformity and compromise crowd in, the faith gradually erodes and disappears.

I confess to you that this is the pastor's most perplexing problem today. Perhaps a newly baptized family in the church is bubbling with that wonderful first-love experience. They are willing to go anywhere and do anything for the Lord. Their contagious enthusiasm is a joy to behold. But soon the pastor notices that the ardor is beginning to wane a little bit, and the family is no longer excited about their faith. They slowly begin to withdraw from participation and even attendance at church. The pastor visits the family and tries to uncover the problem. To his surprise, he discovers that they still believe as much as ever, but they have lost their love for the truth.

How can we explain this slacking of spiritual power? How does the devil steal the very heart out of the Christian experience? One thing is certain: it does not happen suddenly or overnight. People lose their love for the truth by degrees. Little by little they lower the standards and compromise the faith, until nothing remains except a dead, empty formalism.

After reading all that Jesus said about those who are saved, we see one grand absolute truth standing out clearly. *There will be no divided heart in heaven. There will be no half surrender on the part of the*

redeemed. Those who enter God's kingdom will be there because they wanted eternal life more than anything else in the whole world. The Lord Jesus used Lot's wife as an example of those in the last days who will not be single-minded for the truth; who will love material things more than the things of God. Christ said, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:33.

Do you remember the story in the Bible about the businessman who went searching for the most priceless gem in the world? At last he located it and learned that it was for sale. But the price was outrageous! In order to buy that pearl he would have to sell his home, his business, and use every penny of his lifelong savings. But mark this: The man's desire for that pearl was so deep and compelling that he did not argue about the cost. He did not consider waiting until he could better afford the purchase. Nor did he attempt to bargain for a lower price. Immediately and eagerly he hurried away, sold everything he had, and brought the money back to buy the gem from the owners. The pearl, of course, represents eternal life, and those who desire it must be prepared to invest everything they have in order to obtain it.

Lot's Good Intentions

But let's come back to the story of Lot's wife and try to understand what Jesus wants us to learn from her example. According to the Bible record, she belonged to one of the finest families in the East. As the nephew of Abraham, Lot shared the tremendous faith of his uncle and prayed at Abraham's altar. When God's call came to get out of Mesopotamia, Lot went right along with Abraham, not knowing where the call might lead. Together they brought their families to the entering place of the Promised Land and offered their sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Then dissension erupted between the herdsmen of the two wealthy kinsmen. Their vast combined flocks and herds didn't have enough room to graze in such a restricted area, and they had to separate. Lot was given the choice of direction as the whole land stretched out before him. On one side lay the verdant hills with their lofty trees; the other led down into the crowded centers of commerce and trade. The materialistic appeal of the prosperous cities had an immediate impact on Lot, and the Bible records very simply that he "pitched his tent toward Sodom." Genesis 13:12. The predictable pattern of future tragedy was settled by that early decision to move near those wicked cities.

Lot stands forth as a man of good intentions. Quite obviously he did not actually plan to take his family into the urban environment of sinful Sodom. He would only live in the vicinity, where he could take advantage of the economic opportunities of such a bustling trade capital. Very likely he made special mental reservations about letting his family mingle with the degraded inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, he had no idea at all of giving up his religion. His move was prompted by selfish concern over temporal advantages, and he had no intention of losing anything.

But what happened in spite of all the wonderful intentions? Poor Lot lost his wife, his possessions, and almost his own life. Good intentions were not good enough. He moved closer and closer to the cities until finally he actually moved in to dwell with the Sodomites. His plans to guard the spiritual interests of his children failed to materialize. All his rationalization about counteracting the wickedness with stricter prayer schedules and family-altar religion just didn't seem to work out as planned. He gradually compromised with the environment and watched his children slowly assimilate the ways of their

heathen neighbors.

I'm sure Lot did not feel at ease when he first settled among the evil citizens of that abominable place. Every day he heard news of the mushrooming crime rate. He must have been repulsed and even horrified by the vile jokes and obscene language. Then he had to watch with alarm the growing fascination of his family for the perverted lifestyle of their friends and associates.

Finally, his daughters fell in love with worldly men and married them. Outside of the home, united with the enemies of God, they lost all faith in the ancestral religion of their childhood and youth. They began to look upon Lot as narrow and bigoted and soon expressed their extreme loathing of his half-hearted appeals to establish true worship in their homes.

Nevertheless, we still tend to sympathize with Lot in his frustrated attempts to hold the reins on his unregenerate wife and children. He had much against him, but most of it had been created by his own weakness and indecision. One compromise led to another, until finally he must have become totally demoralized over the rebellion of his worldly family.

Mrs. Lot's Response to Sodom

Still, it was an act of flagrant presumption when Lot actually settled within the city. The society there was shameless, degenerate, and entirely sex-perversed. Mrs. Lot not only moved into Sodom, but Sodom moved into her. She was the type who loved fine things, and the mad whirl of social activities fascinated her from the beginning. She was soon caught up in the excitement of party rounds of pleasure, and the evidence seems to indicate that she eventually shared much of the materialistic mindset of the Sodomites.

Can we analyze the cause of such a shocking turnabout? How could it happen to the wife of Abraham's relative? Was it, perhaps, because no one was praying for her in that provocative situation? No, indeed. Abraham was presenting his prayers and sacrifices night and morning for his nephew's family. Was it because no warnings were given concerning the spiritual dangers? We cannot believe that those angel messengers left them without full information concerning the snares of Sodom. Then what brought terrible soul-ruin to this woman? Was it because she disbelieved the call of God to get out? No. She did not mock the message as did her married daughters and their husbands. She believed the warning and actually started on her way to safety.

But mark this - there was no eagerness in her heart and no enthusiasm for the program. She was so reluctant to leave the fine appointments of her affluent Sodom home that she lingered. Her heart and life had been so bound to material things that she could hardly pull away from the accumulated treasures of those finely furnished rooms. With death at her heels, she lingered. With life and security awaiting her on the mountaintop, she lingered. What was wrong with the woman? She loved the world more than she loved God. She still believed the truth; she knew what she ought to do; she wanted to be saved - yet she lingered.

We still find many people exactly like Mrs. Lot. They also believe the truth, know what they ought to

do, and want to be saved. They linger, too, just as she did. Like Lot's wife, many of them wait until the pull of the world overpowers the will to act, and they are not able to let go of "things." Why will people linger over the call of God? Have you ever done it? Millions have lingered until the best years of their life are gone. They linger until their children grow up and are lost in the world. They linger until the world holds them with bands of steel and the voice of God dimly fades away.

But at last Mrs. Lot began to move. The record describes how angels had to take hold of their hands to hurry them out of the doomed city. The angels cried, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee." Genesis 19:17. But Lot's wife did not reach the safety of the mountains. Why? The Bible tells us that she "looked back," and immediately she was turned into a pillar of salt. Why did God deal with her so severely? Was it not the smallest offense of all just to move the head slightly? The Word of God has a name for that type of action: *sin*. She disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, and her judgment underlines the urgency of obedience. God means what He says. There is no excuse for sin, and God cannot overlook it.

Is There a Little Sin?

Nowhere in the Bible does God give the slightest tolerance for men to modify His revealed will. God says what He means to say, and He accepts nothing less than full compliance with His commandments. Some dramatic experiences are recorded in the Scriptures which emphasize this urgent truth. Two sons of the high priest offered strange fire before the Lord, and they died on the spot. God had required that they use only the sacred fire in the sanctuary during their priestly ministry. To them it seemed unreasonable that one fire could not burn sacrifices as well as another fire. Using such human judgment, Nadab and Abihu disobeyed the direct command of the Lord and died. They did not understand the seriousness of violating the sanctity of that which God had set apart for a holy use.

Similar arguments are used today in connection with things which have been sanctified by God. Often it is asked, "What is the difference between worshiping on the Sabbath and worshiping on Sunday? One day is just as good as the other." The tremendous difference is that God made one day holy and wrote an unchangeable law about it on tables of stone. The day is different because it has God's special blessing upon it. Woe to the man who touches with common hands those holy institutions of God!

Nadab and Abihu were not guilty of any rebellious defiance of their faith in other areas of their religious office. They never considered refusing to carry out the proper type of offering in the manner prescribed by the Levitical statutes. The small matter of the fire was the only command which struck them as frivolous and arbitrary. In that area alone, they felt justified in making a tiny change that would more easily and smoothly fit into their idea of functional worship. They reasoned that such a minor deviation in the interests of such a sanctified program could not bring any serious consequences. God would certainly not count it a sin to improve on a program to worship Him.

What an irony that much disobedience of God's law takes place in the name of religion! Christ acknowledged that men would be worshiping Him while they substituted the "commandments of men" for His requirements. He rejected such worship as vain and empty. In the sermon on the mount, He described a large class who would seek entrance into the kingdom because they had prophesied, cast out demons, and done many wonderful works "in thy name." Yet Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you: depart from me." Matthew 7:23.

How can people become so blind and deceived that they feel securely saved while willfully breaking God's commandments? In their vain worship, they bowed regularly in prayer, sang songs of praise, and probably never missed a church service. They professed great love for God and gave moving testimonies of the same.

Is the same problem with us today? Do religious people still disobey God's law while professing to love Him? On any given Sabbath, look around you to see what is going on. People will be ignoring the very heart commandment which God wrote on the tables of stone: "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." Exodus 20:10.

Who are these people who ignore God's Sabbath commandment? As you see them hurrying about their regular work program, pursuing their own pleasure on the seventh day, there seems to be no remorse for violating the clear command of God. Yet tomorrow many of them will be in church - praying, singing, and talking about how much they love Jesus. Where did they get their definition of love? Was it from the bumper stickers on the interstate - "Smile if you love Jesus," "Wave if you love Jesus," "Honk if you love Jesus"? That is not what Jesus said, is it? He declared, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15.

To Obey is Better

Why do people feel secure in breaking one of the Ten Commandments? For the same reason Saul felt secure in bringing back the forbidden sheep and oxen. God had told him not to bring back a thing after he defeated the Amalekites. But Saul was going to use those animals to sacrifice in his worship of God. Notice the incredible illogic of his actions. He disobeyed in taking the animals and then tried to justify the disobedience by using the stolen animals in worshiping God. In the same way, modern church members disobey God by taking the Sabbath for their own use. Then they do like Saul and try to justify their disobedience by worshiping God in the name of what they have stolen.

God declared through the prophet Samuel, "To obey is better than sacrifice." It is also better than all the vain worship of a thousand religious services performed in conjunction with the willful violation of His specific command. Obedience is better than anything else in revealing our love. Jesus said so. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Disobedience is worse than anything because it is an act of disloyalty in its very nature. Observing a counterfeit day derived from the pagan worship of the sun is no more acceptable to God than Saul's prize-winning sheep and cattle. He is not honored by disobedience, and He is especially offended by the breaking of His commandments in the name of worship.

Have you noticed that in the stories of Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah the seemingly slight offense had to do with things God had set apart for sacred use? The fire was holy and the ark of the covenant was holy. Both were to be reserved and preserved for one sacred purpose only. Common hands were not to be laid on the ark and common fire was not to replace the holy fire. When those "set apart" things were treated just like other things, the judgments of God fell.

Are there sanctified things today which God has set apart for a holy use? Indeed there are. The Sabbath has been described by God as "my holy day." Isaiah 58:13,14. That one-seventh of time has been

signally blessed and commanded by God for rest and worship.

The tithe is something else which has been separated by the Word of God for a special, sacred purpose. To appropriate that one-tenth for ourselves is actually to steal from the very coffers of God. The Scriptures describe it thus: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Malachi 3:8.

Some people are horrified to read about the judgments which fell upon Uzzah when he touched the ark of God and upon Lot's wife when she simply turned her head. Are tiny infractions so serious that sudden death can ensue? Does this indicate that the quantity of sin is not so significant as the quality of it? If Eve's simple act of biting the fruit could precipitate six millenniums of planetary suffering and death, surely we dare not measure disobedience in terms of size or appearance.

No wonder, then, that Lot's wife suffered the same terrible consequences as all others who trifled with the word of a holy God. The offense of looking back indicated a divided will. It also revealed the fact that her heart was still bound up with the affairs of a corrupt, condemned social order. Two voices were competing for her allegiance: one, the voice of the highlands - the voice of God calling her to liberty, purity, and salvation; the other, the voice of the lowlands - the voice of popularity and pleasure, the voice of Sodom. Slowly the voice from beneath gained the mastery of a badly bent conscience, and Mrs. Lot stands before us as a tragic example of a divided heart.

Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife," and He said it to those who would live through the final traumatic moments of earth's history. He is saying it to us right now - "Remember Lot's wife." We need that message. Millions are just as double-minded as Mrs. Lot. They find no time to pray with their family. Like Mrs. Lot, many read magazines more than the Bible, and thus they have only a superficial form of religion. Like Mrs. Lot, they linger around the edges of sin and make no strong decision to go all the way in obedience to God.

God's Ultimatum to Lot

What did God think about the namby-pamby way Lot had neutralized his influence in Sodom? You know the story of how those angels visited Abraham and then Lot, telling him that God had tolerated their fence-straddling long enough. They had reached the limits of their double life, so God faced them with an ultimatum: get out or get in! "This is it!" God said. "You can't be neutral any longer. Choose right now what you will do. Come all the way out, or stay there and perish."

What a fantastic confrontation: a final call, a last-minute chance to slip from death to life! Does it sound familiar? If it doesn't, you had better look around again and see what's happening to the world. The same fiery fate which loomed over Sodom has been decreed for this wicked age as well. Jesus pointed to the parallel conditions between the two periods of history. After describing the excesses and indulgences of Lot's day, Jesus said, "Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Luke 17:30.

What did He mean by "even thus"? Similar moral and social problems? No doubt about that. Did He

also foresee a startling final appeal to lingering Lots and Mrs. Lots whose wills have almost been paralyzed by indecision? Indeed, the language of the Master seems to indicate that the whole sordid picture of a dying world was before Him. As in the days of Sodom, men would have just one last opportunity to say Yes or No; then it would be over.

Some, like Lot's wife, will be so wed-ded to the world that they cannot let go in time. They will have to perish with the things which they loved more than they loved God. Others, like Lot, will arouse just in time to choose quickly and deci-sively. Without a backward glance, they will move out in complete obedience to the will of God. This is the choice every-one faces.

The same issues which precipitated the dramatic showdown in Sodom are leavening the Christian churches at almost every level. Materialism and lukewarmness have placed a mold upon the lifestyle of millions who profess to be followers of truth today. While the winds of destruction are slowly slipping through the fingers of the four apocalyptic angels who have been holding them back, the professed people of God relax in a carnally secure dreamworld. Like Lot's family, they have become comfortable in the society of money markets and a compromised faith.

God looks upon the nauseous blend of flesh and spirit as intolerable. As the True Witness of the Laodicean church, He calls upon this last-day religious remnant to repent. Just as those heavenly messengers laid down the ultimatum so long ago, we are also being called to leave it all or perish. There is no more time to be divided. Get off the fence, God says, and be either hot or cold. Come all the way out and live, or stay lukewarm and perish. *There is no place for half-surrender in the church of the translation!*

The story of Lot and his family proves that God will not long tolerate a double lifestyle on the part of His professed people. Those who are trying to live in two worlds must make a decision. God's Word declares that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." James 4:4. Another Bible writer, who was the closest of Christ's disciples, declared, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15.

What One Sin Can Do

Why did Jesus say, "Remember Lot's wife?" Because He knew that many others would be just as attached to "things" as she was. They would linger, and then look back with longing heart upon those things which are forbidden. "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:33.

What do modern church members know about the principle of self-denial and forsaking all? The book of Revelation foresaw the unholy mixture of Laodicean Christianity which would make God sick on the stomach. He said, "I will spue [vomit] thee out of my mouth." Revelation 3:16. Those words are probably the most graphic that ever passed the lips of our Lord. He was addressing the subject of hypocrisy in the end times. Similar strong language was used by Jesus in describing the same condition

among the religious leaders of His day. He called them hypocrites, a generation of vipers, and whited sepulchres.

In the Old Testament, God used equiv-alent rhetoric in calling for His vacillating people to get off the fence. "If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." 1 Kings 18:21.

In all these instances, God was speaking to those who laid claim to being His favored, chosen ones. Yet their practice was not the same as their profession. There was a mingling, in their experience, of the holy and unholy. They were saying one thing and doing something else. The result was a weak, wishy-washy witness which made no positive impact on others. God found such conduct repulsive. That is why He demanded that choices be made; but take note that only two alternatives were ever available. It was either God or Baal, obedience or disobedience.

One of the strangest obsessions of modern churchianity is to blithely blend the concepts of salvation and sin. The Bible makes it very clear that willful transgression is the antithesis of spiritual security. God's call is to "come out of her and be ye separate." Deliberate disobedience cannot coexist with a clear Christian conscience. The Word of God has much to say about sin, but never a good word. No one has ever read the slightest inspired intimation that sin should be reduced or diminished. Whenever it is mentioned, sin is declared to be non-negotiable. It is to be abandoned, rejected, and utterly repudiated. Jesus did not say to the adulterous woman, "Go and taper off on this sin." He said, "Go and sin no more." John did not write: "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin less and less." He plainly declared, "I write unto you that ye sin not."

The story of Lot's wife is a dramatic illustration that the presence of one small act of willful disobedience can lead to eternal loss. Any effort to reconcile God's love, character, or righteousness with a tolerance for sin must end with miserable failure.

How is it with you today? In this final fragment of probationary time, have you renounced every competitor of Christ for first place in your heart?

Just as the angels pleaded with Lot and his family to make a total surrender, the Holy Spirit urges upon us the same kind of commitment today. The call is for separation and urgent action. Multitudes linger in the twilight zone of indecision while the fires of destruction are poised for the annihilation of this world. Worldlings and professed Christians alike are hearing the plea of God to turn loose. The door of probation is open for just a few moments more.

To every soul there comes a golden last moment of decision before the door shuts. Will all be able to recognize that moment? Tragically, no. Some, with senses dulled by worldly compromise, will not even discern the final departure of God's messenger of salvation. The sins of Sodom are just as hypnotizing and appealing today as they were long ago. The same perverse practices have become more commonplace and popular than they ever were in the doomed city of the plains.

Lot had no time to take anything with him. Neither do we. There must be a willingness to deny self and cut away from the abominations of the flesh in every form. Our only hope is to move quickly in separating from the evil attachments of a corrupt society. A loving Saviour stands behind the invitation, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

The secret of being able to resist and reject the appeal of a perverse, renegade society is to look at the cross of Jesus Christ. We might abhor the evil and desire deliverance, but there is only one source of strength to break the pattern of sin. Christ's substitutionary death at Calvary satisfied the penalty which transgression had placed against every living soul in the world. The broken law demanded death, and when Jesus suffered that penalty for every man on the cross, a glorious trans-action was made.

On that cross Christ made provision for the most fantastic exchange imaginable. He offered to take upon Himself the accumulated guilt and condemnation of every sinner since time began. And even more incredibly, He agreed to accept all the consequences which those dark, unspeakable deeds had brought upon the heads of those miserable sinners.

Can you fathom such a provision and such a selfless offer? And what did He provide in exchange for those deadly assumptions of shame and guilt? To everyone who would accept it, Christ imputed the merits of His own sinless life of obedience. Through simple faith, the ugly past of even the most despicable criminal could be instantly covered with a perfect righteousness. Clothed in that robe of credited perfection, all believers could be counted by God as though they had never sinned. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18.

Paul described the experience of the ones who claim personal justification through faith in His blood. He wrote: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Romans 3:24-26. Here is clearly revealed a picture of individual acceptance of all those who claim Jesus as forgiver and justifier.

What is accomplished for the ones who enter this intimate relationship of justification by faith? Are they merely delivered from the guilt of sin, or do they also receive deliverance from the sin itself? Paul answered that question. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Galatians 6:14.

In this verse we find that victory over the world system of evil is definitely tied to the atonement of the cross. No one has been delivered from sins of the flesh without receiving that deliverance as a gift through the merits of Christ's suffering and death. We are made dead to the world's appeal by looking into the face of our Substitute and Saviour. His agape love, revealed at the cross, melts the stubborn will and weans the heart away from every attraction the world can devise. That is how Jesus is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30. It is all in the cross. Look at it daily and remember Lot's wife, that you may be saved from her terrible fate.

Rendezvous In Space

John 14:1

Redbook magazine made a survey of the eight leading seminaries in America and discovered that only one percent of the students believed in the second coming of Jesus. The reason for this astonishing skepticism may be revealed by the experience of D. L. Moody, the great lay evangelist. After explaining that he had been in the church for fifteen years before hearing his first sermon on the subject of Christ's return, he stated, "Now I know why the devil does not want this subject to be preached. Nothing would wake up the church so much as the doctrine that Jesus is coming soon."

Does that also explain why the modern church is so strangely quiet about this glorious future event? Has Satan been successful in throwing a blanket of silence over the one great truth that could revive the Laodicean churches of today? It certainly seems to be the case. Even the evangelists are saying little about this spectacular occurrence which is mentioned 331 times in the New Testament alone.

There is no event of the past, present, or future which has a stronger basis for belief. Jesus spoke about it with such unmistakable clarity that no one need be in doubt or confusion. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2, 3.

It is biblically clear that God's complete plan for this world will not be fulfilled until we are transferred into that perfect home He is now preparing. The plan of salvation has made infinite provisions for our justification and sanctification, but the restoration of all things will not be accomplished until we are freed forever from the contaminating presence of sin.

When and how will Christ's second entry into earth's history take place? Before answering that question it is very important to understand how it will not happen. Millions have been deceived by an incredible array of false theories which have spread like wildfire among evangelical Christians.

When His disciples approached Him on the Mount of Olives with the anxious question "What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world?" Christ answered, "Take heed that no one deceive you." The implication is clear that there will be an unusual amount of misleading information about His return.

Then Jesus proceeded to outline the major signs that would mark His second coming. Almost the whole of Matthew 24 is mingled with warnings about the endtime program of Satan to delude the whole world on this issue. According to Jesus, the very elect will be assailed and threatened by the cunning impersonations of the evil one. He declared that false Christs and deceiving prophets would appear in the last days working undeniable miracles. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Matthew 24:24.

Have such bold religious frauds made their appearance? Indeed, they have been announced through the pages of the world's most prestigious newspapers. Highly sophisticated advertising copy has proclaimed the imminent appearance of the divine "Incarnation" who will have the answers to all our problems.

Even though many of the claims of such charlatans are being rejected, the world community is subtly being prepared for a supernatural manifestation of a counterfeit Christ. Because of their lack of biblical knowledge, millions of Christians will be ready to receive the spurious claims of this brazen impostor.

Jesus declared that He would not return to any localized area of the earth. "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. ... Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not." Matthew 24:23-26.

Those who are well-versed in the truths of the Bible cannot be swept by the massive hysteria which will mark Satan's attempt to impersonate the advent of Jesus. When popular television news commentators announce, with great excitement, that Christ has appeared in London, New York or Rome, the vast majority of listeners will believe it is true.

Satan Impersonates Christ

If you feel you would be insulated from deception, just imagine yourself in the presence of such a personage. Perhaps you have rushed to the scene to expose the crafty pretender, but you are not prepared for the awesome reality facing you. A majestic being, dressed in a glistening robe, towers above all the thousands who try to press in to his side. A tremendous aura of power circulates around the Christ-like figure. He speaks in the same gentle tones that you imagine Jesus used when He was upon the earth. You watch in amazement as he puts forth his hand to touch the blind, lame, and diseased who prostrate before him. Instantly they seem to be healed of every infirmity and weakness. The cry goes up from hundreds of voices, "Jesus has come!" You are strangely affected by the waves of joyful emotion which seem to immerse the adoring multitude who fill the streets.

Then, suppose that this noble benefactor proclaims that he is indeed the Messiah who has returned to resume his work of healing and preaching. How easy would it be to resist the impulse to hail him as the Son of God? The evidence of your physical senses would be overwhelming.

Why could the whole world be captured by such a dazzling demonstration? Because there is a natural response in every human being to the unusual and the spectacular. People will go anywhere at any cost to witness a promised miracle. Satan will exploit this fleshly foible to his own advantage. No wonder the very elect will be in danger of being deceived.

Now that we know how Jesus will not return, let us discover how His coming will actually take place. Our only safety is to understand the truth as it is revealed in the Bible.

Two angels came all the way from heaven to give the clearest declaration on record concerning the

manner of Christ's return. The circumstances of that dramatic moment leave no room for quibbling over what they meant: "And when he had spoken these things, while they *beheld*, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their *sight*. And while they *looked* stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye *gazing* up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have *seen* him go into heaven." Acts 1:9-11.

Five colorful words in these verses indicate beyond question that the ascension of Jesus was a very real event - beheld, sight, looked, gazing, and seen. This was not some mystical dream or vision. They were literally watching our Lord with their physical eyes as He disappeared into the distant sky. Said the angels, "This same Jesus ... shall so come *in like manner* as ye have seen him go."

His return will be just as visible and literal as His going away. Since He left in a cloud, He must also come back in a cloud. Do the Scriptures confirm this? John wrote, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." Revelation 1:7.

In a few brief words the Revelator reveals one of the most astounding facts about the advent of Christ. He will be seen by every living soul in the world as He gradually descends through the atmospheric heavens. The good and evil inhabitants of all nations on earth will look up together and behold the glory of His train filling the sky. Jesus described it this way, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Matthew 24:30.

One Hundred Million Angels

Man and devils may be able to counterfeit many aspects of His coming, but they will not be able to duplicate the *manner* of His celestial entry into our atmosphere. At no time or place will so much glory and grandeur be exposed to the eyes of man. We are told in Matthew 25:31 that "all the holy angels" will be in attendance when He comes. According to John the Revelator there are many times more than a hundred million angels in heaven and all of them will be with Him as He returns. "And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Revelation 5:11.

On occasion single angels have appeared to human beings in the strength of their heavenly glory and the results have been devastating. One angel smote the Assyrian army during the night and 185,000 were dead the next morning. 2 Kings 19:35. Multiply that kind of glory by a few hundred million and you can imagine the brightness of the Advent.

Will it be visible to every person alive in the world? Jesus said, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:27. No wonder all tribes and peoples will be audience to that spectacular sight. Just as a vivid flash of lightning on a dark night penetrates to every corner so that no one can hide from it, so will His coming be. The earth will be illuminated from one horizon to the other.

Already we can see that the final events will not be done in a corner somewhere. In addition to being highly visible, there will be some very loud sounds associated with the second coming of Christ. Paul wrote, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

That mighty demonstration of sight and sound will be such that even the dead will be awakened out of their dusty beds. The shout, the voice, and the trump will be audible to every creature under the sun. I have never played a trumpet, personally, but my two sons tried to learn the art when they were children. I can only say one thing about trumpets with absolute certainty and that is: They are not silent! Trumpets were made to be sounded and to be heard.

Will there be other global phenomena to mark the close of time as we know it? Yes, there will also be a convulsive, world-wide earthquake, more destructive than any ever seen before. "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. ... And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." Revelation 16:18-20.

Envision the universal terror which will accompany the shock waves which cause inhabited islands to disappear into the sea. Huge mountain chains will be shattered into fragments, according to the graphic language of the prophet.

As the picture unfolds, it becomes more and more apparent that our Lord's return will be the most cataclysmic event ever to occur. Not one person in the world will be able to hide from it. The wicked, in particular, will be profoundly affected by the approach of those myriads of heavenly beings, as they escort Jesus toward the earth. John described how they will try to avoid the presence of the One whom they have rejected and denied.

"And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:14-17.

As Christ returns to execute judgment upon the earth, His presence is a consuming fire upon all sin and sinners. The wicked try to escape into the caves of the mountains and pray to be blotted out of existence rather than face a holy God. Intense and awful is their sense of shame and fear.

No Two-Phase Coming

Paul adds to the information about the final fate of those who are not ready for Christ's coming: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence

of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints." 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

At the very same time that the righteous are glorified, the rejecters of His grace will be slain by the brightness of His presence.

This interesting revelation brings us face to face with a massive deception which has misled millions of Christians. Obviously, there will be nothing secret about the rapture of the saints, and the so-called "secret rapture" is only a figment of the imagination. We have just read the clear Bible statement that the wicked are dealt with at the same time the righteous are given immortality.

There is absolutely no scriptural indication that the return of Christ takes place in two phases. The popular concept that Jesus comes secretly seven years before the end of the world to snatch away the good people has no Bible support whatsoever. The wicked do not continue living in the earth for seven years after the mythical rapture of the righteous. They are slain, Paul says, "When he (Jesus) shall come to be glorified in his saints."

Recently, there came to my desk a mockup of a newspaper which was supposed to represent the typical news flashes on the day after the rapture occurs. It was filled with horror stories and pictures beyond description. Terrible accidents were reported to have occurred simultaneously around the world, killing thousands of people. As millions of Christians suddenly vanished without a trace, driverless cars and pilotless planes careened out of control. The paper carried many articles about little children who had apparently disappeared into thin air while on their way to school. Only the spiritually careless and uncommitted were left behind to pick up the pieces of a shattered society.

What a perversion of truth! The wicked will also see Christ when He comes. Paul says He shall "appear the second time," and Peter declared, "When the chief Shepherd shall appear." Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 5:4. If His coming were secret or invisible, it should be written that He will not appear. When Paul and his companions suffered a storm at sea and the clouds were dark and lowering, he described it as "when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared." Acts 27:20. To appear is to be seen. Will Jesus appear or not when He comes? Many verses say He will appear. Can we trust the Bible, or should we put some strange, twisted meaning to that word "appear" in order to support what we want to believe?

Coming As a Thief

I am convinced that the confusion has been largely the result of misinterpreting two phrases which Jesus used in describing His coming. And the interesting thing is that He gave such a clear explanation of the phrases that hardly an unprejudiced mind could be misled.

Now let us take a close look, in context, at the two expressions of our Lord which have been used to support a secret rapture - "*as a thief in the night*," and "*one taken and the other left*." If we are willing to accept the Bible definition of terms, there can be no ambiguity about what Jesus said.

What did He mean when He said His coming would be like a thief in the night? He carefully explained in Matthew 24:42-44: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

There it is! So simple that a child can understand it. It will be unexpected. The advent will take the world by surprise. His coming will burst upon this earth when people least expect it. They will be just as unprepared for it as they would for a midnight thief. These words do not convey the least idea that our Lord will come sneaking around like some common criminal. He was just using a striking illustration of the unexpectedness of His return. Jesus reinforced the point He was making in verse 50, "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of."

Peter used exactly the same words in describing the coming of Christ. He said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." 2 Peter 3:10. This verse alone contains all the evidence we could ever desire about the meaning of the disputed term. When Jesus comes as a thief, Peter says, the heavens will pass away with a great noise. Could that be secret? Does this portray the silent snatching away of millions of people while others are totally unaware of what is taking place? It is the very opposite of that. That great noise corresponds to the shout and trumpet of Paul's epistle - a sound so intense that even the dead are awakened.

One Taken and One Left

The amazing thing is how people have taken such obvious verses and twisted them out of context to support a doctrine which does not even appear in the Bible. The same thing has been done with the illustration of two woman grinding together. Jesus did say, "The one shall be taken and the other left," but what does the context tell us about the meaning of those words? Is there any indication whatsoever that Jesus was teaching a secret rapture of the saints?

The words in question are found in Luke 17:24-27, but let's read the verses before and after in order to get the full picture. Beginning in verse 26 Jesus likened His coming to the days of Noah: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all."

The similarity is beyond question. Before the flood some were taken and some were left. The ones taken were taken into the ark and saved. The ones who were left were all destroyed by the raging water.

Christ continued His discourse with another illustration. "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Verses 28-30.

Again, the parallel is obvious. Some were taken out of the city to safety and some were left. What happened to those who were left? They were all destroyed by the fire.

Now we come to verses 34-36: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

Please keep the continuity of Christ's previous illustration in mind as you consider these words. In every case there had been a separation of the good from the bad, and then the wicked were slain. If the context teaches us anything at all, we must conclude that the one who is left will be left dead, just as it was in Noah and Lot's days. And when we read the next verse, there can be no doubt that this is exactly what Jesus was saying. "And they answered and said unto him, Where Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." Verse 37.

After Jesus said one would be taken and the other left, the disciples asked where they would be left. His answer clearly reveals that all who were left would be dead. Their bodies would be food for the eagles to devour. This is in perfect harmony with what the rest of the Bible says on the subject.

There is not the slightest hint that this final separation of the saved and lost will be done in any secretive manner. Yet, this connotation has been applied by those who are desperately trying to find inspired support for an empty tradition. The unscriptural two-phase coming has been repeated so often and so persistently that millions believe it must be true. There is probably no more dangerous doctrinal distortion in the world than this, because it could delude the majority of professed Christians into being lost. No wonder Jesus warned: "Take heed that no man deceive you."

The Rapture Rooted in Catholicism

The foundation of the rapture theory was laid over 400 years ago upon the specific orders of the Catholic Church. Every Christian needs to understand how this fabrication of error was designed to neutralize the great Protestant Reformation. If the facts of history were known by Protestants today who defend with such great emotion the rapture theory and the futurist antichrist doctrine, they would be horrified.

Luther and his fellow reformers boldly identified the pope as the "man of sin," and labeled the Catholic Church as the antichrist of prophecy. In response to those charges, the hierarchy assigned two Jesuit priests to develop counter-interpretations which would turn the onus away from the Catholic Church. In spite of the fact that the two men founded opposing schools of interpretation, their theories have survived to form the basis of most modern Protestant theology today. Not only did they effectively blunt Luther's assessment of the papacy as the antichrist, but they cleverly divided and diluted the "protest" of all the churches which grew out of the Reformation movement.

Modern religious observers were astounded in January, 1984, when men like Billy Graham and Jerry

Falwell meekly

accepted and defended the establishment of United States political ties with the Vatican. Why could those famous Protestant spokesmen see no danger in being allied with the Church of Rome? Because they are deceived, along with millions of others, by the Catholic-contrived theories of those two priests which have almost eclipsed the historic, biblical position of the Reformers. If the spiritual descendants of Luther and Wesley now had the same doctrine which they taught, not a single Lutheran or Methodist would favor any kind of alliance with the papacy today.

Now let's take a look at these two Spanish priests who flooded the sixteenth century with their counter-Reformation propaganda.

Alcazar of Seville applied all the beast prophecies to Antiochus Epiphanes, who lived long before the popes began to rule in Rome. His system of interpretation came to be known as the Preterist School of prophecy.

On the other hand, Jesuit Francisco Rivera invented a system known as the Futurist School of interpretation. He taught that the antichrist was to be some future superman who would appear near the end of time and continue in power for three and a half years. It is his clever, unscriptural theory which has been resurrected by modern evangelical Protestant Christians. And today millions of Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, etc., hold this anti-Protestant concoction of the Jesuits as some kind of infallible doctrine. Yet, those same denominations claim to be faithful supporters of Protestant theology. Luther and other stalwart protestors against Catholic errors would be astounded if they were suddenly resurrected to hear what is being taught in the name of Protestantism.

In the early 1800s the futurist view of Jesuit Rivera passed through certain refinements and additions, including the seven-year tribulation and the snatching away of the saints. For the first time, it was espoused by Protestant teachers who were seeking ways of reconciliation with Rome. Through the influence and writings of John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren Church in England, the new doctrine spread to the United States. During the middle and latter nineteenth century, it received its biggest boost from Cyrus Scofield, who incorporated it into the notes of his Scofield Reference Bible published in 1909.

Rescue and Reward

Now we turn to the most exciting aspect of this subject. Why will Jesus come back to this earth the second time? John was inspired to write the answer in the exact words of our Lord: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12.

After long, oppressive millennia of suffering, God's people will finally be delivered from the bondage of Satan's evil influence. The mark of his power is etched upon the cemeteries of the land and on the war memorials of the dead. The cries and tears of the saints have filtered through all the years of every generation since Adam sinned. What a day it will be when the curse of transgression is lifted, and the most dreaded of all human enemies is eternally banished.

Paul described it in these words: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

The reward which Christ brings with Him has so many facets that no language on earth could ever adequately portray it, but the resurrection of the righteous dead will be the grand focus of that moment. Some who have been sleeping for centuries will awake as from a night of dreamless slumber. For others it will be the first moment in memory free from the searing throb of pain. The eyes of the blind will be opened to gaze in rapture upon the immortal faces of loved ones who have been recognized before only by touch or sound.

Paul describes the split-second change which will forever place the saints beyond the range of pain or death: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

As the resurrected ones rise to meet Jesus in the air, all the living righteous are instantly translated into the same body of immortal youth. Jesus' feet will not touch the earth at that time, but all the redeemed will be caught up to meet Him as He descends.

That rendezvous in space will surely be the most ecstatic and emotional moment in the long history of planet earth. It is no wonder that so much of the Bible is laced with glowing descriptions of that climactic event in time.

Do most Christians truly understand the nature of Christ's coming and how it will affect the inhabitants of the earth? Let the facts speak for themselves. Most churches have accepted the claims of the rapturists, who have rejected the historical view in favor of these recent revisionist errors. As a result, millions of contemporary church members are looking for events that will never take place.

For countless others, our Lord's return is a subject of great fear and consternation. The nominal Christian (which is the majority) holds very mixed feelings about the event, largely because they lack the personal assurance of being ready to meet him.

Stolen Sweets

It is this lack of preparation which has created such a confused attitude toward our Lord's return. Many do not know whether they want to see Him or not. What a sad commentary on the state of the modern church! Why should we not be eager to see the One we love - the One who died for us? Every true Christian should be excited about His coming. We should talk it, sing it, and preach it! As Paul said, we should love His appearing. It is the blessed hope of every child of God.

My mother was a wonderful cook, and without question she made the best chocolate cake that ever was baked. As a child I would watch her put the layers together, and then apply the delicious icing to the top and sides. The high point came when mother let me lick the pan, or clean out all the icing that was left sticking to the pan.

Sometimes, unfortunately, there wouldn't be very much left, but I always managed to scrape up at least a spoonful. Then I would look longingly at all that delectable icing on the cake as it slowly settled into place. Often it would be so heavy on the sides that the icing would droop and accumulate on the plate. It was always the most terrible temptation for me to clean up all that excess icing on my finger, but Mother had given very specific instruction not to do it.

My real test came on the day Mother left me alone at the house with a big, beautiful cake sitting right in the middle of the table. It was freshly decorated, and I watched in fascination as the thick chocolate icing oozed almost imperceptibly toward the bottom of the cake. Finally, it seemed almost ready to spill over the edge of the plate, and I could resist no longer. Carefully and cleanly, I slid my finger around the rim of the plate accumulating a gob of the forbidden frosting.

Then, suddenly, I heard footsteps on the porch, and before I could dispose of the evidence, Mother was in the room. Without any reservation I can assure you that I did not want to see my mother come at that moment. And I believe this is the reason so many are afraid to see Jesus come - their hands are filled with the stolen treats of this world.

Make no mistake about it. There will be some dramatic changes when He appears. The old familiar places will disappear and nothing we know now will be unaffected by that event. Some people fear the changes, but those fears are ungrounded. Everything will be better and more wonderful than we have ever known or imagined. One moment in the presence of Jesus will compensate for all the suffering and self-denial of a lifetime on earth.

Back to Paradise

God will return the human family to the sinless ideal which He designed from the beginning. All four of God's original gifts to man will be restored, including the perfect conditions of the Eden paradise. But there will be one tremendous difference between the quality of life in the new Eden and the old. Adam received only a conditional grant of immortality, whereas the redeemed will be given an absolute and unconditional access to the life of God. And even though the power of choice will remain, not one of those immortalized saints will ever choose to disobey God again. Because of the demonstration of God's character and Satan's character, as revealed in the age-long controversy, the universe will be secure from any further rebellion or disobedience. Every created being will see the results of such a course, and none will choose to repeat the painful experiment.

It is this prospect of eternal security which makes the coming of Jesus such a glorious doctrine. The world is sick of fractured peace plans, broken treaties, and disappointed hopes. Mankind longs for a peace where fear and uncertainty will be entirely eliminated. Christ's coming will bring an end to everything which could produce human anxiety. Poverty, disease, war, and death are the most common sources of stress, and those conditions will cease to exist when He returns.

But the most exciting prospect of all is to know that we will see the face of Jesus and dwell in His presence for all eternity. Surely that moment will be the climax of all the fondest hopes and dreams we have ever cherished. May the preparation for it be the focus of all our thoughts and actions. And God forbid that any day should pass in which we do not pray with longing desire for our Lord to come soon.

Satan's Confusing Counterfeits

Joe Crews

Ephesians 2:10

Suppose you had to summarize the entire Bible in just two words. What words would you choose? I have thought about this, and I believe *sin* and *salvation* might be the most accurate answer. After all, Satan entered the picture very early to cause man to sin and to steal away his salvation. Incidentally, that was also the turning point for the human family. You see, God had based everything upon obedience. He had provided all those wonderful gifts-life, righteous character, dominion over the earth, and a beautiful home in the Garden. Then He promised that those blessings would continue without interruption on one condition alone: Obey and live, disobey and die.

We know, of course, what followed that ultimatum. Adam and Eve yielded to the tempter and sin entered this beautiful planet for the first time. And from that moment the great controversy became a raging reality, between Christ and Satan, truth and error, obedience and disobedience. Every book and chapter of the Bible is interwoven with God's great plan to bring man back to that original position of obedience from which he fell. "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21. Sin, of course, is disobedience to God's law.

Sometimes people have asked, "Why be concerned over external actions and works of the law? Isn't God more interested in the heart than in the outward conduct?" Truly, those things cannot be separated. From the very beginning God has made obedience the grand test of love and loyalty. No one can say that God was unconcerned over the behavior of our first parents. Their outward actions mirrored a divided heart. This is also why Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15.

The focus of heaven's program is to save men from breaking God's law by instilling an agape love into the hearts of true believers. The very last book of the Bible distills the issue down to that same basic question of obedience. Every soul will receive the seal of God or the mark of the beast. Again the test will be over obedience to the law. The major characteristic of the redeemed, according to the book of Revelation, is that they keep the commandments of God. The condition that God set up for man to remain in Eden becomes the condition for man to return to Paradise. "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that *keep the commandments of God*, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17. "Blessed are they that *do his commandments*, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Revelation 22:14.

The bottom line is that God must have a people who can be trusted with eternal life. Have you considered that those who are translated at the coming of Jesus will still retain the power of choice? The Bible assures us that affliction will not rise up the second time. There will be no repeat of this 6,000-year carnage of tragedy and death. Not because there will be no choice, but because God will take no one to heaven who would not rather die than sin. The angels will know heaven is secure

because of the experience of the saints in this world before they are given immortality. There will be no risk of this recurrent nightmare of sin. This testing experience on planet earth will take care of that.

Satan's whole strategy is based on making people sin. He knows that nothing which defiles will enter God's kingdom, and sin is the only thing that defiles in God's sight. I am convinced that Satan understood a certain principle long before the apostle Paul wrote it down in Romans 6:16. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Please notice that you become a servant of whoever you obey. If you obey God, you are a servant of God; and if you cease obeying God, you cease being a servant of God. The enemy's plan is to cause you to obey him and become his servant.

I cannot emphasize enough that the devil doesn't care why you disobey God as long as you do it. You can even do it in the name of religion, and some of the most religious people have done it down through history. In fact, they can think up the most religious reasons for disobedience. Jesus spoke repeatedly of those who would be guilty of this paradoxical conduct. He declared, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:22, 23.

Jesus carefully identified these boastful claimants as very religious individuals. Everything had been done in the name of Jesus, yet they were rejected in the end as unworthy to enter heaven. Why? What was their problem? In the previous verse the Master spelled it out clearly that even though they talked much about Him, they did not do "the will of my Father which is in heaven." Profession was strong, but doing God's will was absent.

Jesus was even more specific in Matthew 15:9 when He spoke these words to the Pharisees: "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." How it must have shocked that audience to understand for the first time that many who worshiped Him would be lost. How could it ever be wrong to worship God, and why would it be counted vain and worthless? Jesus explained that He could not accept it because they had set aside His commandments in favor of the commandments of men. How interesting! Apparently Christ recognized obedience as the highest form of worship, and the most acceptable.

Has anyone ever been able to find an acceptable excuse for disobeying God? Certainly men of the past have fabricated some that sounded good in their own ears. I think of Saul whom God had approved as Israel's first king. He was a great and wonderful man in many respects. But do you remember what happened when God sent him to fight against the Amalekites? Those people had become so depraved that God ordered Saul to utterly destroy them. Nothing was to be brought back as souvenirs or booty from this campaign. The command of God was clear and specific.

Why, then, did Saul decide to spare some of the finest, sleekest cattle? He gave his explanation to Samuel after being confronted by the prophet on the way home from the battle. Samuel asked, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and

the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." 1 Samuel 15:14, 15.

No matter how logical those words may sound, they are filled with devious design and hypocrisy. In the first place, Saul blamed "the people" for sparing the animals, trying to shift the responsibility for the act of disobedience. But Saul was in charge, and he had received the orders from God. Then, he tried to make it seem that it was a trifling matter, because "the rest" of God's word had been fulfilled. Only one little deviation was made, so why make such a big deal out of it, and besides, these animals were not for them; they were to be used for worshiping God!

Don't miss the significance of that explanation. Saul was *disobeying God in order to worship Him!* Did God accept such an argument? Samuel replied, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Verse 22. Again, we see that God looked upon obedience as the highest form of worship. Even though Saul probably had the most persuasive religious reason for disobeying, God dramatically rejected it and, at the same time, rejected Saul from being the king over Israel.

Is the same thing being done today? Look around you as the sacred hours of the Sabbath are introduced week by week to a world in need of rest. In the very heart of His handwritten moral law God inscribed the longest and most detailed of all the Ten Commandments. Yet it was so simply expressed that no possibility of confusion existed. "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work." Exodus 20:10. Even a child can understand those words. Yet, when the seventh day begins each week millions are still out there in the market place carrying on business as usual and violating the clear, specific command of God.

Who are these millions who dare defy the unmistakable written orders of their Creator? Many of them are religious people who will be in church the very next day singing hymns, praying, giving offerings,

and kneeling to worship the God whose law they transgress every week. Some perhaps do not realize that they are honoring a pagan tradition above the commandment of God, but large numbers are well aware that they are disobeying one of the eternal laws of God. Of such, Jesus spoke with alarming candor: "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

For years as an evangelist I have listened to the rationalization of religious people for breaking the Sabbath. Many of them actually sound pious and sincere and profess great love for God. But do they really love Him? The problem today is that there is such a superficial, sentimental definition of love. All of us have seen the popular bumperstickers which boldly demand "Smile if you love Jesus," or "Honk if you love Jesus," or "Wave if you love Jesus." *But that is not what Jesus said!* He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Now that is authentic! That is real. The shallow froth of many modern religions reflects anything except love.

Two Strategies of Satan

How does Satan orchestrate his program to make even the most religious people sin? Before we look at his two most effective strategies, we need to understand that we are dealing with the greatest

counterfeiter who ever lived. As the archdeceiver he often employs a mixture of good and evil to accomplish his ends. He doesn't even mind utilizing the Scriptures if it can serve to achieve an ultimate end.

Satan did not write the Bible, but he was looking over the shoulders of the men who did, memorizing every bit of it. And he has often quoted texts, as he did to Jesus in the wilderness of temptation. In that instance he actually quoted the Psalmist correctly that angels would protect from even dashing a foot against a stone. But take note that he misapplied the text by urging Jesus to presumptuously leap from the pinnacle and trust the angels to save Him.

This clever ploy of distorting Scripture forms the basis of the two special tricks which Satan uses to make Christians disobey God's law. The first argument goes like this: Since the Bible says "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life," the most important thing in order to be saved is to obey the law. Revelation 22:14. If we can just do that well enough, in every detail, we will qualify for eternal life.

Does that sound familiar? And is there some truth in such an argument? Indeed, it is very important to obey the commandments. But is there also a strong element of error woven through that belief? The fact is that no one can make themselves good enough to deserve salvation. Such a doctrine is rank legalism, the very antithesis of God's way of being saved. It is the foundation of every non-Christian religion and has deceived millions of professed followers of Christ into a fatal delusion.

But you may ask how such a doctrine could lead to more breaking of God's law. Wouldn't it actually motivate more people to carefully keep the commandments in order to be saved? In this case the answer is no. You see, Satan knows very well that things have changed since the Garden of Eden.

It was a thousand times easier for Adam to obey than it is for us. He had a pure, unfallen nature that had no inclination toward sin, and all of his temptations originated outside of himself. With our inherited fallen nature our greatest temptations spring from within. But Satan has convinced millions that they can avoid sin, just like Adam and Eve, by trying harder to obey God. So they manfully struggle to exercise more control over their sinful tendencies and fail, and fail, in their fleshly efforts. Finally, they decide that it is impossible to get the victory over sin and that God will not require something that can't be done. The result is more and more breaking of God's law.

Consider this thought for a moment: Suppose you could keep every one of God's commandments from this moment right on through the remainder of your life. In other words, you would not make a single mistake or commit another sin for the rest of your life. Would that save you? Of course not, because you have already committed sins before starting this future program of perfect obedience. Therefore, you have come under the death sentence by those past transgressions. No amount of good behavior can change the record of your past misconduct.

The truth is that only one man ever came into this world and lived an absolutely perfect life without committing a single sin. Jesus had an impeccable record of right-doing. Our record is blotted and

blurred by repeated failures to measure up to God's standard of total obedience. Not one of us can stand before God on the basis of our past record. We know God will accept nothing but a perfect righteousness, or right-doing, and none of us has such a record. Unless we can somehow get the credit for that holy, unblemished life of Jesus and have it actually imputed to our account, there is not the least possibility for us to be saved. How thankful we ought to be that such an arrangement has been made available through the grace of our Lord Jesus.

One of the most amazing texts in the Bible is found in Romans 5:10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ..." Let's pause and examine that first half of the verse, because it contains the most crucial message in all the Bible. It tells us that we became enemies of God when we sinned. A reconciliation was required if we were to have any hope. In order to remove the sin that separated us from God, an at-one-ment, or atonement, needed to be accomplished. Our text says that only the death of Jesus could effect such a reconciliation.

How did the cross remove the enmity and restore the relationship of God and man? What did Jesus carry to that cross? Upon His own body He assumed vicariously the guilt of every descendant of Adam and Eve. In fact, Jesus offered to make an exchange with each one of us. He would take our condemnation and death sentence, bear it to the cross, and exhaust the penalty of sin against us. At the same time that He bears our punishment, He covers over the ugly record of our past transgressions. In fact, He accomplished this by imputing credit to us for living His own perfect life of obedience. So what do we yield up, and what do we receive from Him? We give up our death in exchange for His life; and as a result, God treats us as if we have never sinned, and He treats Jesus on the cross as though He were guilty of all our sins.

Now look at the rest of Romans 5:10. After describing the reconciliation effected by the death of Jesus, Paul continues, "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Please notice that we need both the life and the death of Jesus to achieve full salvation. Past sins are covered by the imputed benefits of His atoning death, and future victories are assured by the imparted benefits of His sinless life in the flesh.

We cannot change or improve the actions that have already been recorded against us. They can only be canceled by claiming to our account the credited record of His perfect obedience. Any of our future actions can be changed by accepting the impartation of His victorious experience as He lived it in our own fallen nature. And that brings us to the second strategy that Satan uses in making people sin.

The Cheap Grace Trap

In this clever assault, the great counterfeiter pursues a different argument. It goes something like this: "No one can be saved by keeping the law. We are not justified by works, but by grace through faith. We are not under the law, but under grace. Keeping the commandments is not necessary as long as we love Jesus." Again, we see that there is much truth in what he says, but also a terrible strain of error. Even though we are not justified by works, we are not exempt from obedience either.

Countless multitudes have fallen prey to this devious approach. I see it all the time in evangelism. Christians of every stripe and denomination will give fervent assent to the first few nights of the

crusade series, but then we introduce the subject of law and grace. Instantly the reaction begins. "Brother Joe, don't talk to us about that old law. We're not saved by works. We're under grace, and keeping those commandments won't save us." Do you see the problem? In an extreme reaction against legalism, these sincere souls swerve far over to the side of cheap grace and almost become antinomian in their views.

How hard it is to be balanced on this question of faith and works! There are two extremes, and the devil doesn't care which end we go off. It is like rowing a boat with two oars named "faith" and "works." If either oar fails to work, the boat simply goes around in a circle. A lot of people are going around in circles, because there is not equal pulling on these two essential aspects of salvation. The fact is that we are talking about two ends of the same piece. This is why there can be no conflict in the matter. True faith *always* produces the good works of obedience. Genuine justification invariably produces sanctification. The Bible truly declares that "Faith without works is dead." James 2:26.

Our great enemy, the devil, has cunningly counterfeited both ends of the beautiful doctrine of righteousness by faith. He has distorted "righteousness" into legalism and "faith" into a cheap substitute that does not even produce obedience. Somebody has referred to it as "sloppy agape," because it also denigrates love to an ill-defined sentimentalism.

In the Scriptures I find three kinds of faith. One is a faith that even the demons possess, but James makes it very clear that this kind does not work at all. It is merely an intellectual assent or mental agreement. It cannot save a single person. The second does work, but for the wrong reason. It is well-illustrated by the driver who sees a stop sign at an intersection. He has faith in the sign and his faith works; he brings the car to a stop. But why did he stop? For fear he would be struck by another vehicle? Or fear that the police might be watching from around the corner to give him a ticket? That kind of faith is also unacceptable to God because it is based on fear.

Unfortunately, many professed Christians have this kind of fire-escape religion. They know there is a fire at the end of the road, and they don't want to go into that fire. So they force themselves to do all the good things that they believe good people ought to do. This is just another form of legalism that we talked about earlier.

The third kind of faith, and the only kind God will accept, is described in Galatians 5:6, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." There it is. There is the real motive for every act of obedient compliance with God's law.

Sin and the Christian

But before we show how this motivation of love is the very heart of all true acceptance before God, let us turn to some of the most dogmatic statements recorded by the inspired writers. Some would even classify John's language as positively intemperate, but you be the judge as we read the words of that great disciple of love. Please keep in mind that John was the disciple who leaned on the bosom of Jesus. He was, without question, the warmest and most tender-hearted of the twelve disciples. He wrote more about love than any other writer of the New

Testament, yet he probably had more to say about the commandments of God than any other writer as well.

First, we will read the most simple, succinct definition of sin to be found in Holy Writ. John declared, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." 1 John 3:4. Please fix this verse clearly in your thinking, because the rest of the chapter focuses on the nature of sin and utilizes this exclusive definition for it.

The text is very clear, but we need to quantify the word "law" in this verse. What law is being referred to? Paul answers in a parallel discussion about sin in Romans 7:7. He asks: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Here the meaning is beyond question. Paul quotes directly from the Ten Commandments and declares unequivocally that sin is the breaking of that law.

So, as we read further in 1 John 3, keep clearly in mind that the word sin has been defined in verse 4 as the breaking of the moral law of the decalogue. Verse 5 continues the discussion with these words, "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins." What was Jesus to take from us? Our sins. What is sin? Breaking the Ten Commandments. Therefore, He came to save us from transgressing those laws. He came to keep us from sinning.

Then John begins a series of radical statements of truth which have confounded many modern Christians. He said, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." Verse 6. Powerful. Some men are known for bold preaching, but never have I heard such strong words from any living prophet or preacher. Declares the beloved John, "Anyone who keeps walking in disobedience to the Ten Commandments has never met Jesus and knows nothing about His salvation." Shocking? Indeed, it is.

But wait. There is more, and it gets even stronger. Next verse: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil." Verse 7, 8. John boldly marks out the difference between false professors of truth and the genuine.

Incidentally, there is great significance in the words "Let no man deceive you." This alerts us that whatever immediately follows will be the subject of great delusion and deception. In Matthew 24:3 the disciples asked Jesus about the signs of His coming and in verse 4 He replied, "Take heed that no man deceive you." Then He proceeded to spell out the terrible confusion that would mark the end-time teaching on the "rapture." So we can expect that similar misunderstanding will attend the doctrine of righteousness by faith in the last days. The sin question will be confused. The doctrine of obedience and the law will be confounded and twisted.

John urges us to heed the warning that no righteous person will be walking in willful disobedience to the Ten Commandments. He goes so far as to say that such an individual would actually be of the devil, and not a Christian at all! Then he adds the words which have been debated for generations by theologians as well as laymen, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remains in

him: And he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Verse 9. Who is the seed of the woman in the Bible? Jesus is that true seed, and the truly converted child of God has Christ abiding in his heart. And while Jesus is there he cannot sin. In order to sin he will have to put Jesus out of his heart. Christ is not the minister of sin and cannot share the heart of one who chooses to deliberately disobey the commandments of God. John is not saying that a Christian loses his power of choice, but he is emphatically declaring that Christ does not remain in the heart of the willful transgressor.

Let's clarify this matter of sinning. A strange doctrine has wormed its way into the Christian church via the teaching of Augustine and John Calvin. This false system of belief holds forth the idea that we can be walking in deliberate disobedience and still have the assurance of salvation. It is simply not true. Nevertheless, millions have swallowed the distorted concept that justification changes our standing before God but does not change our state.

The Calvinistic view is that the covering of justification makes us acceptable in God's sight even if we do continue willfully sinning. In the final analysis, we are told that the atonement saves us in this life from the results of sin but not from the sin itself. In effect, the message is declaring that the atonement does not so much change the nature of the Christian in relation to sin as it changes the nature of sin in relation to the Christian. For some reason, after accepting Jesus, sin is not the same deadly factor it was before. By committing sin as an unconverted person we are doomed to destruction, but committing the same sins after being "saved" cannot send the Christian to hell.

Do you see how this doctrine seeks to change the nature of sin instead of changing the nature of the sinner? Is this not playing games with religion? Justification does not ever cover sins that we keep on practicing. Justification provides a totally new heart and life called conversion by which we begin to show forth a new spiritual lifestyle. Justification cannot be maintained while deliberate sins are being committed. It is not a cloak to cover continued transgression, it is a spiritual transformation which removes both the guilt and power of sin.

Mark it down well: True faith always produces the good works of obedience. Faith without works is dead. Jesus came to this world to save His people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. The Bible says a lot about sin, but never anything good. For instance, you will never read in the Scriptures that we should diminish the amount of sin we commit. Nowhere are we admonished to cut back or reduce our disobedience.

Sin is absolutely non-negotiable in God's sight. We are to utterly reject, abandon, and forsake all practice of known sin. Jesus said, "Go and sin no more." He did not say, "Go and cut back on this sin"! John did not write, "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin less and less." He said, "I write unto you that ye sin not."

John the Beloved pulled no punches in writing his epistle about sin. No modern preacher ever said it stronger than he did. He declared, "He that committeth sin is of the devil." 1 John 3:8. This foolishness about God counting us righteous while we willfully keep on choosing to disobey Him is not supported in the Bible. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and that power is able to save us from *all*

sin as well as from *some* sin. Why should we believe that an all powerful God, would forgive us and then leave us under the power of continued sin? That would make God an accomplice in our sin.

Judged by Our Works

Finally, let us consider the fact that the judgment will take place on the basis of our works. I know this may sound legalistic to some, but the Bible is exceedingly clear on this point. John wrote: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... And they were judged every man according to their works." Revelation 20:12, 13.

How do we harmonize these words with what we have discovered about God's love and mercy? Is it not contrary to Bible justification for works to be the basis of the judgment? Not at all, if we take into consideration how the works will be judged. It is imperative that we understand exactly how God will measure and test the actions of each individual. What determines whether they are accepted or rejected? Is it the amount performed? If we have enough right-doing to our account, will we be granted entrance? And will we be left outside if the works are not sufficient?

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus described a sizable group who would seek entrance into the kingdom of God. We referred to this verse earlier. Jesus said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:22, 23.

Carefully weigh the words of those last minute applicants. Jesus did not dispute or deny the truthfulness of what they said. They boasted of having done *many* works. There was no lack in quantity. The amount was acceptable, but obviously, the works were not judged on the basis of quantity-they were denied entrance. But we are more puzzled when we read about the kind of works these people had done. They were "wonderful" as well as "many." The quality seems to be good also. Perhaps one of them had donated a million dollars to build a new synagogue; yet they were not allowed entrance. The mystery deepens. What other factor could possibly account for the severe sentence, "depart from me, ye that work iniquity"?

The answer is found in the last book of the Bible, and when we read it, the entire puzzle suddenly falls into place and pulls into focus. In Revelation 3:15 God says, "I know thy works." Of course He does, because He has kept the record and will be the final judge. But let's read on, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Revelation 3:15, 16.

There is the secret of the whole matter! Our works will be judged at last, but not by the *weight* or the *height*. They will be judged by the *heat*! In other words, all of our obedience must spring forth from a heart of burning love and devotion to God. The motive will be uncovered and examined by the all-seeing eye of God. No amount or kind of human works will carry any degree of weight in that day unless they have been produced by a fiery love relationship with Jesus.

Here we come to the paradox of the faith-works issue. Works are either worth everything or they are worth nothing. They are a sweet savor of incense before God or they are an abomination. All depends on the motive and who is providing the strength to perform the works. Works of the flesh are man's efforts to save himself, but works of love rising out of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit are exactly the opposite. They stand forth as the authentic credentials of genuine faith and love.

God has not changed that test since the Garden of Eden. He still requires exactly the same kind of obedience. The only difference is that in Eden our holy unfallen parents had, by nature, the power to obey. Unfortunately, as the children of post-fall Adam and Eve, we have inherited carnal natures which are not subject to the law of God, except by the miracle of conversion and "Christ in you." This is why Jesus declared, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3. And to the rich young man who asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" Jesus replied, "Keep the commandments." Matthew 19:17.

There is no contradiction in these two statements of the Master. None can be saved without experiencing the new birth, and none can be saved who walk in willful disobedience of the commandments. The two things operate as two parts of the same salvation experience.

The central truth in all these utterances is that none can obey who has not been converted, and none will deliberately refuse to obey who has been converted. Let no one persuade you that works are unimportant or unnecessary, or that keeping the commandments is legalism. But do examine your heart with great care to determine the hidden root of the fruit which adorns your Christian lifestyle. If conformity to God's law is the spontaneous outflow of your joyous, continuous connection with Christ, then whoever would charge you as a legalist would be exposed as judgmental and self-condemned. On the other hand, your works of love would stand forth as the very antithesis of legalism, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10.

Spirits From Other Worlds

Joe Crews

Hebrews 1:14

Spirits from other worlds do visit this earth. They are continually going back and forth and have sometimes been seen by men. These super-dimensional space visitors have the uncanny ability to appear and disappear at will. They have interfered in the affairs of government, family and personal lives from time to time. It is now known that they have dramatically affected the rise and fall of nations for almost 6,000 years of human history. Coming from another space galaxy and not being subject to the restrictions of time or distance, these amazing creatures have literally "occupied" this planet, and with their mysterious extrasensory powers they have transcribed and preserved the most classified secrets of men and governments.

Who are these visiting spirits from outer space? Do they come as friends or enemies? For what purpose do they make a record of our most secret transactions? Are they connected with the hundreds of UFO sightings around the world? The answers to these questions could very well determine our attitude toward these very real beings who surround us each day.

First, let me assure you that these celestial visitors do not travel by means of swift, silent, cigar-shaped rocket ships. UFOs, whatever else they might be, are not the vehicles for these extraordinary creatures. They are spirits. This much is confirmed by the most reliable document in the world today - God's holy Bible.

Please notice that His Book speaks about spirits in a variety of connotations, just as we use the word in our modern vocabulary. We refer to an individual as a "guiding spirit" in the community. Alcoholic beverages are called "spirits" of liquor, and imaginary ghosts are said to be "spirits." In the same manner, the Bible refers to God as "Spirit," and the angels are also called "ministering spirits." Hebrews 1:14 "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Here we also find spirits who visit this earth from time to time; they are angels who continually minister to the needs of God's people. With exceeding speed and power they hurry from heaven to earth to carry out God's biddings in behalf of men.

Before proceeding further, let us clarify some false impressions that have been held by many regarding the angels. Mothers have been known to tell their children that if they would be good, someday they could be angels in heaven. Is it true that the angels are actually the spirits of the dead? Do the godly mothers of this earth turn into angels when they die? The answer is emphatically NO! First of all, we know that there were angels before anyone had died among the human family. They do not depend for their existence upon the death of mortals. "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Genesis 3:24.

Furthermore, the Scriptures make it clear that angels were made before man and they belong to a different order of beings. Psalm 8:4, 5: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." The fact is that we can never hope to be an angel. Even though we belong to the same great family of God, there is a difference of order which separates the earthly from the heavenly members of that family.

Where did the angels come from if they are not related to earthly beings? The answer is found in Colossians 1:16, 17. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." They were created by God. Sometime in the eternity of the past, before the creation of this world, they were formed by the power of God. Apparently, there are various types of good angels among the heavenly host. Psalm 99:1 describes the cherubim with their two wings arched over the very throne of God. Isaiah 6:1-7 speaks of seraphim who have six wings and seem to have separate duties to perform. But one fact stands out clearly - none of them are disembodied spirits. They are real beings who simply possess powers that you and I do not have. In Genesis 18:1-8, we are told that some angels appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre. With typical eastern hospitality, Abraham prepared a meal for his guests, and the record says, "He stood by them under the tree, and they did eat." Now, if they had been bodiless spirits, this act of eating would have been an impossibility. They had just as real bodies as you and I have. We find no evidence that these heavenly visitors are indefinite, formless, vacuous objects. The Bible reveals that they have personality, knowledge, etc. 1 Peter 1:12 says, "Which things the angels desire to look into." Then again in 2 Samuel 14:20 we read, "According to the wisdom of an angel of God."

If they are real beings, some might ask, why cannot we see them? How many believe that a glass of water is full of little wiggling bits of life? Of course, we all believe it. That water is full of germ life, and if we could look at a drop through the microscope right now, it would come alive with movement. There are lots of things that are real that we cannot see or hear. The room where you sit is full of voices of all kinds. Music is filling the room at this very moment, but you cannot hear it. All we need to do is bring in a radio and turn it on. Immediately we can hear these sounds which fill the air. The fact that we cannot see or hear a thing is no proof that it does not exist.

The truth is that men have seen angels, and even animals have seen them. In Numbers 22:20-33 a certain man by the name of Balaam was riding along one day on his donkey. The animal suddenly stopped in its tracks in a narrow place between two walls. Even though Balaam beat the donkey unmercifully, it refused to move because its eyes were opened to an angel standing there. In a few moments Balaam saw the angel also, and he realized why the animal had not moved forward.

One reason why angels are not seen more often by men is because of the kind of nature we have. In Revelation 22:8,9, we read: "And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." Here the great prophet John had to be rebuked for trying to worship an angel. If their supernatural glory had such an effect upon that man of God, what would our reaction be? If God permitted them to make general appearances to men, in their glory, they

would become objects of adoration and worship. Generally, the special appearance of angels in the earth today is in the form of human beings. Said the apostle in Hebrews 13:2, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." You have probably encountered an angel in the form of a stranger without realizing it.

Angels then, should not be worshiped, but we ought to have a full appreciation of their power. Sometimes they are commissioned from God to visit judgments upon the wicked. One notable example of this is found in the experience of an Assyrian army which defied the God of Heaven in the Old Testament. During the night, one angel of death came down among the soldiers and the next morning 185,000 Assyrians were found dead. This is in sharp contrast to the usual work of protection carried out by the angelic messengers. But we must remember that it is toward those who fear God that angels minister with greatest power. Psalm 34:7 tells us, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

The angels are so real that they have actually been seen. Let us read this experience found in 2 Kings 6:15-17: "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

I want to point out now that angels are in close touch with members of the human family. They watch the movements of humanity closely. They know our first names. They know our surnames. They know our occupations. They know where we live. They know whether or not we pray. They know whether or not we support God's work. They know all these details. In Acts 10 it tells how the angel of God came to Cornelius and told him that his prayers and his alms had come up as a sweet savor before God. Now listen to what the angel said: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." Acts 10:4-6. The angel knew Peter's given name; the angel knew his surname; the angel knew where he lived; the angel knew that Cornelius prayed; and that he gave alms to God.

The angelic beings know the same details about your life and mine. Our complete life record is open to them, because they follow us from the cradle to the grave. Each individual has a guardian angel who seeks to influence him in the right way. He also guards us from a thousand dangers along the road of life. Matthew 18:10: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." How else could we explain the miraculous intervention of unseen powers to deliver us from harm? Occasionally we realize their ministering presence, but usually we are unconscious of the multitude of their services.

Once I was driving my car along on a busy highway. I had been driving for 1,000 miles without sleep or rest. It was an emergency trip, and I was traveling alone. Drowsiness overtook me. Suddenly, my head came up with a start, and I realized that the scenery was changed. I had been asleep. I don't know how long the car had been guided by other hands, but even a few seconds' lapse is enough to lose

control of a speeding car. Yet everything was under perfect control. Who guided the car while I slept? Who but an angel protector could have saved me during that time? What a thrill it will be some day to talk to the guardian angel who has been with us during our life on earth. Then we can learn about the countless unconscious sweeps we had with death, and how the angels saved us.

I would like you to notice, too, that the angels as a heavenly company are distinguished from a race. Here are the words of Jesus found in Matthew 22:30: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." The angels are not developed from one original stock as is the case of man. There is no common nature that binds the angels together as is the case with the race of men. It is quite evident that angels are the administrative assistants of heaven's government. Let us read what it says here in Revelation 5:11: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." And the Old Testament confirms this in Daniel 7:9,10: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened."

The angelic host is made up of various ranks. Paul writes of "thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers" in Colossians 1:16: "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." Then Jesus said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Matthew 26:53. These words suggest the organization of an army.

We need to be aware of the fact that angels many times meet us on the highways of life for various purposes. It is related that just before the great struggle of his life the angels of God met Jacob. I refer to Genesis 32:1, where it says, "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." It is not related that Jacob had any conversation with them. But their coming at this particular time must have had but one purpose - to reassure Jacob of God's interest in him.

Then sometimes I find that God's angels come as rescuers. It was rescuing angels who went to Sodom and led Lot and his family out of that wicked city before it was destroyed. How clearly this incident shows the tenacity and persistence of God's mercy. Let us read Genesis 19:15, 16: "And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city."

Then, I notice that God sends His angels of comfort and consolation to those who love Him and try to do His will. After Christ had spent forty days in the wilderness with the wild beasts and had endured the temptations of the devil, angels came and strengthened Him and comforted Him, as we read in Matthew 4:11, "Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him." Then,

again, in the dark hour of Christ's anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, an angel ministered unto Him as we read in Luke 22:43: "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him."

So, God sends His angels to His people now. No one can live an entirely lonely life who walks the path of duty and lives a life of prayer. To such, God will send His angels to comfort them in their sorest time of need. He who sent His angel to Paul through the midnight storm, to hunt him out in his chains on the Mediterranean ship; and He who sent His angel to Peter in the dungeon to open all the prison doors to him and lead him out to go free to his friends, will not leave His true children of today without comfort and consolation in trying hours.

Now for the story of a modern miracle, a story which has been verified by several who were personally acquainted with the people involved. Mrs. Dubay, of Anchorage, Alaska, was a dedicated Christian who lived alone in a small cottage that was heated by a wood-burning cook stove. At the time of this experience, she was sick in bed, so badly crippled that she could scarcely walk. She had depended on friends to bring in a fresh supply of wood for each day, but on this particular morning no friends came to help her. She realized that unless someone brought wood soon the fire would go out and she would freeze to death. The temperature was 30° below zero that February day. She began praying earnestly for help. Finally, as no one appeared, the last of her wood was burned, the fire went out, and the room grew cold. Then she prayed a different prayer - a prayer of complete resignation, telling the Lord if it was His will, she was willing to freeze to death. Just then, the door to her cottage opened and a tall young man walked into the room carrying an armful of wood. He carefully placed the wood in the wood bin and began to remake the fire. He also filled the kettle with water and placed it on the stove to heat. Then he went outside and soon returned with another armload of wood. While performing this service he kept his face turned to one side so that Mrs. Dubay could not see him. She wanted to ask him whether he was an angel, but was reluctant to do that. Finally, she asked the question inaudibly, and then the young man turned toward her, smiled and nodded his head. "His face was so noble that I knew he was not from this world," said Mrs. Dubay. "He turned, opened the door and left me without saying a word."

Was this man really an angel? I will let Mrs. Dubay give you her conclusion. She says, "For a time I sat there like one turned to stone. Finally, I thought, If he is an angel sent from God, there will not be any footprints in the snow outside the door. So I forced myself to hobble to the door, opened it and looked out on the unruffled snow in my yard. There were no footprints in the snow. Then I forced myself to lean against the side of the door casing and looked around to my right to see whether the snow had been disturbed where my wood was piled directly underneath my front window. No, the snow had not been disturbed in the slightest bit, over or around my little pile of wood. The snow was perfectly smooth and rounded just as it always is after a snow storm. As I closed the door to my little cabin, I knew that God did love me, and that in my extremity He sent one of His holy angels to my assistance."

At this point, let us consider the solemn thought that angels also make a record of our words and even our thoughts, and they will take part in the great judgment scene as witnesses either for us or against us. Read Daniel 7:9, 10: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened." Notice that books are used in the judgment and innumerable

angel witnesses are to have a part. That guardian spirit who kept the record of our life will be called on to present the books out of which we are to be judged. What kind of testimony will they give about our lives? By the way, you will have a lawyer to represent you in this heavenly court case. Verse 13, "And, behold, one like the Son of man came . . . to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him." "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1.

We must remember, however, that there are two kinds of angels, good and bad. Hebrews 1:14 tells us that some are ministering spirits sent to minister unto those who will be heirs of salvation, but in the book of Ephesians it says that there are also wicked spirits. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Ephesians 6:11, 12. Now we have two great hosts of beings. The good angels are ministering spirits; the wicked angels are spirits of devils - one seeking our salvation, the other seeking our destruction.

Almost 6,000 years ago, this earth was invaded by alien visitors from another world. Their purpose was to frustrate plans for the first real interplanetary space trip by earthlings.

The evil angels were those alien visitors to this planet. Satan and his rebel followers were cast out of heaven and came to this earth to continue their great controversy against God (Revelation 12:7-9). Their unalterable purpose has been to frustrate the first real interplanetary space journey that millions will soon make to the paradise of God.

I want to point out today that heaven has done all it possibly can to save you and me from eternal death. And if we insist on losing our eternal salvation it will be in spite of all that God could have done to save us from ourselves. Yes, all heaven is interested in our salvation. Angels from the throne of God are far more anxious to see you make a full surrender to Him and prepared for the eternal home than you are yourself. Good angels seek our salvation; evil angels seek our destruction. On which side are we going to cast our influence today? No doubt Satan has commissioned an evil spirit or angel to attend us through life with the purpose of destroying us. We stand between the good and the bad, and our decision will determine who shall have the upper hand in our lives. Let us choose to serve God and know that He has charge of everything through His ministering spirits, the angels.

Spirit Shadows Over America

No study of angels can be complete without considering the evil ministry of fallen angels, also. The Word of God has some very startling things to say about the evil spirits whose ranks comprise the one-third of rebellious angels who were cast out of heaven. It is this unholy confederacy which threatens to deceive the whole world right now. The roots of every form of occultism are either directly or indirectly related to the fallen angels. Demonism is the manifestation of their activities through human channels.

Long, ominous shadows are lengthening across the face of America today. They are being cast by a dozen different, specious forms of occult spiritualism, and the tentacles of this fast-growing evil are fastening a strange hold upon millions of devotees.

A few short years ago, the stories of apparitions and spirit forms were not taken seriously by very many people. Rarely did the public media see fit to reproduce the reports of frightening encounters with "ghosts," either in the body or out. Today, scarcely a paper or magazine can be found which does not cater to astrology, psychic phenomena, or sensational supernaturalism.

Millions are now asking, Is it all delusion, or is it devils? Are the apparitions real or imagined? What power lies behind the confirmed accounts of materialized spirit forms?

The phenomena can no longer be ignored! The claims have come far too close to every one of us. Hardly a person has escaped contact with someone who has an incredible tale to tell about communication with the dead.

Often the manifestations are anything but ghostly and sepulchral. After their sudden appearance, the familiar forms of deceased friends and relatives are recognized by distinctive clothes, voices and mannerisms. Often they refer to closely guarded family secrets and pass on verifiable information known only by one or two others alive.

Some people have affirmed that they make no important decisions without consulting a spiritualist medium who, in turn, supposedly puts them in touch with the guiding spirits of the dead. Even high government figures have confessed to consulting with such sources before moving in matters of national interest.

Do we have reason for concern over this situation? Can these supernatural agencies be depended upon to give safe and honorable guidance?

And what about all the related forms of occultism whose tendrils seem to intertwine every existing social structure of mankind today? Satanism, witchcraft, ESP, hypnotism, Zen, astrology, voodoo, and a dozen other so-called "mind sciences" purport to bring happiness and success beyond imagination.

To answer these crucial questions we must uncover the foundations of these mysterious movements. Let us be willing to face the inescapable conclusion that there can be only two sources of supernatural power in the world. Whether we believe in God or not, and whether we believe in Satan or not, honest reason demands that anything beyond the demonstrable, natural processes would have to involve either the spiritual powers of a god or a devil.

If these insistent voices which have influenced empires truly represent God's counsel, then we must rejoice over this growing influence. On the other hand, if evil, satanic forces are producing the phenomena, we are facing one of the most diabolical and frightening schemes imaginable. What could be more self-delusive than to be following demon voices in the belief that it was God's voice?

Please take note that God's method of communicating to man is through His Word: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:19, 20. Here, God tells us that knowledge beyond human power should be gathered from His Word and not from familiar spirits. But contrary to this instruction, millions today are turning to modern sorcery and spiritualism for the answers to problems.

Even some great church organizations are now ready to recommend this avenue as a way of truth. Inroads are being made into vast religious systems and some astounding sentiments are being expressed by Protestant church leaders. The public has already been duly impressed by some of these Protestant positions. Evidence of this was seen during the war when Wanamaker's store in New York City sold four out of every five books on the subject of spiritualism. One Pittsburgh concern sold over fifteen hundred Ouija boards in one week's time.

Before I cite some of these strange statements, let me ask, What is the basis of the spiritualist doctrine? The answer is very short and simple. It is fundamentally rooted in the idea that the dead are not really dead at all but living in some other world of higher wisdom and understanding. It also teaches that communication is carried on between the living and the dead. Now, we shall learn just how unbiblical and false this doctrine really is, but first, let us look at an alarming statement in the Methodist monthly magazine, *Together*. To a reader's question, "Shall we pray for the dead?" Dr. Nall gave the following answer in the issue of May, 1956: "Why should we not pray for them, even as we believe they must pray for us. Prayer for the dead unites the church, visible and invisible, to a timeless fellowship, binding us all, as Tennyson says, to God Himself." Now, the very fact a prominent Protestant author would give status and endorsement to such a view is a startling revelation of the power of spiritualism.

Perhaps it is in England that the strongest pitch has been made to favor this rising tide. Some time ago, the Church of England appointed a committee to investigate the growing phenomenon of spiritualism. Appointed by the archbishops, this committee was made up of the nation's most eminent churchmen, educators, and lawyers. After a two-year study, a report was made which shook the city of London, and the whole country, for that matter. The major emphasis of the report is reflected in this paragraph lifted out of it: "It's necessary to keep clearly in mind that none of the fundamental Christian obligations or values are in any way changed by our acceptance of the possibility of communication with discarnate spirits. Where these essential principles are borne in mind, those who have the assurance they have been in touch with their departed friends, may rightly accept the sense of enlargement and of unbroken fellowship which it brings."

Perhaps this provides sufficient testimony to alert us that spiritualism is shaping the thinking of Christian leaders to an alarming degree today. But is this doctrine according to the law and the testimony? How does all of this fit in with the teaching of God's Word? What does the Bible have to say about it? Let us examine some of the sources of spiritualism for a moment.

The fact is that it started in the Garden of Eden, and Satan utilized the serpent medium. In Genesis 3:1-4, we read the story of Eve's fall into sin. God had said that death would follow their transgression, but Satan said to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die." When Adam and Eve did die, Satan shrewdly tried to

cover his lie. Ever since that day, he has tried to make it appear that death is not really death - that it is actually life, instead. Because Satan used it to perpetuate his lie, God strictly forbade the practice of necromancy or familiar spirits. Notice these statements from the book of Leviticus. "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God." Leviticus 19:31. Again, "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death." Leviticus 20:27.

Now, why is God so opposed to this thing? Why such a severe penalty for engaging in spiritualistic seances? Because it is a lie and it is devil-inspired. It is unsound and antisciptural throughout. And God said: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6. Again, describing death, God said, "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Psalm 146:4. Death is a sleep until the resurrection day, an unconscious, dreamless sleep. Since the dead cannot possibly come back to speak to their loved ones, how can we explain these mysterious appearances of those who have died? Numerous instances could be cited of such experiences where the exact form and voice was seen and heard. There is only one possible source for such demonstrations. Satan is still trying to sustain that lie which he told Eve. He is still trying to prove there is no death. He appears in whatever form he chooses, shrewdly imitating the characteristics of the dead. Such lying wonders are well calculated to deceive and convince people that a lie is actually the truth.

Notice how this work of Satan is described in God's Word: "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. Here we are told that the truth alone will guard us from the signs and wonders of Satan's power. In 1 Timothy 4:1 we read of some in the last days who will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Finally, in Revelation 16:14 the prophet describes "spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world."

Don't forget that the devil can work miracles (Revelation 16:14). He can do things that we never will understand. Now we can begin to understand why people have been so shaken up by the apparent appearance of dead friends. After 6,000 years of observing human behavior, Satan is able to counterfeit their forms and voices cleverly. At psychological moments he takes advantage of heartbroken, bereaved relatives to perpetuate his fraud. No wonder God despises this evil and sentences its leaders to death by stoning.

Flee from spiritualism. In the last days Satan will appear as an angel of light and will seek to counterfeit the truth of God. But remember, he is the father of lies (John 8:44). He was cast out of heaven once because of that, and he is going to work mightily in these days to deceive, to twist the truth, and try to lead us to believe this great delusion. The dead are sleeping. They are not conscious at all. There is no communication between the living and the dead. Only by believing the Bible truth can we escape the deceptions of Satanism.

With time running out and the end of the world at hand, Satan is desperately working to revive the old, forbidden avenues by which he can control people's lives. He has changed the names like wizards, necromancy, and sorcerers to more acceptable titles like spiritualism, astrology, hypnosis, and ESP. The devil can control a human being only by being able to manipulate his mind and will. That is why most of the modern counterfeits of Satan demand a yielding of the mind. And that is why it is such an evil thing for any human being to surrender his mind to the controlling influence of some other person or power. If ever there was a time when men and women needed all of their mental capacity and strength of will, it is now. There is plenty of evidence at hand that the more a person's mental processes are breached and controlled by someone else, the weaker the will becomes, and the less power of decision can be exercised.

How delighted Satan must be to find the mental barriers relaxed and often removed entirely. He can't force a single human will, but the person can voluntarily give up his personal control. That means someone else can take over. In hypnotism it is supposed to be taken by the hypnotist who begins giving orders; in spiritualism the spirits are invited to control the yielded mind; in astrology, the mind bends to the belief that the stars are controlling life and destiny. In every case, the devil has an opportunity to step into a mind that has been voluntarily opened, and which is eagerly ready to accept whatever guidance may be given. What more diabolical scheme could ever be devised than this!

And by the way, to guarantee himself further access to other minds, the devil is chuckling with glee over science tampering with human genes trying to produce "programmed" people - people whose physical and mental makeup is directed in the laboratory by the proper preparation of test-tube genes. No wonder the Bible warns us over and over to take heed of deception in these last days.

Now, someone is certain to raise the question right here about the predictions of some of these modern prognosticators. Are they able to foretell the future accurately? Are they true prophets? Do they operate within the framework of the Bible? You see, the Bible itself lays down a test for such professed prophets and clairvoyants. Here it is in Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." This means that those who are teaching and acting contrary to the Scripture cannot be true prophets. There are false, as well as true, prophets according to Jeremiah. Listen: "Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers . . . For they prophesy a lie unto you." Jeremiah 27:9, 10.

If these occult specialists could actually know the future, I can tell you one thing - they would be billionaires by being able to manipulate the stock market. By their foretelling of politics, they would surely dictate the headlines of tomorrow's newspapers. But this has not been the case. Eight hundred years before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah set up a divinely appointed test for those pretending such power: "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let him bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." Isaiah 41:21-23.

What about that test for today's predictors? God says, "Let them show us what will happen" - not just once in a while - not 75 percent correct. A good guesser could do that - an astute politician could be

right that many times. No, if God is in it, it will always be 100 percent correct. Neither Satan nor man can tell the future, except on the basis of the past, and in the light of Bible prophecy. But the very thing that men and evil spirits have never been able to do, God has done again and again by His prophets.

Outside the Word of God no claims like these have ever been made and fulfilled, either on a short-term or long-term basis. Here is where the nonsense of astrology is most clearly revealed. Its absurd generalizations and warnings, based on the supposed mysterious influence of stars on human destiny, have never been proven to be accurate. Millions can be cheered or dismayed by the implications of the horoscope. Did you know that the Bible speaks directly to such people? Listen to this in Jeremiah 10:2: "Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them."

There it is - an actual description of astrologers who become fearful and dismayed over the signs of the heavens. Have you never considered how insane it is to believe that those hard, cold chunks of rocks in the distant heavens could influence your life? The old pagan worshipers of the planets believed that their gods dwelt in those stars, and the superstitious carryover has led 40 million Americans to believe the fable.

What a time this is for people to trust in the God who made those stars. The creature can never help us or hurt us, but the Creator has a personal interest in everything He made. And His attention is not given alone to the giant worlds that wheel and spin in their orbits but to the smallest, weakest plant or animal that lives on this planetary speck. How much more concerned He is with the human family, created in His image, and ordained from all eternity to glorify Him in the world. It is this same loving Creator-God who guides the destiny of men, women, and children.

The astrological horoscope is a vain, empty cry towards dumb matter which, itself, must be governed by the God who created it. To trust in those dead stars and planets for direction is tantamount to idolatry, because it places more trust in them than in the loving God.

The truth is that all forms of new age, or occult, mysticism have their foundation in the government of Satan. The Scriptures indicate that he has organized levels of evil authority presided over by legions of fallen angels. While God administers His program of life, healing, and restoration through the messengers of light, Satan uses evil angels to propagate confusion and deception.

What a picture of the great controversy as it is played out on a cosmic scale and also in the lives of struggling individuals! Spirits from another world are mobilizing forces beyond our comprehension in preparation for the final engagement between good and evil. Not one of us is an innocent bystander in this contest. None can be neutral as the issues of truth and error separate the inhabitants of planet earth into two mighty camps. With whose angels will we cooperate? Where will our loyalties be placed? May God grant that we shall be found at last on the side of those ministering angels who will continue to be our companions throughout all eternity, world without end.

Square Circles and Carnal Christians

Joe Crews
Romans 7:21

Carnal Christians. The words just don't seem to go together. They sound too much like a square circle or a round triangle. And yet, there are many sincere people who believe this is a truthful characterization of the normal Christian experience. Others, of course, strongly disagree. They say the term is self-contradictory and consists of words without meaning. They even deny the possible existence of any hybrid creature who could be Christian and carnal at the same time.

Actually, the controversy is rooted in something Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans. Right between two of the most triumphant chapters in the Bible, the great apostle penned twenty-five verses which have given rise to all the theological conflict on this subject.

In order to understand properly those cryptic twenty-five verses which make up Romans 7, we must also examine the companion chapters 6 and 8 which, though written by the same author, seem to be in complete contradiction to the chapter in between. The tremendous theme of total victory over sin flows powerfully through Romans 6 and 8, but chapter 7 is like a catalogue of frustration and defeat. How could the same man describe such opposite personal experiences within the same few pages of this letter? The question becomes even more significant when we consider that in all his other prolific writings, Paul never repeated, in any form whatsoever, such expressions of hopelessness as he uses in Romans 7. Let us take a closer look.

Can you imagine how these words could ever apply to that spiritual giant who was Paul: "I am carnal, sold under sin," "... bringing me into captivity to the law of sin," "What I hate, that do I," "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:14, 23, 15, 24.

What does this miserable, sin-bound creature have in common with the experience described in the preceding chapter? "we ... are dead to sin," "... freed from sin," "Let not sin therefore reign," "Sin shall not have dominion over you," "Shall we sin? God forbid," "Being then made free from sin." Romans 7:2, 7, 12, 14, 15, 18.

And how could Paul himself harmonize his wretched state of Romans 7 with the soaring experience of Spirit-filled victory described in Romans 8? "There is therefore now no condemnation," "... made me free from the law of sin," "... righteousness-fulfilled in us," "... mortify the deeds of the body," "We are the children of God." Romans 8:1, 2, 4, 13, 16.

The crux of the "carnal Christian" argument is brought into view by Paul's bold assertion that "I am carnal, sold under sin." Romans 7:14. Yet he declares in chapter 8, "For to be carnally minded is death," "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8: 6, 7.

Is Paul really saying that he is not a Christian and is the enemy of God? Is he conceding that his life is fleshly and therefore under the sentence of death? Of course not! On the other hand, if Paul is describing his experience after conversion, we must admit that there are irreconcilable differences between chapter 7 and the rest of Paul's writing. In all honesty, we are led to the unavoidable conclusion that Paul is not describing his born-again experience at all in chapter 7. We must reject the entire concept that one can be carnal, condemned to death, at enmity with God, and still be in a saved condition. The wretched man who cries out in despair for deliverance has obviously never been delivered from his sins. Why, then, does Paul portray himself in such a state of hopeless bondage?

Although the picture at this point may be slightly confusing, let me assure you that there is a very clear, convincing reason for Paul writing as he did. When we follow the logic of the prince of apostles, we can understand perfectly why he threw in the material of chapter 7 exactly as he did, and at that precise point in his dissertation.

The Law in Salvation

Please take note that Romans 7 is wholly given to an explanation of the law and its role in the process of salvation. In the preceding chapter Paul explained how justification came through one man upon all the world. Most of the material presented from chapters 1-5 deals with the theology of righteousness by faith, with the chief focus on justification. Then in Romans 6 Paul moves into the area of sanctification and begins to describe the effect of being saved by grace. The entire chapter is taken up with a portrayal of perfect obedience and sin-free living. Over and over he asserts that sin (breaking the law) cannot prevail against the power of God's justifying grace. The consistent, habitual pattern of the child of God will be to reject sin. Obedience to the law will be the fruitage or consequence of all true justification.

But even though holy living and law-keeping will mark the lifestyle of every true Christian, Paul did not want anyone to misunderstand the specific role of the law in the process of salvation. Important as it was, the law had its limitations. It could not cleanse or sanctify. Although it marked out the path of God's perfect will, there was no redeeming grace in the law to justify a single person. Its primary function was to convict, condemn, and create a desire for deliverance. Then, like a schoolmaster, it would conduct the sinner to Jesus for free cleansing and grace.

So what does Paul do at this point? He inserts twenty-five verses which carefully define the function of the law in leading a person to Christ. And by way of illustration, he uses his own experience with the law to show how it affected him when he fell under its influence. He tells, in retrospect, how the law opened his eyes to the real nature of sin within him and "slew" him with its devastating exposure of his gross disobedience.

It is most important to remember that Romans 7 is Paul's description of his reactions to the law before he was converted. This is why he described his bondage to the carnal nature and his utter helplessness in trying to fulfill the requirements of that law. Step by step, he gives a graphic account of his anguish of soul under the prodding convictions of the law.

Many sincere Christians have concluded that Paul really was describing his converted experience in Romans 7, and they comfort themselves that it is quite normal and acceptable to be overcome by sin. They express it this way: "If Paul had no power to do what he knew to be right, surely we cannot be held accountable for disobeying also. After all, it is not us, but sin in us, that is guilty of the wrongdoing. God will not let us be lost as long as we have the desire to do His will, even though we do not 'perform that which is good.'"

If such an interpretation is correct, we are immediately faced with the problem of harmonizing hundreds of other texts which assure us that we should live without sin. Can you see what a serious issue this becomes for every one of us?

Surely it must be apparent to all that such a teaching, if true, would have to be the best news in the world for those who are not willing to crucify the fleshly nature completely. With two memorized texts they could biblically justify any act of disobedience and still feel secure: "I am carnal, sold under sin ... the evil which I would not, that I do ... it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

On the other hand, if this interpretation is wrong, it is, without question, one of the most dangerous and reprehensible teachings on Satan's long list of deceptions. The horrible import of teaching people to tolerate that which God hates boggles the mind. If sin really is non-negotiable in His sight, and will never enter into His kingdom, then any doctrine which tries to make it acceptable to God could lead millions to damnation.

The Law Did Not Die

Because this crucial chapter has been twisted to support such a portentous doctrine—we shall take the time to analyze it carefully verse by verse. Not even the smallest question should linger concerning God's attitude toward the practice of sin.

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. Romans 7:1-6.

Here Paul uses the law of marriage to represent the spiritual relationship with Christ. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. When he dies, she is free to marry someone else without being called an adulteress. So the sinner is represented as being loosed from one relationship in order to be bound by another. Many people read these verses lightly and assume that Paul is doing away with the Ten Commandments. Not so. Paul is speaking about the sinner in his experience of turning from sin

and becoming married to Christ. The law did not die. Paul said, "Ye also are become dead ... that ye should be married to another."

Verse 5 makes it very clear that the sinner had been bound to his sinful nature. "For when we were in the flesh, the motions (passions) of sin did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." How did he get released from that fleshly nature that wrought death in him? The answer: "Ye ... are become dead ... by the body of Christ." In other words, by accepting the atoning death of Jesus, the carnal mind was destroyed, and "being dead wherein we were held," Paul says we are free to be married to another, even Christ.

Some might question why Paul wrote that we become "dead to the law" by the death of Jesus. But we must understand the context in which this is used. It is obvious from verse 5 that we become dead to what the law condemns in our nature-"the motions of sins, which were by the law." Here Paul introduces the chief function of the law which he will reiterate throughout the chapter. It exposes the works of sin. It brings to light the activities of the flesh. And in doing so it also ratifies the death sentence against all who are breaking it. To be "dead to the law" and to be "delivered from the law ... wherein we were held" means to be delivered from the sins which it condemned in us and from the penalty of death which applied to all who broke the law. Being married to Christ does not deliver us from obeying the law, but it does deliver us from the penalty of death which results from violating it.

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. Romans 7:7.

Because he had identified the law as the instrument for pointing out sin, Paul now feels it necessary to exonerate the law from any charges of being evil itself. Even though its very nature revealed sin in others, he would defend it throughout the chapter as holy, just, good, and spiritual.

Many modern Christians are making the mistake which Paul strongly warned against. With varying degrees of animosity, they make the law of absolutely no effect in the experience of salvation. Not only do they reject its claims as the perfect blueprint of right living, but they deny its assigned mission to convince of sin. In the most positive language Paul declared earlier in his epistle that there can be no sin without the law: "For where no law is there, is no transgression." Romans 4:15. Now he reinforces that point by recounting his own experience with the Ten Commandments: "I had not known sin, but by the law."

The Law Confronts Paul

Here we find the important transition point in this chapter which holds the real answer to the "carnal Christian" question. For the first time Paul begins to speak of his own personal relationship to the law. But notice that he carries his readers back with him into the past. He speaks of his first encounter with the law. At that time, Paul says, "I had not known sin." In other words, he had not been aware of breaking the law before that moment of spiritual conviction and enlightenment.

As a teacher of the Sanhedrin, no doubt Paul had a vast intellectual knowledge of all the religious laws of Israel, including the Ten Commandments. He prided himself as being flawless in meeting all the legal requirements of those statutes. But all was changed on that day when the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the superficial nature of his obedience. For the first time he recognized that he was only observing the letter of the law. His empty works of self-justification appeared in their true light.

Paul does not tell us, and neither is it necessary to know, just when this initial conviction began to operate in his life. It is sufficient to say that there was a period of time, whether short or long, when his eyes were opened to what he really should be before God. The law had accomplished its task very well, and he clearly discerned how broad and deep and comprehensive were its principles.

In recalling the agony of his soul during those days of conflict Paul wrote:

But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. Romans 7:8-13.

Paul continues to describe the personal reactions of his pharisaical nature to that initial conviction of sin. It was absolutely shattering for this famous teacher to be exposed as a transgressor before God. The experience was so intense that he could only compare it to being happily alive without the law, and then suddenly to be crushed to death by the consciousness of his guilt-guilt generated by the revelations of the law.

Paul marvels that something so righteous and good could stir up within him such consciousness of evil. Like a powerful magnifying lens the law had probed the recesses of his legalistic soul, making sin appear "exceeding sinful."

No Power to Obey

Confessing that sin was "working death in me," Paul launched into the famous verses which have been so terribly misapplied to the experience of beleaguered saints.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing

me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. Romans 7:14-25.

Some have taken the position that Paul's statement here that the law is spiritual proves that he was a converted man. Yet the rest of the verse plainly declares that he was carnal and sold out to sin. Is it unusual for a sinner to make such an admission about the law? Not at all. I have heard hundreds of unconverted inquirers after truth acknowledge the claims of the Ten Commandments. But believing the truth and consenting to the law is not enough. It must also be obeyed. And Paul knew that.

If anybody could appreciate the necessity of doing the works of the law, it would certainly be Paul. And he did try! The rest of the chapter is replete with his frustrated report of trying and failing, trying and failing. On the basis of these texts thousands of sermons have been preached to explain why we should not be too hung up on perfect obedience. If Paul found it impossible to do good, and constantly did evil instead, why should we get a guilt trip over our failures?

Unfortunately the dispensers of these soothing tranquilizers are not really comparing apples with apples. They are comparing spiritual things with carnal. Let Paul clear up the matter for us quickly. He said, "I am carnal." How did he define the carnal condition? Just eighteen verses down the page he explained it this way: "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Romans 8:6. This is the third time that Paul admits to being under the condemnation of death. In Romans 7:10 he said, "The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." In verse 13 he spoke of sin "working death in me." Can anyone accuse the great apostle of being confused about the status of the justified believer? This was his specialty. He understood very clearly that justification and condemnation could not coexist in the same person at the same time. Dozens of times the regenerated Paul declared his freedom from the guilt and condemnation of the law. Only in this chapter where he described his unconverted experience does he ever place himself back under the death sentence.

Convicted But Unconverted

His eyes had been opened. He had been instructed and convicted by the law. He knew what was right and desired to do it, but he had not yet laid hold of the delivering power of Christ. He was miserable. He hated himself, and everything he was doing. "But what I hate, that do I." Romans 7:15. The problem was with the flesh. It was too weak to obey. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." Romans 7:18.

Why could Paul not obey in the flesh? Because that expression was used by him repeatedly to describe the unconverted nature. In verse 5 he said, "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins ... did work in our members." In Romans 8:3 he wrote that the law could not be kept by us because it was "weak through the flesh."

The old carnal power of sin made it impossible to obey. In his mind he was willing, but he described another law "in my members, warring against the law of my mind." That other law was stronger than

his good desires and intentions because the rest of the sentence reads, "and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Romans 7:23.

How clear it is that the law of sin in his members, or in his flesh, was the unregenerate, carnal nature. It made a perfect slave out of his body, compelling him to do evil things that he hated, and forcing out of him finally that despairing cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:24.

Here again, for the fourth time, Paul indicates that the penalty of death was residing in his body, or in his flesh, where sin had taken control.

Recently a young seminarian pointed to verse 22 as proof that Paul was converted during this losing battle against sin. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." He said no one could delight in the law unless he was born again. But that is not true. In Romans 2:17, 18 Paul was addressing the Jews, and he indicated that even they had an exalted concept of the law, "Behold, thou are called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law." Paul's delight in the law in the inward man merely reveals his total mental acceptance of the principles of the law. He held it in the very highest esteem. He had no problem with believing, or being willing to obey, but without Christ there was no enabling grace to perform that which was good.

Did the apostle ever find the answer to his plaintive cry for help? Did the wretched slave ever obtain freedom? Was he finally loosed from the captivity of the law of sin? Of course he was. Just as soon as he accepted the Lord Jesus his chains fell off, his carnal nature was crucified, and he was set free from sin. Four verses further we read how the miracle happened: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

Who cannot see the dramatic turn-around of the entire situation? How has Paul been set free from the very law of sin which had captured him in Romans 7:23? He answers that question himself: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This point of conversion in Paul's experience has been acknowledged in the writings of many well-known Bible commentators. Here are three source statements which confirm that Romans 7 describes his unregenerate nature:

The apostle Paul, in relating his experience, presents an important truth concerning the work to be wrought in conversion. He says, "I was alive without the law once"-he felt no condemnation; "but when the commandment came," when the law of God was urged upon his conscience, "sin revived, and I died." Then he saw himself a sinner, condemned by the divine law. SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1076.

Oh, how many flatter themselves that they have goodness and righteousness, when the true light of God reveals that all their lives they have only lived to please themselves! Their whole conduct is abhorred of God. How many are alive without the law! In their gross darkness they view themselves with complacency; but let the law of God be revealed to their consciences, as it was to Paul, and they would see that they are sold under sin and must die to the carnal mind. Self must be slain. Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 475.

It is impossible for us, of our selves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them ... "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The Saviour said, "Except a man be born from above, ... he cannot see the kingdom of God." ... It is not enough to perceive the loving-kindness of God, to see the benevolence, the fatherly tenderness, of His character ... Paul the apostle saw all this when he exclaimed, "I consent unto the law that it is good." "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." But he added, in the bitterness of his soul-anguish and despair, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Romans 7:16, 12, 14. He longed for the purity, the righteousness, to which in himself he was powerless to attain, and cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Romans 7:24, margin. Such is the cry that has gone up from burdened hearts in all lands and in all ages. To all there is but one answer, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. Steps to Christ, pp. 18, 19.

Serving the Law of Sin

There remains one small perplexity in the wording of Romans 7:25. Some have questioned how Paul could still talk about serving the law of sin in the flesh after apparently being delivered from the flesh in the same text. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

In spite of the awkward phrasing of this verse, there is no contradiction of the main theme. Paul gives a quick, parenthetical answer to his desperate question, "Who shall deliver me?" Then he moves back to complete the point which he was making in verse 23 about being in captivity to the law of sin. The very same sentence structure is found in Revelation 20:4, 5. After describing the first resurrection of good people who would not receive the mark of the beast, John wrote, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

As everyone recognizes, the "rest of the dead" are the wicked people who arise in the second resurrection, not the first. So the last sentence, about the first resurrection, is actually referring back to those who are described in verse 4—those saints who had not received the mark of the beast. Obviously the first part of verse 5 is thrown in parenthetically, and the final sentence, "This is the first resurrection," completes the thought which was being developed in the previous verse.

In the same way the final sentence of Romans 7:25 is referring back to the theme of verse 23 and is not directly related to the first part of verse 25.

Paul has just reached a climax of logic and pathos in describing his abject condition of condemnation. Verse 23 speaks of his captivity to sin and verse 24 reveals his agony of desire to be free: "WHO SHALL DELIVER ME FROM THE BODY OF THIS DEATH?" Giving a quick, parenthetical answer

to his rhetorical question, he encapsulates in one final sentence the basic point he has made throughout the chapter; i.e., his mind wills to serve God, but his flesh forces him to serve sin. "(I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord) so then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Thus closes chapter 7 with its dismal dirge of defeat, but Paul has not made this detour in his epistle without good reason. Now his readers are prepared to appreciate the scope of his transformed experience under grace. It seems to be one of Paul's penchants to illustrate by dramatic contrast the "much more" of grace over sin (Romans 5:20, 21), of justification over condemnation (Romans 5:16, 17), and of the Spirit over the flesh (Romans 8:5). And it is only because of the stark manner of portraying his misery under sin that Paul can now project, by comparison, the glory of Spirit-filled children of God.

The Power of the Will in Victory

There are yet two important points to be made before we leave this troubling chapter 7. Both of them relate to the manner in which we are able to choose the path of total victory over the flesh. Obviously the will is very much involved in this process. Few understand the explosive power of this decision-making part of every individual.

Regardless of the physical frailties or incapacities, God has placed within each human brain the ability to choose one's course of action and direction. This independent, sovereign faculty constitutes the most obvious difference between people and animals. No other creature on earth besides man has been given this responsible power of choice. Monkeys cannot calculate and reason; they move by instinct. Man thinks and chooses.

It is very likely that no other inherent power of mind or body is so deeply rooted as the power of choice. In bestowing this gift the Creator laid upon each person the responsibility for his own salvation. Even though the fallen nature alone has no power to stop sinning, it does have the power to choose to stop sinning. Even the most vile and degraded of men may decide what actions to pursue.

Often the will has been weakened and traumatized by wrong choices and external pressures, but it remains the one human alternative by which deliverance can be initiated. Here it must be emphasized that the desire to make right choices is a result of God's grace acting on the mind. Not everyone is willing to give up the enjoyment of sinful indulgence. This is why some may need to pray, "Lord, make me willing to be willing," or even, "Lord, give me enough faith to believe that you can increase my faith and help my unbelief."

How truly it has been said that our greatest enemy is self. Here is where the most desperate battles are fought in the conquest of sin. It is only when the self-nature surrenders its own way and becomes willing to accept God's way that we are enabled to choose right over wrong. The contest over the control of the will lies at the heart of every victory and every defeat.

It is not a sin to struggle, nor is it wrong to be tempted. Conversion does not remove temptation, but rather makes it possible for the struggle to culminate in victory.

Then there must be a clear perception that my decision and initial action against sin does not in itself obtain the victory. Deliverance is only made possible as divine power responds to my active choice not to sin. How often we limit the Holy One of Israel by refusing to do what He has given us the power to do ourselves in overcoming sin. We have a mind and we have a will. By choosing not to sin and putting that decision into action, the way is instantly opened for God to move against the enemy and secure our deliverance.

Is there a struggle, then, in subduing the flesh and escaping from the authority of sin? Indeed there will be continual conflict in resisting the inherited propensities to disobey. But the encouraging thing is that none of the effort needs to end with defeat. He causes us always to triumph as we exercise the natural weapons of decisive action against the enemy.

I am sure Paul did not intend for us to linger too long in the shrouded paths and lanes of chapter 7. It is a necessary place to pass through, but it is not made for Christian dwelling and living. After the law has shown us our need and escorted us to the cleansing grace of Christ, our relationship with the law changes. No longer is there the clash between what must be done and what cannot be done. Chapter 8 still talks about the law-the same law-but the futile struggle to keep it is finished. The carnal mind, which was not subject to that law, has now been changed into a spiritual mind. As children of Adam we will possess his fallen nature until translation day, but the converted mind no longer is forced to obey the dictates of that fallen nature. The power of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for every one of us to choose not to sin. By daily dying to self and sin, the justified believer is enabled to overpower completely the propensities of his fallen nature and to live a life of total obedience to God. The One who has condemned sin in the flesh now fulfills in us the just requirements of the law, making obedience not only possible but a glorious privilege. Thanks be to God!

From the wilderness experience of Romans 7 we enter the Canaan of chapter 8. Let your soul feast there upon the milk and honey of freedom, victory, and adoption into the very family of God. Here is the place to pitch your tent and remain for many days. Paul reserves his choicest words, his most unrestrained language, to portray the joy and security of those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Meditate long and often upon these verses which depict so beautifully the experience which God desires every one of His children to manifest moment by moment.

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31. "How shall he not ... freely give us all things?" Verse 32. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Verse 29. "The Spirit itself beareth witness ... that we are the children of God." Verse 16. "Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." Verse 17. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Verse 28. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Verse 35. "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Verse 37. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Verses 38, 39.

The Abomination of Desolation

Gary Gibbs

Matthew 24:3

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. . . . For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24: 15, 16, 21).

What is this prophecy all about, and does it really affect Christians in today's world?

One of the most interesting prophecies in the Bible concerns the abomination of desolation. The element that makes this prophecy especially intriguing is that Jesus identifies it as a specific sign that the end is near.

It was in answer to the disciples' question, "When shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" that Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation. He said, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (Whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains... for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:3,15-21).

Christians of many persuasions recognize this text as a definite and peculiar sign concerning the last days. Yet even though the majority of them can agree that the abomination of desolation is an important sign, they can't seem to agree on its specific nature. Even preachers are thrown into a quagmire of confusion-looking for something that no one is very sure about. It is a perfect example of the blind leading the blind.

Of course, some believe they know the identity of the abomination of desolation. Some teach that this prophecy was fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes interrupted the temple sacrifices between 168 and 165 B.C. The abomination they point to is the pig Antiochus had offered on the altar in the temple complex. Others believe the abomination of desolation refers to a future time when an atheistic antichrist will overthrow the temple in Jerusalem and use it as his throne. Then there are those who believe the abomination of desolation is the Roman standards which were worshipped in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. at the time of its destruction by Titus.

Just what exactly is the abomination of desolation? Is it any one of these alternatives? Is it all of them at the same time? Or could it be possible that not any of these interpretations are correct? The answer to these questions is vitally important. Jesus clearly implies that our very lives could be at stake over this

matter.

Jesus tells us that our study of the abomination of desolation should focus on the book of Daniel (Matthew 24:15). When one makes a careful study of this book he discovers that the abomination of desolation can be divided into three parts. These parts are: the abomination of desolation in Daniel's day (involving the first temple); the abomination of desolation in Jesus' day (involving the second temple); and finally the abomination of desolation in the time of the end (involving the whole Christian church). The issues that come into play in the abomination of desolation as treated in the book of Daniel remain consistent in each of its three phases. Therefore they are types, or examples, of each other.

The First Abomination

The key that unlocks the mystery of this prophetic event is found in the first two verses of Daniel. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god" (Daniel 1:1,2). In these two short sentences Daniel provides a concise historical background to the remainder of the book which follows.

Further study of Daniel's prologue reveals the abomination of desolation was existent in his time and led to Jerusalem's captivity. The Chronicler reveals the reason the Jewish kings fell to Babylon. "Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign... and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God." It was because of Jehoiakim's iniquitous life that God allowed him to be taken captive.

The significant feature of this is that Jehoiakim's evil deeds are described this way: "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead" (2 Chronicles 36:5-8). It was specifically the abominations of Jehoiakim that led him and his city to forfeit God's protection and thus fall to Nebuchadnezzar.

Unfortunately Jehoiachin, his son, didn't do much better. Scripture tells us he also did "that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." Consequently he too was taken captive to Babylon, and "Zedekiah his brother" was placed as king over Judah and Jerusalem (v. 9-11).

The Bible goes on to record that not only did Zedekiah turn out to be just as evil as his two predecessors, but "moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen" (v. 12-14). God's political and religious leaders, as well as the people, adopted heathen ways as their own. They did this at the expense of God's revealed truth. Notice where these abominations were committed: the people "transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem" (v. 14). These abominations were standing in God's consecrated holy place, the "house of the Lord."

The religious leaders of the day had purposefully led the people to adopt heathen worship practices and incorporated them into their worship of God. In substituting for God's commandments the vain notions of men, the leaders of God's heritage provoked his wrath. The people rejected God's calls to repentance and reformation and were left to reap the consequences. "Therefore, he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary" (v. 17).

This judgment was felt not only in the spilling of the blood, but in the complete destruction of the city and sanctuary (v. 19). This all was done "To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath to fulfill threescore and ten years" (v. 21). The result of God's people practicing the religious abominations of the heathen was the desolation of their land, city and sanctuary.

Breaking The Sabbath Brought Desolation

Just what were these abominations that resulted in such desolation? Since this was all done "To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah," then Jeremiah should be able to tell us what substitutions in worship had been made. In Jeremiah 17 the prophet is told to stand in the gate of the people and prophesy. Under a divine mandate, Jeremiah told the people that if they would honor God's seventh-day Sabbath their city would remain forever, and that this faithful obedience would lead them into such a relationship with Himself that they would be used to convert the surrounding heathen nations (ch. 17:19-26).

On the other hand, if they would not keep the Sabbath day holy God would allow their city to be desolated. "But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then I will kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (v. 27).

Sadly, the Jews chose to continue breaking God's Sabbath and thus inaugurated their own destruction and captivity. The abomination that led to their desolation was breaking the Sabbath. Thus we see the significance of 2 Chronicles 36:21: "To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath."

Ezekiel, who lived during the same time, also tells us about the abominations God's people were practicing in the holy place. In Ezekiel 8, the prophet was brought by vision to the door of the inner gate. God proceeded to show his servant the progressively greater outrages His people were committing. In verses 5 and 6 He speaks of an image that provoked Him to jealousy. In an escalation of outrage, unclean beasts had been brought into the house of God, women were weeping for Tammuz and the greatest abomination of all was twenty-five men standing in God's holy place "with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east" (Ezekiel 8:16).

God had instructed the Jews to erect the temple in a manner that would discourage the imitation of their heathen neighbors in sun worship. The ark of the covenant, the very focal point of the Jews' worship, was placed at the western end of the tabernacle. Thus the children of Israel would face the west, their backs to the rising sun, when they worshipped the true God. Yet the entrance of paganism among God's

people had grown to such proportions that Judah's leading men were actually turning their backs on the temple of God. This was a significant act of apostasy.

Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah list the heathen practices that had been incorporated into the worship of God. Whether it was breaking the second commandment by idol worship, adoring unclean beasts, worshipping Tammuz, the mythological god of the pagans, or breaking God's holy Sabbath and worshipping the sun on the day consecrated to it, these practices all were classed by God as abominations. It was because the Jews persisted in justifying their own course and continued in these heathen customs that God permitted the desolation of their city.

Daniel himself agrees that it was the sins committed by God's people that caused their desolation. "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and the iniquities of our fathers.... cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate.... open thy eyes, and behold our desolations..." (Daniel 9:16-18).

It is important to note that the abominations were done by the apostate people of God. This in turn resulted in their forfeiture of God's protection and called down His judgments and chastisement in their desolation. This scenario of the abomination of desolation in Daniel's day, involving the first Jewish temple period, prefigures the two other abominations of desolation prophesied in Daniel. The next one we shall consider is the one that concerns the second Jewish temple period.

The Second Temple Desolated

After their release from Babylonian captivity and rebuilding the city and temple, the Jewish leaders erected a mountain of rules and regulations designed to protect them from repeating the sins that had led to their bondage. The fourth commandment's seventh-day Sabbath became a special object of amendment. The Jews reasoned that since it was transgression of the Sabbath that led to their captivity, they needed to define in minute detail how the Sabbath should be kept.

Over 500 rules concerning Sabbathkeeping eventually resulted. Some of these Sabbath laws were as ridiculous as this: one could not leave an egg in the sun on the Sabbath because the sun might cook it, and cooking on the Sabbath was a violation of the fourth commandment. Of course, this only resulted in a system of pure legalism. At last the people began to believe that favor with God depended on how well they obeyed the traditions of their elders.

Ultimately the people were led full circle to disobedience again. Jesus comments that in spite of their apparent religiosity they were still breaking God's law even as their forefathers had during Isaiah's and Daniel's day. "Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men... full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition... making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered" (Mark 7:6-13). Once again the people found themselves immersed in vain and rebellious worship.

Even though their apostasy expressed itself in legalism instead of laxness, it was still based on the same principle upon which all pagan religions are based—that man can save himself by his own works. Jesus, like Jeremiah of old, rebuked this religious system and called it an abomination. "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Jesus expressed His displeasure for their abominations on numerous occasions. Most notable were the two times He cleansed the temple. On these times He expressed His anger at the desecration of His holy place. The controversy between Jesus and the Jews steamed, boiled and spewed over religion. The religious leaders hated Him because He didn't look like the Messiah, He didn't respect their traditions and most notably He didn't keep the Sabbath in the manner they thought it should be kept. This latter issue infuriated the Jews and led them to seek Jesus' death (See John 5:10-16; Matthew 12:1-4; Mark 3:1-6).

In spite of the religious leaders' resistance, Jesus sought time and again to bring them to repentance and reformation. Often He reproved them for their erroneous ways and pointed the way to true and undefiled religion that is of great price in the sight of God. Yet they hardened their hearts and beat back the waves of God's mercy.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, His prophetic eye saw the consequences of their constant rebellion. With a grief-stricken heart and tears coursing down His cheeks, He prophesied the coming doom of the city: "For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

After teaching in the temple for several days, Jesus left its precincts for the last time. Again He was choked with anguish as He saw the ultimate result of His people's apostasy. He exclaimed, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37,38).

On both these occasions Jesus placed the guilt upon the people by stating, "they knew not the time of their visitation" and "ye would not." As a result of not responding to God's call to turn from their abominations, their temple was to be desolated. This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman armies of Titus burned the temple to the ground. This second desolation of the temple perfectly paralleled its first destruction. On both occasions the abominations were done by the apostate people of God and the desolation was an act of judgment performed by a heathen army.

This desolation of Jerusalem was prophesied by Daniel to come as a result of the people rejecting Messiah the prince. A careful study of Daniel 9:25-27 will show this to be the case. In verse 25 Messiah is promised to Israel, and the city's restoration is also predicted. But then ominously all is prophesied for doom again. Verse 26 speaks of Messiah being killed by His own people and of how this act would cause their city and sanctuary to be desolated once again.

As Daniel heard Gabriel relay this prophecy, it was to his mind a replay of what he had seen happen to the Jerusalem of his day. The prophecy indicated that history would repeat itself, and this is exactly what happened. The abominations that God's people committed resulted, in both 586 B.C. and 70 A.D., in the destruction of their sanctuary and city—first by Nebuchadnezzar, then by Titus.

Because Israel rejected the Messiah they lost their place as God's favored people. Jesus predicted this would take place by saying, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). Israel forfeited their franchise of the gospel by their own obstinate sin.

Who would be the new nation to receive the kingdom of God and bring forth the fruits thereof? The Bible provides a clear and concise answer in the apostle Peter's letter to the Gentile converts who "In time past were not a people, but are now the people of God." Of the converts to Christianity, the new people of God, he further says, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9,10).

In the new dispensation God bestows upon the converted Christians all the privileges and promises that had been made to the literal seed of Abraham (see Galatians 3:26-29). Now converted Christians assume the role of Israel, and the Christian church absorbs the status of the temple or sanctuary of God. The Scriptures make this abundantly clear in such texts as Romans 2:28,29; Ephesians 2:11-13; 19-22; and 1 Peter 2:5.

The Final Desolation

It is in the light of this New Testament principle of spiritual Israel that Daniel speaks of the abomination of desolation the third and final time. These references can be found in Daniel 8:13; 11:31; and 12:11. Discerning students of prophetic history realize that these verses predict the formation and ascension of power by the Papacy. It is an indisputable fact of history that the Papacy brought into the Christian church the very same practices of paganism for which ancient Jerusalem was destroyed. One has to do only a little study to see how image worship, Tammuz worship, and sun worship were introduced to Christianity during the Dark Ages. Many of these abominations are still with us in the form of statues, candles for the saints, rosary beads, Easter sunrise services and Sunday worship. [For more information on this subject, see Amazing Facts' booklet Baptized Paganism.]

By no means does the papal apostasy exonerate Protestantism. Most Protestant churches accede to the apostasy by continuing the practice of abominations that have their roots firmly fixed in ancient pagan religions, which were established to destroy God's truth. Both Catholicism and Protestantism have fostered abominations in God's holy place, His church. The Christian church is mirroring literal Israel. We are repeating many of the same sins and will consequently reap the same punishment of desolation, unless we are willing to read the handwriting on the wall and flee from Babylon.

It is clear that the three occasions of abomination of desolation found in Daniel result from apostasy on the part of God's people, but what is the sign that will tell us when the desolation is nigh?

In Luke 21:20 Jesus told His disciples what would be the last sign of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem. He said, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." This text does not indicate that the armies are the abomination, but rather that the armies were the instrument to cause desolation. Through the Roman armies God would execute "the days of vengeance" for Israel's abominations.

When the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, it was a sign that most of the city's leaders and inhabitants had passed the boundaries of grace and had filled their cup of iniquity. To the Christians living in the city, this was to be a sign that Jerusalem would soon suffer God's judgment. As soon as the first opportunity arose, these Christians were to "flee to the mountains" (v. 21). In 66 A.D. when Cestius, the Roman general, surrounded the city the Christians knew the promised sign had arrived and the time had come to flee. At their first opportunity to escape they did so, and not one Christian died in the horrible destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Just as God gave the early Christians a sign of when to flee Jerusalem, so He has given us a sign. He has made it possible for every Christian to know when this world's probationary hour is nearing its close.

In Revelation 13 and 14 John records a list of omens that will tell us just how close we are to the end. The sign that will show this nation has filled its cup of iniquity will be when it makes an image to the Papacy by uniting church and state. How much more neatly could this be effected than by the passage of a national Sunday law commanding everyone to honor a pagan day of worship? Such an event will be a direct fulfillment of Revelation 13:15-17, and provide assurance that the end of this earth's time is quickly approaching.

One author describes coming events this way: "As the approach of Roman armies was a sign to the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, so may this apostasy be a sign to us that the limit of God's forbearance is reached, that the measure of our nation's iniquity is full, and that the angel of mercy is about to take her flight." When the churches have apostasized in their abominations to such a degree that they enact legislation of a religious law which displaces God's holy Sabbath with a pagan holiday, we may leave our cities, knowing that a time of trouble will be forthcoming.

The abomination of desolation is an important subject in these last days. If we study this prophecy carefully, we will find that in each of its three fulfillments refers to a national apostasy by God's people that ends in their tragic destruction. We are now living in the time of the Christian church's final apostasy, which makes of none effect the commandments of God. We need to see that we are in the midst of fulfilling prophecy and keep our eyes open for the culmination of all things.

Our only sure protection against the abomination of desolation is to give our lives unreservedly to Jesus, loving others as He loves them and worshiping Him in the way that His word teaches. The greatest commandment is simply to love God with all our heart and soul and strength. If we have such love, it will be natural for us to do all things to please and honor Him. In return, He will see us safely through the desolation that will close this earth's history just before He comes again.

The Brook Dried Up

Joe Crews

Romans 8:20

Some of the most dramatic and adventurous stories in the Bible revolve around the meteoric rise of Elijah the prophet. Like a shooting star he flashed out of obscurity and changed the character of a whole nation in a very short time.

Little is known about the background of this colorful reformer of Israel. Called of God from the rugged mountains of Gilead, he walked into the palace of King Ahab while apostasy was at its darkest point. Fired by a holy indignation, he confronted the wicked ruler of Israel with words of judgment, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." 1 Kings 17:1.

After delivering his inspired message, the courageous prophet was commanded by God to hide himself in the eastern wilderness by the brook Cherith. There God arranged providentially for ravens to deliver food to the isolated fugitive during the predicted years of famine.

As the land baked and cracked under the withering heat of the sun, every green plant died for lack of water. But Elijah was well supplied, morning and evening, by the miraculous ministry of the ravens. In addition to the bread and flesh brought by the birds, God provided plenty of refreshing water from the splashing brook which flowed nearby.

What a perfect picture of God's power and willingness to care for the physical needs of His faithful servant! With pleasure we contemplate that scene of restful abundance. The prophet had no problems. Everywhere else the people were suffering from the terror of the draught, but God would not let His obedient child lack for anything. Without fail, the ravens flew in twice a day with their fare of food and the brook was always yielding its life-giving supply of water.

Haven't we seen the same kind of providence in our own day? The God of Elijah still takes care of the needs of His children. The prophet was walking in the center of God's will, and the promised blessings never failed. Or did they?

Let's read on in the biblical account: "And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up." 1 Kings 17:6, 7.

Can't you picture the shock and disappointment as Elijah walked out to the brook to get his daily water supply? He looked down upon the dry, brown stones of the brook-bed and could scarcely believe what

he saw. Not a drop of water remained. A terrible tragedy had overtaken him - THE BROOK HAD DRIED UP!

We have no way of knowing how long God tested His prophet by the barren brook. For a time, at least, Elijah had to wait in faith. It probably seemed that all the promises were failing. God had abandoned him to an agonizing death in the parched wilderness. But as he lingered and listened, God spoke these words, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." 1 Kings 17:9.

Don't you see how God closed one door so that He could open another one? Elijah had been there long enough. God had another experience waiting for him in Zarephath. God provided the brook, and God dried it up. It would have been a tragedy for the prophet to remain longer in the wilderness. Life was moving on. In the dynamics of divine Providence, Elijah was scheduled to experience another miracle in another place. Had the brook not dried up, he would have stayed there. He would have relaxed in the satisfying fullness of material blessing. But he would have missed the widow's cruse, the Carmel experience, and Elisha plowing in the field.

Listen, God's brooks always dry up. He doesn't want us to stay in the same place all the time. That is our great problem. We get by our comfortable brook, surrounded by peaceful plenty, and want to rest there the remainder of our days. Then when God allows the brook to dry up, we often weep and blame God for afflicting us.

Let me ask you, was Elijah backsliding when the brook dried up on him? No, he was growing spiritually. Zarephath was many times more wonderful than Cherith. But please take note that God closed up Cherith before He revealed Zarephath. Faith had to be tested. There is always the time when everything looks absolutely hopeless. It happened with Elijah and it will happen to us.

The Eternal "Why?"

Almost daily I stand with people beside their dried-up brooks trying to help them see that the world has not come to an end. One of the hardest questions for a minister to answer is "Why?" Why did my baby die? Why did I lose my job? Why are my children so unconcerned about spiritual things? Why did my companion abandon me for another?

Under the emotional stress of our loss we tend to blame God for making some terrible mistakes in dealing with our lives. It is so human to do this because we have no way of seeing the future.

I can still remember weeping, as a child, when I read the story of Joseph for the first time. He had been so happy and carefree. Then, suddenly, his brook dried up. He was on the way to Egypt as a slave. How Jacob grieved for that lost boy! We can hear him moaning, "Simeon is not and Joseph is gone. Now you want to take Benjamin from me. Everything is against me." Genesis 42:36.

How familiar it sounds. Poor Jacob couldn't see through the "whys" any more than we can. But a little

while later we see him on his camel, hurrying toward Egypt. His heart was overflowing with joy. Another brook had broken forth in his life. And then we hear Joseph saying to his brothers, "Ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good." Genesis 50:20.

It is so easy to look back as Joseph did that day and confess that the disappointments have really been His appointments. Why can't we have the faith to stand by our dried-up brooks and make that confession? Someday in the future every redeemed soul will do it in retrospect. God delights in those who will take Him at His word and claim the promise of Romans 8:28 even while the heart is breaking with sorrow. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The Fires of Affliction

The Bible is laced with texts about the spiritual benefits of suffering. Peter said to "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." 1 Peter 4:12. Paul assures us that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3:12. And James makes the incredible statement, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." James 1:2, 3.

In the light of these and many more similar statements, we must confess that there are mysterious blessings associated with trials and suffering. James indicates that they develop the very character traits which mark those who will be candidates for the Kingdom. In Revelation the saints are described in these words: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12.

Obviously, patience is a requirement for those who are redeemed out of this world. James says that patience is developed by tests and trials. This clearly teaches us that suffering may indeed be a necessary molding process in our preparation for heaven.

David, who also suffered much, came to this amazing conclusion: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." Psalms 119:71. Again, he wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." Psalm 119:67.

Until a Christian learns this simple Bible principle, he will live in a ferment of doubt and uncertainty. Every experience of disappointment will raise fresh questions concerning God's justice and love. Many Christians hold the childish view that because we have accepted Jesus and because He loves us, therefore, He will use His mighty power to preserve us from every pain and trial.

The inspired record reveals that because He loves us, He will often permit us to pass through the fires of affliction. Why does He do it? Because He sees that this is the only way to prepare us to be with Him for eternity. God is actually answering the prayers of those who have asked for purification of life. When we pray for God to eradicate sin from our life, we must be ready to accept His ordained method of accomplishing that work. Grinding trials appear to be part of the machinery by which sanctification is effected.

It is very likely that more Christians have lost their faith over this issue than any other. Every pastor has watched and prayed with his suffering people as they struggled with the "why" of their dried-up brook.

Not even the most consecrated Christian can be insulated from shock and grief when loved ones are taken by death. But they can be prepared ahead of time so that their faith will not give way under the stress of loss.

The secret is to rest upon the assurance that God will not permit any circumstance that is not for our best good. This requires faith, but it is not difficult to trust the One who died for us. We must keep on reminding ourselves that God will allow many situations which will seem to us like terrible tragedies. We will not be able to discern any logic or reason behind the events. Our human faculties may rebel at the very thought that any good could ever result from such circumstances.

Here is where we must cling to the Word of God and nothing else. This is the dividing place between the mature and immature Christian. The loss will either drive us closer to Jesus, or cause us to turn from Him. At this point, everything depends upon the personal relationship which has been developed prior to the crisis. Those who have understood and accepted the principle that God's love will not allow any trial which is not for our best good - only they will be able to relate properly to the experience.

Reasons for Trusting

We have said that faith alone will hold us in this kind of traumatic test. Nevertheless, our faith is not blind or unreasonable. We have a fabulous reservoir of experiences with God which prove His unfailing love and concern for us. Why should this one be any different? Even though I can't understand it, I can trust Him who has promised. If His Word has never failed before, how could it fail in this situation? Then, like Job, we can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Job 13:15.

Here we may learn a lesson from the trustful manner in which parents surrender their children into the hands of a surgeon. How can they submit that beloved child to the cutting of that knife and the throbbing pain which inevitably follows? Two factors make it easy for them to place such confidence in the doctor. They trust his skill and ability to operate successfully, and they have faith in his wisdom to do the right thing at the right time for the good of their child. They also know that after the temporary suffering is past that the child will be better off than it was before the pain.

If we can trust a human physician who often fails, why is it so hard to trust a divine One who never fails? Probably none of our children would ever choose to be operated on, no matter how serious the condition. It is only because of our greater knowledge of their case that we submit them to the surgery. In the same manner, we would never choose to experience the trials and afflictions which our heavenly Father often allows to come upon us. He understands the case completely and knows that after the passing pain we will be better prepared for a happier future.

And here is a beautiful parallel in that illustration: Even though I know my child will be greatly improved as a result of the cutting, I still suffer right along with him. I sit up during the long hours of the night, holding his hand and ministering to every possible need.

Don't think for one moment that our wonderful Father in heaven doesn't do the same thing for us. Like a small child we may cry over the pain and blame our Father for allowing the cutting to be done. And like a human parent, God must weep because He has no way to communicate His reason for subjecting us to the pain. It is just as impossible for us to understand God's decision for our lives as it is for our children to comprehend our decisions for them.

I think it would be an overwhelming revelation to see ourselves without God's mysterious permissions, painful though they be. Only when we see Jesus face to face and reason on the plane of immortality will we be able to thank Him for allowing things to be just exactly as they were.

I can look back upon certain shattering experiences in my past and recognize how they altered the entire direction of my life. It is easy for me to see how any significant change in those disappointing events could have sent me in a totally opposite direction. I tremble to think what my life might now be had God not measured out to me those bitter experiences.

Chosen from Eternity

If indeed the hardships are necessary to prepare us for entrance into heaven, then they should be looked upon as a part of God's great election plan for our salvation. Isaiah wrote, "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." Isaiah 48:10.

What a difference it makes in our attitude if we can see suffering as a sign of God's special choice for us to spend eternity with Him. He loved us before we were born, and according to Paul, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Ephesians 1:4.

Can you fathom the exciting reality of that truth? You are one upon whom the eye of God has rested from eternity. Through all those eons of time, divine Wisdom has been perfecting a detailed plan for your sanctification and ultimate salvation. As you submit to Him, He will certainly perform only what has been determined as absolutely essential to carry out His plan for your life. If that plan allows for heartaches here and there, and even apparent disasters from time to time, God will never permit more than we can bear. He will be there to measure and temper the furnace according to our strength and according to our need.

Does that sound like a contrived explanation for the problem of pain and affliction? It will, no doubt, to the person who does not believe in the existence of God. He scoffs at the idea that a loving, omnipotent Deity would not intervene to spare His followers from all trouble and pain. Often the believer is hard-pressed to justify the apparent arbitrary manner in which some suffer and some are spared. How can we respond to the accusation that a just God would protect all His people from all trouble at all times?

First of all, let us concede that God could do that very thing. He has the power to prevent accidents. He could commission angels and the Holy Spirit to override the law of cause and effect in the lives of all Christians. They would not get bad colds, stub their toes, or contract cancer.

What would be the effect of such a program? The answer is obvious. Everyone would rush into the Christian camp in order to be protected from trouble in the flesh. The world would literally be compelled to follow Christ for purely physical reasons. God doesn't build His kingdom upon appeals to such motives.

It seems logical that God had to allow the natural laws to operate equally upon all to demonstrate the unconditional nature of His love. Christians do inherit the same genetic weaknesses as others who have no faith. They have accidents, and often die of the very same diseases which assail the unbeliever.

Physically, then, is there any difference in the way Christians suffer, and the way non-Christians suffer? The answer to that question must be carefully qualified. God reveals no partiality in the way He permits natural law to affect all mankind. Any difference which enters the picture must be based upon the individual's response rather than any difference God makes between categories or classes. This is another way of saying that no one in the world can prevent troubles coming into his life, but he can decide what those troubles do to his life after they happen.

The Christian meets trouble by surrendering to the will of God and praying for a spirit to profit from whatever God permits. Such a trusting faith can not only bring power to bear the suffering with less trauma, but also, in some cases, to be healed of the affliction as well. This response of God to the faith of an individual has nothing to do with favoring a class of people. God is still operating within the framework of law, but this time spiritual law instead of natural. That law is not limited to any nationality, race, or religion. All who approach Him in faith will tap into the same reservoir of divine power. Even though God's love is unconditional, His healing power is not. Nevertheless, the conditions are the same for all, and He delights to set the spiritual laws of asking, believing, and receiving into operation for anyone.

Here, then, lies the most understandable human explanation for the mysterious way some are afflicted and others are not. Some are delivered and healed, while others suffer and die. God has to deal with each individual on the basis of that person's faith and the kind of prayer he offers. If his greatest concern is for God to mold him and prepare him for heaven, his prayer will be for God to shape all the circumstances of his life to that end. In order to answer such a prayer of faith, God may have to permit experiences of pain or affliction.

Again, God will have to answer that prayer according to His omniscient knowledge of the future of that individual. Only One who accurately foresees the consequence of every act can safely be trusted to control the circumstances of life.

Is it hard to submit to a God who does not always explain His omniscient actions? Indeed, it would be impossible to trust Him if we had no other subjective evidences of His commitment to our happiness. But anyone who believes that Jesus was willing to die in his place would have to believe also that Jesus would always work for his best good. God would have to deny His own nature to do anything against the one He loved more than His own life.

This is the assurance that sustains those who suffer under unexplainable circumstances. Even though they can't understand why God allows their condition, they know it would be totally contrary to God's nature to permit anything against their highest interests. Their faith dares to believe that if they could see the future as God sees it, they themselves would choose no other way than He chooses.

Is there evidence that obstacles and hardships are sometimes necessary for the highest achievement? Nature itself bears witness that it is so. Certain migratory birds must wait for strong, opposing winds before they can achieve the heights necessary for their long-distance flights. There are some fruits which cannot ripen until they have been nipped by the frost.

Can Hardships Help Us?

Are there souls who cannot mature until they have been buffeted by hardships and opposition? Undoubtedly. We think of Moses spending forty years in the wilderness before God could use him for leading Israel out of bondage. We marvel at the years John was isolated and imprisoned on Patmos before he could become the writer of Revelation. And Paul experienced torture and imprisonment before he could write, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6.

I believe Paul was ripened for the Kingdom during those seasons of solitary confinement. I think John needed the rest from constant, wearying oversight of the churches. It is almost impossible for human beings to recognize the limits of their physical endurance. They seldom stop in time to prevent damaging collapse. A Cambridge naturalist released a pigeon that had been born in a cage. For the first time the bird used its wings to fly around the laboratory room. Around and around went the pigeon, excited and panting. Finally, in utter exhaustion, the frantic bird crashed into a wall and fell to the floor seriously injured. Only then did the scientist realize that the pigeon had inherited the instinct to fly but not to stop its flight. Had it not been willing to risk the shock of a crash landing, the bird would have died of stress in midair.

Sometimes God has to stop people from their furious pace before they destroy their own usefulness. The trauma of a sudden stop may be hard to understand and accept. Sickness, loss of job, or even tragedy may be necessary in order to provide time for physical and spiritual recuperation. "Be still, and know that I am God." Psalms 46:10. In the thoughtful hours and days of slow recovery from surgery, many have found the secret of life in Christ.

Perhaps only God understands why pain is often the only thing which can get the attention of human beings. Never should we blame God for utilizing the one device which will ultimately draw us to Him. Strange as it may seem, prosperity, good health, and smooth sailing do not attract the soul to God. A man was imprisoned in a tower and was trying to alert passersby of his dilemma. They could not hear his cries, so he began to drop gold coins from his pocket to attract their attention. But although they scrambled about to recover all the falling money, not one pedestrian looked up to see the plight of the prisoner. Finally, he managed to break off a chunk of mortar from the crumbling wall and dropped it out the window. It struck a man on the head, injuring him. Only then did the man look up and get the message from above.

In the same way all manner of blessings are taken for granted. Instead of looking to the source, we are

busily gathering more from the world around us. It is only when we are hurt that we look up and begin to listen to the message God has been trying to communicate.

Looking for the Reasons

After a period of test, will God always reveal the reasons for His divine permissions in our lives - His dried-up brooks? Eventually, yes. But not necessarily in this life. Our faith may have to hold us steady until God can explain to us, face to face, why it had to be. Paul finally came to know why God allowed his thorn in the flesh. It was to keep him from feeling exalted over the abundance of revelations granted him. I may have to wait until Jesus comes to understand why my little eight-year-old son suffered so long before dying of a brain tumor.

It took a few years for the citizens of Coffee County, Alabama, to understand why the boll weevil invaded their fields, devastating the cotton industry completely. After turning to diversified farming and eventually doubling their income from growing peanuts, the farmers of Coffee County erected a monument to the boll weevil. In the memorial inscription, credit is given to the boll weevil for forcing the change of crops, creating unprecedented prosperity for that area.

Christians should look for the reason when trials appear. Usually, a new door will open when one brook dries up. But if the years bring no satisfactory explanation of tragic loss, then we should trust Him still. Someday He will make it plain to us. In the meantime, we are sustained by the comfort of the One who fully understands our griefs and sorrows. Jesus became one of us so that He could experience every pain and be a faithful Intercessor for us. Only those who have passed through the same suffering can truly sympathize and communicate with our hearts. When one grief-stricken father cried out, "Where was God when my son was killed in that car accident?" the answer quietly came back, "He was exactly where He was when His Son was tortured and killed on the cross."

Isn't there a tremendous lesson in that answer? If God would not intervene to save His own Son's life because He saw that great good would eventually result, then He must have seen some future good when He allowed my son to die also. And is that not the reason I could feel the sweet, personal touch of the Father upon my life during those dark hours of grief? He knew exactly how I felt. He could minister to me as no human friend could do. Has not my own ability to provide healing comfort been greatly strengthened because I have shared a similar sorrow with those who have lost children?

Christians should have no illusions about the source of afflictions. Sin is the cause of all suffering in the world today. God is often blamed for doing the devil's work. Not one cancer has ever been caused by God. In the experience of Job we have a perfect picture of Satan's mischievous program to afflict God's faithful children. Up to certain limits God allowed Job to be tested by the great adversary, and the triumphant conclusion of the story reveals why God permitted things to go as far as they did. Job emerged from the devastating trials with a stronger faith and greater prosperity than he had before.

There may be many reasons that God allows Satan limited access to His followers, but one of the chief positive effects is to keep Christians constantly on guard against sin. Through the exercise of a wide-awake conscience, the first approach of our cunning enemy can be recognized and repulsed. The knowledge that he is apt to attack at any moment or place develops a healthy spirit of alert

defensiveness.

The story is told of one old Cape Cod fisherman who always hauled in the most sought-after catch of the entire fleet. Because his fish were so lively and healthy, they invariably commanded the highest prices in the marketplace. In vain did the other fishermen try to uncover the secret of his success. Only after his death was the formula revealed by his son, and it was as simple as it was effective. After securing his load of fish safely in the holding tank, the old fisherman would loose several pugnacious catfish into the tank. The constant fear of attack kept all the commercial fish in agitated motion, preserving them from the normal lethargic state brought on by prolonged captivity. Their obvious alertness made them the most desirable in the eyes of the buyers.

Can we not see in this story a possible reason for our own harassment by the wily Satan? Does God allow him to threaten us so that we might be constantly in a protective stance? Perhaps this provocation is exactly what we need to produce a necessary attitude of vigilance.

In the days of the Napoleonic wars, before radio or telegraph had been invented, messages had to be sent by semaphore signals. Even from a long distance the flags could be deciphered as they slowly spelled out words letter by letter. It was by this method that the Battle of Waterloo was reported to the anxious citizens of London.

For years Napoleon had struggled to bring Europe to his feet. Finally his goal was in sight and only the thin, red line of Highlanders stood in his way at Waterloo. The banks of England had poured every available pound into government loans to defeat Napoleon. If the Battle of Waterloo was lost, Britain would be lost.

On the coasts of Dover the people of London gathered to watch for news of the battle. Suddenly they saw across the channel the big semaphore begin to move. Painfully slow, the letters began to form into the first words of a message: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D." Then suddenly, a dense fog settled over the scene and blotted out the signals. But the people had seen enough to convince them that their general had been put to rout. In despair they fled the city. Raw militia rushed to the coast prepared to die in desperate hand-to-hand combat with the expected invasion force. Road blocks were erected and houses hastily fortified.

For two days London resigned itself to destruction. Then the storm abated and the fog began to lift. Watchers saw the semaphore flags begin to move once more, and the message was slowly spelled out: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D N-A-P-O-L-E-O-N A-T W-A- T-E-R-L-O-O." The joy of the people knew no bounds as the full import of the news struck home.

Living in a world that is often obscured by tears and human misunderstanding, we do not always have access to the whole truth. Like the despairing Londoners, we are not able to see past the apparent tragedies of His interrupted message. When the fog of unbelief is lifted and the veil is completely taken away, we will recognize for the first time that there was no defeat at all. It had been victory from the very beginning, but we just didn't have the rest of the message. The whole message will be understood

only when Jesus Himself speaks to us beyond the mist of our limited human view.

In the meantime, what is the solution? The solution, my friend, is simply to trust the promise of One who has never failed us yet. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28.

The Church - Is it Babylon?

Dennis Priebe

Hosea 14:1

No one can deny the painful divisions which rack the Seventh-day Adventist church today, but few understand that much of it springs from issues rooted in the 1970s and 1980s. It was during those two decades that the church was assailed with controversy over the sanctuary, the nature of man and sin, the role of Ellen G. White, the humanity of Christ, and the possibility of character perfection before the coming of Christ.

The confrontations over those basic theological issues laid a foundation for the more vocal battle of the 1990s concerning the nature of the church. Loud and long has been the dialogue over what constitutes the church. The strongest disagreements have focused on whether the organized Seventh-day Adventist church will go through in triumph. Or has the Adventist church become a part of Babylon? If so, should we separate from it and call others to join us?

Much of the debate revolves around the terms "visible" and "invisible." One group contends that the visible church consists only of faithful, obedient believers and could never refer to an organization which is not wholly following God. On this basis, they feel compelled to urge people not to be associated with the organized church any longer. They also apply some of the identifying marks of Babylon to the present Adventist church structure.

These are the claims which need to be scrutinized under the microscope of God's Word. None can ignore the fact that thousands are being influenced to join "home churches" and to look askance at those who give support to the historic conference organization. In order to ascertain whether there is a distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" church, we shall examine the testimony of Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy as well as the evidence of church history. Then we will be in a position to determine our relationship with the organized Seventh-day Adventist church of today.

Visible and Invisible

Ellen White used the term "visible church" a number of times, but the term "invisible church" is not commonly used in her writings, if at all. Apparently, many who have studied her statements assume that where there is a "visible," there must also be an "invisible." However, to avoid a controversy based solely on semantics, other words can be used in place of "invisible church." Ellen White herself drew a clear distinction between two groups within the church who would be equal in membership but far apart in their standing before God.

"We should feel an individual responsibility as members of the visible church and workers in the vineyard of the Lord. The advancement of the church is often retarded by the wrong course of its members. Uniting with the church, although an important and necessary step, does not of itself make

one a Christian. If we would secure a title to heaven, our hearts must be in unison with Christ and His people." (Bible Echo and Signs of the Times, Sept. 1, 1888.)

Here we find a distinction between being a member of the visible church and being a Christian. If the visible church was composed only of faithful and true believers, then being a church member and being a Christian would be exactly the same thing. But "members of the visible church and workers in the vineyard of the Lord" can take a "wrong course" which retards the advancement of the church. This means that non-Christians (professed, but not true) can be members of the visible church. Although the visible church has both Christians and non-Christians in its membership, uniting with it is still "an important and necessary step." However, a second step is necessary in order to be a Christian and be saved-namely, a heart-unity with Christ. Both steps, becoming a member of the visible church, and having a heart unity with Christ, are necessary for salvation.

"Depending upon men has been the great weakness of the church. Men have dishonored God by failing to appreciate His sufficiency, by coveting the influence of men. Thus Israel became weak. The people wanted to be like the other nations of the world, and they asked for a king." (The Kress Collection, p. 57.)

The church is compared to Israel, which made poor decisions because it coveted the approval of other men or nations. Clearly this statement is referring to the organized nation of Israel in a disobedient state. The "church" here cannot refer to true believers only, but to an organized body which is disobedient to God. Yet it is still "the church."

"We profess to be the depositories of God's law; we claim to have greater light and to aim at a higher standard than any other people upon the earth. ... As members of the visible church, and workers in the vineyard of the Lord, all professed Christians should do their utmost to preserve peace, harmony, and love in the church. ... Satan is constantly working to prevent this union and harmony, that unbelievers, by witnessing backsliding, dissension, and strife among professed Christians, may become disgusted with religion and be confirmed in their impenitence." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 619, 620.)

Here the visible church is said to contain "professed Christians," which is not the same as true believers or genuine Christians. Those who profess obedience to God are members of the visible church, but some of them are backsliding and fighting with each other.

When God led Israel out of Egypt, He gave precise directions regarding each person's work. "This is an important lesson to the church. ... The management of that great church in their journeyings in the wilderness symbolizes the management of the church till the close of earth's history." (That I May Know Him, p. 323.)

The organized church of Israel is to teach lessons of obedience to the organized remnant church until the close of time. The church of Israel and the church of Adventism are parallel to each other, and we can learn what the church is today by looking back at the church of the Old Testament.

"Notwithstanding our varying types of character, we are brought into church capacity through the profession of our faith. Christ is the head of the church; and if those whose names are on the church record do not belong to Jesus, the invisible Head, they are like the fruitless branch of the vine, and are taken away. If one is really a fruitful branch, he will make it manifest by bearing fruit, giving evidence of his absolute allegiance to Christ. He will have a spiritual connection with God." (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Feb. 23, 1897.)

Note that Christ is the head of the church, which we enter by our profession of faith, and that we can be fruitless branches while on the church record. This church with many unfaithful Christians in it is not a false church, and we are not to leave it to find the true church, because Christ is still its Head. However, we are reminded that being a church member is not enough. We must maintain the spiritual connection with God that is essential to salvation, and we are to take this step within the church of professed believers.

"There are two kinds of connections between the branches and the vine stock. One is visible, but superficial. The other is invisible and vital. So there is an apparent union, a membership with the church, and a profession of religion which, though in itself good, is too often unaccompanied by saving faith in Jesus or living obedience to the commandments of God." (Signs of the Times, July 27, 1888.)

This visible, superficial, apparent, professed membership in the church is "in itself good." In other words, no one should be denied the privilege of joining the church, even if their motives and sincerity may not be fully apparent. But the important point is that church membership is not the same as saving faith, and the church is not solely a group of faithful believers. The visible church includes within it more than obedient Christians.

From the preceding statements, we can see that there are two distinct categories described in the Spirit of Prophecy. One is the visible church, and the other is faithful souls. Since both of these categories can be called "the church," it is only by a careful study of context that we can determine which church is being referred to in a given statement.

The visible church, which is specified in Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 4, p. 16, has a special purpose. Though it cannot save individuals, its function is to be the center of God's government on earth. It is to reveal God's character and His laws to a rebellious world. It is to be a center of outreach to those who are deceived by Satan. It includes both saved and unsaved individuals, because it includes all who make a profession of faith in Christ. It is to be a teacher of salvation and a guide to salvation.

The "faithful soul" church is described in Acts of the Apostles, p. 11. It is made up of individuals whose hearts have responded to God in genuine faith and obedience and who are in a saving relationship with Christ. Some of these are in the visible church while others, who are fully surrendered to God but have limited light, are outside the visible church. It is membership in this spiritual body that assures us a place in heaven.

To say that the visible church is always equivalent to the "faithful soul" church is to seriously distort

the teachings of the Spirit of Prophecy and to misunderstand the distinct purpose of these two groups. One cannot select a preferred definition of the church and then try to force all other usages of the word to conform to this preferred definition. We can wrest the Spirit of Prophecy to our own destruction just as surely as we can wrest the Scriptures.

Two Visible Churches

As we look back through history, we can see two visible churches in action—one established by God to demonstrate His character and laws and one established by Satan to counterwork God's plans. Immediately after the Flood, Satan set his church into motion through the city and tower of Babel. God soon saw fit to call Abraham out of the society where Satan's principles were being followed. Abraham became the father of God's visible church, and it is important to note that although Jacob's 12 sons were not all faithful believers, they were all part of, and fathers of, God's true visible church on earth.

Some might ask why God directed Abraham to move into Canaan, whose inhabitants were followers of Satan's church also. Why should the faithful church move from one center of false worship into another just as wicked? The answer appears as God re-vealed His ultimate purpose to drive out the pagan tribes and to establish His own center of worship in the land of Canaan. God gave specific orders for His church to have no close relationship or intermarriage with the heathen nations—a principle that He continued to apply to His church right down to the present.

When God called Israel out of Egypt, He put into operation a plan designed to completely replace Satan's church in Canaan with His own visible church. Again it is important to note that God's true church included a mixed multitude of faithful and unfaithful souls, a situation which did not improve dramatically even after they entered Canaan.

After a time, God's true visible church took a major step in disobedience by asking for a king so it could be more like Satan's church. God continued to work through Israel's kings as much as possible, but His plans were severely hampered by increasing apostasy in His visible church. Satan's church, on the other hand, developed first in Assyria and then in Babylon. Things got so bad in God's church that He had to allow Assyria to destroy 10 of the 12 tribes He had laboriously brought out of Egypt.

It has been suggested that when Israel broke God's covenant they were not the true church. If that had been the case, God would have been without a true, visible church for most of the history of Israel. We marvel at the extreme mercy and long suffering of God in dealing with His backsliding people. It seems to us that God should have cut them off when their apostasy was so deep and pervasive. In order to understand how long and patiently He bore with them, read the command of God to His prophet Hosea.

"And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord." Hosea 1:2. The church of Israel was in full apostasy, and God's response was direct. He commanded the prophet to give names to his children that would bear witness to the whole nation concerning their spiritual condition. After the birth of his third child, Hosea was told by God: "Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." Hosea 1:9.

This does sound like God was through with Israel as His visible church, and that He was ready to move on to some other plan for accomplishing His purposes. But in the very next verse God said, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." Hosea 1:10.

We must always remember the difference between God's chastisements and God's rejection, and be able to tell the difference between the two. Because Israel had broken God's covenant, God had to abandon His people to their own choices-temporarily. But as long as Israel continued to be God's church, He would work to secure their repentance and obedience so that He could once again call them His sons.

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea 14:1, 4. Although Israel was in full apostasy, God had not yet rejected them which is not teaching and living the truth is not God's church at all. But let us look more closely at the church in Corinth to see whether or not this is so.

"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Corinthians 1:2. Everything that follows in this letter is directed to the church of God, composed of all those who are sanctified [set apart], called, and who call on Jesus' name.

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. ... For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envy-ing, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" 1 Corinthians 3:1, 3. "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you." 1 Corinthians 11:18, 19. In God's visible church were carnal professed Christians, as well as divisions and heresies. Although not all of its members were Christians, the Bible says the Corinthian church was part of the visible church of God.

The next step in the history of the Christian church is very important, because many people say that the church of the apostles turned into the Papacy-in other words, that the true church turned into Babylon. To find out whether or not this is true, perhaps we need to see exactly where the Papacy originated.

"And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority." Revelation 13:2. The Papacy received its power, its place of government, and its authority from Satan, who was working at that time through the Roman empire. From its very beginning, the Papacy was part of Satan's visible church, in a direct line from Babylon through Rome. The Papacy was never God's true church at all. Let us review what happened during the first centuries of the Christian era.

In Alexandria, Egypt, a school of philosophy and theology had existed from before the time of Christ.

In fact, the school at Alexandria had more than a little to do with the corruption of the Jewish church through the education of its most promising young men. When Christianity came on the scene, the Alexandrian school began to study these new teachings, incorporating them into its philosophical models. The Alexandrian Christian school combined mysticism, pagan philosophy, and a careless handling and interpretation of the Scriptures into an apostate form of Christianity almost from the very start.

Alexandria had great influence on the Western branch of the Christian church, especially in Rome, Italy. These two Christian centers were the first to combine Christian teachings with pagan ideas and to discredit the Bible Sabbath. Thus the Papacy was the direct descendant of Babylon through Rome and Alexandria.

In the meantime, an entirely different Christian school was developing in Antioch, Syria. Here the teachers and students were much more faithful to the authority of Scripture, refusing to mystify and spiritualize away clear teachings of Scripture. They copied and interpreted Scripture very faithfully and did their best to pass on the teachings of Christ and the apostles accurately. This brand of Christianity spread within the Eastern branch of the church, which remained much more faithful to the truth than did the Western branch. However, this more faithful Eastern church should not be confused with the later Orthodox churches in the East, which were closely patterned in theology and ritual after the Papacy in the West.

Thus, the true church did not turn into Babylon, but remained vital and growing for centuries, while the false church continued directly in the line of Babylon. Now it is true that individuals and whole congregations changed sides occasionally during this formative period-both from God's church to Satan's church and, more rarely, from Satan's church to God's church. But this must not obscure the fact that the two churches remained distinct and separate from each other. (See time line on pp. 16, 17.)

Unfortunately, the Eastern church was not to be left in prosperity. The Mohammedan invasions took their toll on the Eastern part of the Roman empire, and Eastern Christianity was gradually swallowed up by these invasions. The great centers of the Eastern church were eliminated and could no longer stand in defense of the truth against Western perversions of true Christianity. The only part of the Roman empire to stand intact was in Rome itself. The church in Rome became the professed defender of Christianity and, ultimately, the only form of Christianity recognized during the Dark Ages.

As the Roman church forced the true visible church to flee into the wilderness for survival, hundreds of years passed by, with God's true visible church receiving very little recognition from the civilized Christian world. Reports filtered out of England and Ethiopia confirming the activities of many faithful Christians. Only later did the Waldenses in Italy and the Huguenots in France receive notoriety as they suffered intense persecution by Satan's church.

Then the Reformation broke upon the Christian scene, and Lutheranism and Presbyterianism carried the torch of God's true visible church. Next, the Anabaptists and Methodists came into the picture. Satan's church, meanwhile, received a deadly wound in 1798, from which some thought it would never recover. During these centuries, there were again individuals and congregations which crossed from

one side to the other; but as before, the two churches remained distinct. (See time line on pp. 16, 17.) Babylon did not turn into the true church.

Finally we come to the climactic time period of William Miller and the giving of the midnight cry. God was challenging all the Christian bodies who carried the torch of truth to move ahead into the advancing light, including the Sabbath and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. If they would not move with the light, they would be left in darkness and would actually become part of the spiritual system of Babylon. For the first time in history, whole denominations switched from the true church to the false church.

Those who were obedient to the gathering call formed the Seventh-day Adventist movement to function as the final remnant, God's visible church, which would ultimately be formed into the 144,000 and give the loud cry to Babylon. Those who refused to heed the gathering call became the daughters of Babylon, soon to be fully absorbed into Babylon.

God's plan for the visible church is that it will pass through a time of shaking and purging, so that unfaithful professors will be shaken out while the faithful believers go to the world with the final loud cry. Individuals and congregations will again switch sides at this time, but it is not God's plan to raise up a new visible church to replace the corporate Seventh-day Adventist church.

The most important thing to note from this brief review of history is that God's visible church and Satan's visible church have remained distinct from the very beginning. Also, God's visible church has always included faithful believers as well as un-faithful professors.

Adventism and Babylon

In light of this understanding of God's visible church, what conclusions can we draw regarding the present and future of the Seventh-day Adventist church? Let us look carefully at God's counsel through the Spirit of Prophecy.

When the school at Battle Creek began to depart from God's plan, especially regarding the amusements being provided, Ellen White quoted the text, "How is the faithful city become an harlot!" (Special Testimonies on Education, p. 181.) In another context, her divine Instructor said to Ellen: "How is the faithful city become an harlot! My Father's house is made a house of merchandise, a place whence the divine presence and glory have departed! For this cause there is weakness, and strength is lacking." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, p. 250.)

Serious charges, indeed! The Seventh-day Adventist church is a harlot and God's presence has left it? Surely this was a final judgment against the organized church.

But look again. Her very next words are: "Unless the church, which is now being leavened with her own backsliding, shall repent and be converted, she will eat of the fruit of her own doing, until she shall abhor herself. When she resists the evil and chooses the good, when she seeks God with all humility

and reaches her high calling in Christ, standing on the platform of eternal truth and by faith laying hold upon the attainments prepared for her, she will be healed. She will appear in her God-given simplicity and purity, separate from earthly entanglements, showing that the truth has made her free indeed. Then her members will indeed be the chosen of God, His representatives."

What God was saying to the Seventh-day Adventist church is exactly what He was saying to Israel through Hosea. Rather than a statement of rejection, this was an appeal for repentance and obedience, and it carried a promise of healing. God appealed to His visible church to repent before it might cross a final line.

Ellen White wrote to George Butler, the General Conference president, in 1886: "We are in danger of becoming a sister to fallen Babylon, of allowing our churches to become corrupted, and filled with every foul spirit, a cage for every unclean and hateful bird. ... I tell you the truth, Elder Butler, that unless there is a cleansing of the soul temple on the part of many who claim to believe and to preach the truth, God's judgments, long deferred, will come." (Letter 51, 1886.)

"If most earnest vigilance is not manifested at the great heart of the work to protect the interests of the cause, the church will become as corrupt as the churches of other denominations." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 4, p. 513.) "The world must not be introduced into the church, and married to the church, forming a bond of unity. Through this means the church will become indeed corrupt, and as stated in Revelation, 'a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.'" (Testimonies to Ministers, p. 265.)

These are very, very solemn warnings to God's visible church. We cannot pretend that they do not exist and that if we do not read them they will somehow not apply to us. We dare not make the mistake of the Jews, who believed that because God had called them to be His chosen people it was impossible for them to fail. We live under the principle of conditional prophecy just as surely as God's Old Testament church did. This means that both the beautiful promises of God to this church and His warnings to us are conditional upon our response to Him. Our obedience or disobedience will determine what the future holds for us individually or as a church.

Ellen White makes it clear that a church can be converted into Babylon, but the process is not an easy or simple one. Disobedience—even over a long period of time, or in a number of different areas—does not turn the true church into Babylon. God's love for His chosen people is too deep and strong to allow Him to cast them off for even repeated failures. God's love for Israel over many disappointing centuries should instruct us about His attitude toward His remnant church today. Israel crossed the line of divine patience only after it rejected, openly and defiantly, the ultimate gift of God's love by sentencing His Son to death. As we understand from Daniel's prophecy, God's final separation from the Jewish nation did not take place for another three and a half years after the crucifixion. What long suffering and mercy!

We are told what steps our church will have to take to cross the line that Israel crossed. If our church were to adopt, openly and officially, the errors of Sunday sacredness, the immortality of the soul, and eternal torment, then we too would become a part of fallen Babylon. (See Selected Messages, Vol. 2, p. 68 and Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 61, 62.) However, we must remember that small deviations from

truth lead to larger errors. Our compromises over the last 50 years need to be addressed and reversed, or we could be in real danger of adopting the major errors of Babylon.

Now that we have examined the warnings God has delivered to His church, we must also look at what the Spirit of Prophecy has to say to those who claim that the organized, visible church has already crossed the line and that the faithful ones should separate themselves from it.

"No advice or sanction is given in the Word of God to those who believe the third angel's message to lead them to suppose that they can draw apart. This you may settle with yourselves forever. It is the devising of unsanctified minds that would encourage a state of disunion. ... There must be no separating in this great testing time." (Selected Messages, Vol. 3, p. 21.) Please notice how long we are to avoid drawing apart. Forever!! Should this not caution those who are saying that things are so much worse today that her 1893 counsels no longer apply?

"I know that the Lord loves His church. It is not to be disorganized or broken up into independent atoms. There is not the least consistency in this; there is not the least evidence that such a thing will be." (The Remnant Church, p. 53.) "We have never had a message that the Lord would dis-organize the church." (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, vol. 3, p. 86.)

"The Redeemer of the world does not sanction experience and exercise in religious matters independent of His organized and acknowledged church, where He has a church.

"Many have the idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of His acknowledged followers in the world. But this is condemned by Jesus in His teachings and in the examples, the facts, which He has given for our instruction." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 3, pp. 432, 433.)

"You will take passages in the Testimonies that speak of the close of probation, of the shaking among God's people, and you will talk of a coming out from this people of a purer, holier people that will arise. Now all this pleases the enemy ... Should many accept the views you advance, and talk and act upon them, we should see one of the greatest fanatical excitements that has ever been witnessed among Seventh-day Adventists. This is what Satan wants." (Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 179.)

"The Lord has not given you a message to call the Seventh-day Adventists Babylon, and to call the people of God to come out of her. All the reasons you may present cannot have weight with me on this subject, because the Lord has given me decided light that is opposed to such a message." (Selected Messages, Vol. 2, p. 63.)

"I tell you, my brethren, the Lord has an organized body through whom He will work. ... When anyone is drawing apart from the organized body of God's commandment-keeping people, when he begins to weigh the church in his human scales and begins to pronounce judgment against them, then you may know that God is not leading him. He is on the wrong track." (Selected Messages, Vol. 3, pp. 17, 18.)

"But we have never had a message that the Lord would disorganize the church. We have never had the prophecy concerning Babylon applied to the Seventh-day Adventist church, or been informed that the 'loud cry' consisted in calling God's people to come out of her; for this is not God's plan concerning Israel. ... Now can we expect that a message would be true that would designate as Babylon the people for whom God has done so much? Hell would triumph should such a message be received, and the world would be strengthened in iniquity. All the reproaches which Satan has cast upon the character of God, would appear as truth, and the conclusion would be made that God has no chosen or organized church in the world. Oh, what a triumph would this be to Satan and his confederacy of evil!" (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Oct. 3, 1893.)

These statements are much too clear to be misunderstood. Although the visible church is in crisis, the solution is not in applying the message for Babylon to it. If we decide that the church is Babylon or has passed the line of its probationary time, then our only message is "Come out of her." If we decide that the church is Laodicea, then our only message is "Repent." Our message will be determined by our view of the church.

Although God's visible church is not functioning as He designed that it should, and although there is much disobedience-both individually and corporately-in God's church, this is the time to look back to Moses and rebellious Israel. "In the example of Moses pleading for the children of Israel, is represented the position that we should take in regard to the people of God, however erring, or weak, or defective they may be." (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Oct. 3, 1893.)

In pleading for God's people, we will be following in the hallowed line of Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus, and Ellen White. May God help us to have the shepherd's heart, seeking to heal and restore while the door of probation for the church is still open.

The High Cost of the Cross

Joe Crews

Hebrews 2:3

After his disastrous defeat at Waterloo, Napoleon, so the story goes, met with some of his leading generals to analyze the battle's flawed strategies. In the course of their discussions, the little general pointed at England on the colored map before them and said bitterly, "Except for that red spot I would be master of the world." Satan could say the same thing today except he would point to a cross on a hill outside the walls of Old Jerusalem. Aren't you thankful for that red spot of Calvary that rescued this world from the control of our great enemy?

That was the place, the time, and the contest that settled the destiny of planet earth. Satan has been a defeated foe ever since. There it was that he met his Waterloo and suffered a decisive defeat from which he will never fully recover.

How few of us understand the real meaning of Christ's suffering and death on that cross. We have only a dim comprehension of the conflict He passed through and the kind of agonizing death He experienced. Could our eyes be opened to grasp the true significance of His sacrifice, there would be no more miserable collaborating with Satan. Our weakness would be turned into courage and victory.

The Bible writers struggled to explain, in human language, the mysterious incarnation and atoning death of the Son of God. Often we weep under the power of their inspired testimony. We get glimpses that boggle our minds, but still, we are only scratching the surface of a subject which will continue unfolding for all eternity.

Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5-8. These sublime words describe the condescension of Jesus from the throne to the manger and then to the cross.

From the Highest to the Lowest!

There is not an illustration in all the vast reaches of time or space that could properly portray what Jesus did. Sometimes we try to fabricate imaginary circumstances to convey the idea of His sacrifice. A diseased pack of wild dogs is described, covered with many scabs and running sores. It is postulated that if one human being would only submit to become one of the dogs, the entire pack could be saved from imminent death. Could anyone be found who would voluntarily lay aside his human condition, and suffer the unspeakable indignity of turning into a dog? Dramatic as it may sound, that is a feeble illustration of the humiliation of the divine Son of God. We cannot grasp the glory and position from which He separated when He emptied Himself and came into the condemned, dying family of Adam.

This is why it is so difficult for Christians to grasp the atonement. Why do so many treat casually the events of the cross? Surely because they do not understand what their salvation cost the Son of God. It is only when we know the cost of something that we begin to appreciate it. We value most highly that which requires the greatest investment.

All of us have encountered people who display a mystifying indifference toward the sacrifice of Christ. At the end of one of my crusades I visited a businessman who had attended every night but who had made no commitment. We had developed a warm friendship during the four-week series, so I felt bold to ask him why he had made no decision for Christ. His vague answer indicated to me that he had no understanding of the seriousness of accepting the gift of salvation. He had never made any kind of response to the gospel and, under my gentle questioning, confessed that he had no assurance of being saved. Finally, I asked him point blank, "Do you mean, Sam, that if you died tonight you would have no hope of eternal life?" He answered, "No, I have never made any kind of profession of Christianity."

Shocked by his obvious unconcern I gathered the courage to ask this question: "Sam, suppose that you could pick up \$10,000 tomorrow morning from your banker in exchange for a paper containing the signatures of ten men in this city. Would you be willing to drive around the city tonight and get those signatures?" He answered, "Of course I would."

"Would you run any risk of losing one of those signatures on the paper?" I asked. "Absolutely not," Sam replied, "I know a good thing when I see it."

The truth was that Sam *did not* recognize a good thing when he saw it, and I felt constrained to tell him so in the kindest way that my outraged spirit could manage. I said, "Sam, you would not take the least chance of losing \$10,000 between now and tomorrow morning; yet you have stated that you do risk losing eternal life if you die tonight. You place more value on the money than you do on eternal life. Your appraisals are wrong. You don't have the faintest idea what it cost to provide for your salvation, or you wouldn't value it so lightly."

It was easy to see why my friend was so noncommittal toward the cross of Christ. Even though he had been around Christians all his life and had heard hundreds of sermons, he held the typical "martyr" view of the death of Jesus. It is simply not true that He died just like all the thousands of others who were crucified on crosses around the wall of Jerusalem. There can be no comparison. Christ did not die because of the nails, spear, or physical abuse. No amount of blows or pain could have produced the agonies of the cross. Others were enduring the same torture of the flesh, but none died from the same causes which took the life of the Son of God. His death was different. How was it different?

What kind of death did He suffer? The Bible says that "he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Hebrews 2:9. Think of that for a moment. He died my death, and yours, and every other person's. How could that be? Will we not have to suffer our own death-experience at the end of our days? Yes, we will. And therein lies the mystery and the wonder of what He did for us. He did not take our place in passing through the first death. He experienced the second death for every soul who has ever been born.

Christ Died the Second Death

It is so important that we distinguish between the first and second deaths. Only then will we be able to understand why God the Father turned away from His Son on the cross. Angels were not permitted to minister to Him. Jesus had to be treated as though He were guilty of every terrible sin which has ever been committed. Under the weight of that condemnation and guilt, He sweat great drops of blood and fell fainting to the ground in the Garden. On Golgotha's Hill, shut off from the approving presence of His Father, He cried in torment, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46.

Do you begin to see what Sam overlooked? He did not sense the real suffering of the cross and, therefore, had no true understanding of the cost of salvation. We shall attempt to expose some of those "hidden costs" which Sam did not recognize and which many today do not properly appraise.

Paul wrote, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Romans 5:12. Several fundamental questions are raised by these words of Paul. If only one man sinned, why did all have to die? Do people have to pay the penalty for other men's sins? When Adam was in the Garden of Eden, he represented every person who would ever be born. As the head of the race he stood before God as though he were every man. You and I were there, represented by the genes and chromosomes which later produced the hereditary pattern of Adam's children. As partakers of his body and mind, all his descendants had to be affected by what affected him. He is our father, and there are laws of heredity which reproduce the genetic pattern from age to age.

What happened to Adam which also affected his children? God placed him on probation in that original paradise. The test was simple and direct: obey and live, disobey and die. We remember so well the story of the tree in the midst of the Garden. God said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:17. His continued existence in the perfect atmosphere of Eden depended upon obedience. Adam's happy future was conditional upon staying away from the forbidden tree, but he did not meet the condition.

No provision had been made to remove the penalty or to lighten it. The issue was clear-cut: obey and live, disobey and die. At the age of 930 the sentence was fully carried out, and Adam died and was buried.

All of Adam's children were born after his nature had become depraved through sin. They could inherit only what their father had to give, so they were born with a sinful, fallen nature. Please note that they did not inherit the *guilt* of their father, but only his weakened, sin-loving nature. There is no such thing as original sin, in the sense that Adam's descendants were accountable for his sin. It is true that they also were subject to death just like Adam, but their death was not the punishment for Adam's sin. They died because they had received a mortal nature through the laws of heredity. Their death resulted from the degenerated constitution which Adam transmitted to his offspring. Only Adam's death was the punishment for his sin.

From the moment sin became a fixed fact, every human being who would live became subject to the first death. In fact, if God had not intervened, it would have been an eternal death. Adam's probation ended when he sinned. As far as that first offer of life was concerned, it was finished. He had forfeited all hope of life under the proposal God had made. Now only death awaited him - a hopeless, final death. And if God had done nothing more, that's the way it would have ended - for Adam and all of his descendants.

A Second Probation Provided

But immediately after Adam sinned and before the sentence was fully executed, God introduced the plan of salvation through the seed of the woman and gave Adam a new trial (Genesis 3:15). This second probation was conditioned upon acceptance of a Saviour who would bear man's penalty through His own substitutionary death. A new hope was set before Adam and all his posterity through this second arrangement, but it did not alter the consequences of failing the first probation.

That brings us to a very crucial question. How could God uphold His integrity by carrying out the penalty of the first failure, and still hold out the offer of a new life to everyone through another probation? God met that puzzling dilemma in such a simple way that we are amazed. He would let men live their limited life span and then die, regardless of whether they did good or evil. That first death would take care of the Adamic consequences of failing the first test. Then, let all men be raised from that first death, into which they fell through no fault of their own, and let them stand before God to answer for their own personal sins, for which they are responsible. Then their destiny would be determined on the basis of the *second probation* (between birth and the first death), and how they met the conditions of salvation through Christ.

If they are found guilty of personally failing the second test they will suffer the same penalty that Adam faced - death. In this case, however, there will be no further probation extended, and their death will be the second death - final, eternal extinction.

Now we can better understand the words of Paul, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Corinthians 15:22. The plan of salvation involves a resurrection of all men from the first death, so that they can be placed beyond the effects of Adam's sin. This is necessary so that they can be judged on the basis of their personal actions and choices. Adam died because he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, not because of anything he did after that. But if, after the judgment, Adam is found worthy of the second death, it will not be because he ate the fruit, but because of other sins committed after that experience which were not confessed and forgiven.

Some may charge God with being arbitrary and cruel to bring the wicked back to life again only to destroy them in the lake of fire. Why not just let them remain under the power of the first death? That would not meet the conditions required by the second probation. The first death is not the punishment for sin for any of Adam's posterity. Justice requires that each individual be held accountable only for meeting the conditions of his own salvation. Without a resurrection no such judgment could be made, and no just retribution could be given. It is no wanton act on God's part, but a fulfillment of the standards of divine justice.

The Second Adam Meets the Test

With that understanding of the first and second deaths we are prepared to examine the roles of the first and second Adams. Just as the entire human race was represented by Adam in the Garden of Eden, so every man would be represented by Jesus, the second Adam. "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Romans 5:18, 19.

As we have seen, whatever happened to the first Adam affected all those whom he represented. Now we are told by Paul that the experience of the second Adam will directly affect all men. Jesus, the Creator, was incorporated into humanity, and stood before God as though He were every man. This is why Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ." Galatians 2:20. "We are buried with him by baptism." Romans 6:4. "As Christ was raised up, ... even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:4. The life of man is deeply associated with the events of Christ's life.

Because Jesus came to redeem the failure of the first Adam, He had to do it in the same flesh that mankind possessed when He was born. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." Hebrews 2:17. Had He possessed any supernatural advantage over His brethren in conquering sin Jesus would have given support to Satan's charge of injustice. God had been accused of requiring an obedience that was unreasonable and even impossible. Christ came to disprove the devil's false accusation by meeting the requirements of God in the same human nature that any man may obtain through faith in the Father.

It was that perfect victory of Christ over sin and death which provides the basis of all salvation. All the descendants of Adam lay under the influence of his weakness and failure, making it impossible for any of them to obey the law. In that dying, condemned family of Adam they were doomed to perpetual struggle and defeat. *But the victory of the second Adam opened a door of escape for the family of the first Adam.*

Changing Families

The first Adam passed on the results of his *sinful* experience through physical birth - weakness, sin, and death. The second Adam passed on the results of His *sinless* experience through spiritual birth - partaking of the divine nature, victory, and eternal life. All the effects of the first Adam's failure are completely counteracted by the second Adam. Please don't miss the point that one can join the new family only through a spiritual birth. Through faith in Christ a new creation takes place, lifting man out of the hopeless, carnal state of the family of Adam. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The change of families constitutes one of the least understood blessings of the Christian experience. It is not a theoretical or mystical transaction with no practical results. Just as the transformation of nature is dramatically real, so the privileges of the new family are also real. One of the hardest things for the newborn Christian to accept is the total change of position, authority, and ownership under the new family arrangement. They are now eligible for all the riches and advantages of the children of God.

Incredible promises are included in this new spiritual relationship. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Romans 8:16, 17. It is easy to understand why the human mind boggles at this concept. We tend to probe for hidden reservations and secret meanings in verses like these. A joint-heir is one who holds equal rights to all the family estate. We ask ourselves how it is possible to become sudden heirs of such unlimited wealth. From abject poverty we now hold title to the universe! The holdings of God include galaxies and island universes in space. By faith we try to grasp hold of the reality: Jesus and I share and share alike in all the spiritual riches of the Father. Whatever He gets, we also receive. Paul describes the boundless resources of the Spirit-filled life in these words: "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Ephesians 3:19. Who can comprehend such language? The great, loving God who made us, and who gave up His only Son to die for us, now wants us to have everything His Son has, and also everything that He has!

Along with the staggering assets of a King, we also actually inherit the family name and the family resemblance. We even begin to look like our new Father and Elder Brother. "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Colossians 3:10. In the beginning Adam was made in the image of God, and was called a "son of God." In Genesis we read, "In the likeness of God made he him. ... And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years and begat a son in his own likeness." Genesis 5:1-3.

Like father, like son. Adam looked like God, but the resemblance was lost through sin. So Adam's son did not look like God; he looked like Adam. But under the new birth, man begins to lose his Adamic features and to look like the One who created him - Jesus. Is this resemblance real or imagined? Does God create only an illusion to make it seem that man is being restored to the divine image, or does He powerfully provide for the change to take place? There is a theological debate as to whether God's righteousness is only accounted to man or whether it is truly imparted as well. Those who feel that man is only accounted righteous, do not believe that he can really overcome sin and live a holy life, even in Christ. But Paul's words are clear, "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Romans 5:19.

Along with the family likeness this new spiritual birth brings deliverance from the second death, which was inevitable under the Adamic nature. Christ did not change the first death penalty for Adam's failure under the first probation, but He did abolish the second death for all those who received Him under the second probation. This was made possible only because He submitted to suffer the horrible penalty of the second death in place of man. He became sin for us, and voluntarily accepted the punishment which sin demands. On the cross, with no ray of hope from the Father, Jesus was enveloped in the darkness of a billion lost souls. He tasted death for every man. Hebrews 2:9.

Abraham's Fiery Crucible

Was it easy for Jesus to have such an experience? Was it easy for the Father to withdraw from His beloved Son and treat Him as though He was guilty of the most atrocious blasphemy and crime? Only one man in the world has come near to understanding the intense suffering of the Father and the Son in that situation. That man, Abraham, gave up his only son also, and became the first human to share the agony of the cross.

Paul wrote that "the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham." Galatians 3:8. Jesus also recognized that Abraham had special revelations on the atonement. He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." John 8:56.

To understand how this Old Testament patriarch had such prophetic insight into the work of the Messiah, we must go back to his experience on Mount Moriah. Because he had initially failed to believe that God could give him a son from Sarah's dead womb, Abraham was subjected to another test concerning life from the dead. God told him to slay his only son Isaac on an altar. The account of that lonely journey to Mount Moriah is one of the most moving stories in the sacred Word.

Abraham had no doubt about the validity of the order. He was a friend of God and had learned to recognize His voice. There was no way for Abraham to comprehend the reason for this bizarre command. The promise had been confirmed repeatedly that Isaac was the seed through whom the Messiah would come. Now he was asked to take the life of that child of his old age through whom the world would be blessed and redeemed. How could the Saviour come through Isaac if he was slain on the altar?

By the time father and son reached the base of the mountain Abraham's faith had resolutely claimed God's resurrection power. He said to the servants, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Genesis 22:5. This time there was no weak faltering over the seeming impossibility of the promise. No resurrection from the dead had ever occurred, but Abraham believed that God would fulfill His promise concerning Isaac's seed.

As Abraham lifted the knife over his submissive son, he was meeting the most severe test ever faced by a human being. It would have been terrible enough to take his son's life, but with one stroke of the knife he was about to destroy the only hope of salvation for himself and every person who would be born. No one except Jesus would ever hold the destiny of a world in his hand as Abraham did in that moment. It was more than the test of fatherly affection. By killing Isaac, Abraham was depriving the world of a Saviour. The knife was at his own throat also. God's unfailing word had assured him that no Messiah could be born without Isaac. Do you begin to see into the fiery crucible of Abraham's test? No wonder Jesus spoke of Abraham being able to see His day.

Even though his hand was stayed and God provided another sacrifice, Abraham really did give up his son that day. He experienced all the pain, heartbreak, and horror that attends the death of an only child. Holding the power to save His son's life, he would not exercise it. God intervened only after it was fully apparent that Abraham would not hesitate to offer up Isaac. Thank God for the faith of Abraham and for the equal faith and submission of his beloved son. No one can miss the impact of that very moving, human story. It brings the love and sacrifice of the atonement within the understanding of every child of Adam. Now we can grasp a little better how the Father and His only begotten Son suffered at the cross. The cost of our redemption becomes clearer.

How the Cross Provides Forgiveness

But now we must consider another aspect of this heavenly drama which will further illuminate God's love and sacrifice. How does the death of one man, the second Adam, provide forgiveness for all who have sinned? The Bible says, "Without shedding of blood is no remission (of sins)." Hebrews 9:22. Remission, of course, means forgiveness. The question is, How does Christ's death make it possible for Him to forgive sin? This brings us to the crux of all we have learned so far. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer the second death in order to acquire the power to forgive.

The germ of all forgiveness is rooted in an act of substitution. Whoever forgives another person must actually substitute himself for the one he forgives, and be willing to suffer the consequences of the wrong done. For example, if I forgive someone a debt, I must be prepared to suffer the loss of the amount. If I forgive a blow, I must be willing to suffer the pain of it, without requiring the one who gave it to be punished.

Justice requires that every offender be recompensed in proportion to what he did: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. The one who gives a blow must also suffer an equal blow in return. Forgiveness, though, relieves the offender from receiving what he legally deserves. The forgiver accepts the consequence himself in order that the guilty one can go free without punishment. Thus there is clearly a substitution of the innocent for the guilty in every act of forgiveness.

As a further demonstration let us imagine that a murdered man could forgive his murderer from beyond the grave. He would, in effect, be consenting to his own death in order that the killer would not be punished. By accepting the results of the offense against him, he allows his own death to satisfy the penalty which could be legally laid upon the murderer.

This illustration brings us very close to the heart of the atonement. We are dealing here with the readjustment of a jarred relationship. That is what atonement really is. Two parties are always involved, the wronged and the wrongdoer. In this case it is God, the wronged, and man, the one who sins against Him. Justice demands an adequate expiation of the sin. Only two courses are possible: either justice will exact the prescribed penalty, or there must be forgiveness from the offended one. If forgiveness is extended, the forgiver will have to accept the consequences of the sin, and suffer it in place of the guilty. The penalty for sin is death. So in order to grant forgiveness to the sinner, Jesus must be willing to bear in His own body the same punishment that the broken law would demand of the sinner.

The punishment for sin is not the first death, but the second death. That is why the protracted agony of Jesus on the cross was totally unlike any other death. Thousands of criminals were crucified in the same physical way that Christ was nailed to the cross, *but they suffered only the bodily pain of the first death*. He experienced the awful condemnation and separation from God that the vilest of sinners will feel in the lake of fire. His sensitive nature was traumatized by sharing vicariously the guilt of foul rapes, murders, and atrocities. He became sin in order to allow the full wrath of the law to fall upon Him in exactly the same way it would fall upon the lost.

In no other way can we explain the mysterious anguish of spirit which surrounded our Saviour in His closing hours of life. From the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus bore the accumulated sins of mankind on His breaking heart. Not one ray of light was permitted to penetrate the blanket of total alienation from

His Father in heaven. In order to take the place of guilty sinners and to provide forgiveness there could be no difference in their penalty and His penalty.

Let no one suggest that the Father did not suffer equally with His Son. The divine forbearance of God in allowing wicked men to torture His Son to death is the ultimate proof that He loves us with the same love that He loved Jesus. The choice He faced was very simple. He could spare the Son or He could spare us. There was no other choice. The law had been broken - the law which was holy and perfect. As a reflection of His character it could not be changed or destroyed. The penalty had to be paid. The Father loved those who had broken His law, but He also loved His Son.

Look again at the scene around that cross. God looked upon those wicked men as they spat upon Jesus and hit Him in the face with their fists. They were unworthy to touch the hem of His garment, but they were mauling Him to death. He held the power in His hand to smite those little men into oblivion. He could save His Son from cruel taunts and blows, but if He intervened not one human being would ever live again. Adam, Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, and every other child of Adam would be lost for eternity. Their resurrection depended wholly upon the death and resurrection of His Beloved Son. In His omniscience God must have remembered every individual face and name, even of those who had not yet been born.

In that moment God thought about you and me. Even though He saw all our miserable failures He still wanted us to be with Him for eternity. He knew the great majority would not accept the offer of eternal life with Him, even though it would be provided at such a fearful cost. But He also knew that a few would love Him and gladly receive the substitutionary death of His Son in their behalf. So God turned away from His Son, and allowed Him to be crushed to death under the weight of sins He did not commit. Even the sun hid its face from the terrible scene, and the earth shuddered in protest. "It is finished," Jesus cried, and yielded up His life. John 19:30.

Was the Price Too High?

The price of redemption had been paid. Was it too high? For multiplied millions it was an empty investment, a wasted sacrifice. They would lightly esteem the entire transaction and reject it out of hand. But what about you? Now that you see a little clearer what it cost, do you find yourself responding to the investment He made in your salvation?

So far we have focused upon the enormous scope of the atonement - how it provided for every man, woman, and child who has ever lived. This emphasis should not obscure the terribly personal aspect of what He did. The quality of that love which brought Jesus to His death on the cross was such that He would have made the same sacrifice for even one soul. I need to remind myself every day that God not only "so loved the world," but He so loved me, that He gave His Son. The genius of the entire plan of salvation revolved around the application of His death to individuals.

Christ's love for people is repeatedly dramatized in the Bible. We see it in His time-consuming, one-person interviews. Some of His most significant spiritual discourses were delivered to single individuals. We see it also in the dangerous voyage He made across the sea to deliver the Gadarene demoniac. It occupied fully two days of His precious time to cross that stormy water and return. Only

one man was directly contacted during that unpleasant excursion, but that man, later, turned the whole countryside toward the Saviour.

We must watch Jesus relate to Nicodemus, the leper, the harlot, and the despised tax-assessor before we can understand the value of a single soul. He took time with people regardless of their position or possessions. The woman of Samaria was just another shameless community "character" when Christ took the opportunity to engage her in a conversation that turned her life upside down.

Undoubtedly Jesus looked at each person as a candidate for eternal life. How else can we explain His association with Simon, Zacchaeus, and Mary Magdalene? He saw in every soul the glorious potential of reflecting His own holy character for both time and eternity. He saw there the reason for His incarnation. Each soul was the one He had come to redeem. Those were the faces which came into His mind as He hung on the cross, strengthening Him to drain the cup of His suffering.

One of the most astounding statements in the Bible about the atonement is found in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

How could that terrible experience on the cross have any joy connected with it? We are assured that some joyful motive girded Him for the shame and humiliation of the crucifixion. What was "the joy that was set before him"? Here lies the secret of His self-abnegation. He did it in the strength of the anticipated joy of opening wide the gates of Paradise to welcome us into His never-ending kingdom. It was love for us, and the desire to be with us for eternity which led Him to endure the unendurable. Here is a positive assurance that He was thinking of you and me as He bore the wrenching cruelties of the cross.

Is one soul worth such an infinite price? In the light of eternity the answer is Yes. Consider the amazing fact that one redeemed soul will outlive all the combined years of earth's total population. Eventually, in eternity, the life of that one person will outstrip by a million times all the life spans of all the inhabitants of this world put together. In this sense, one saved person represents more life, more accomplishment, and greater fulfillment than all the lost people combined. Jesus must have recognized that truth every time He looked into the face of a man, woman, or child. In even the most degraded human being He saw a life that could memorialize His love for longer than time had been computed.

With these glimpses into the real costs of Calvary, how could anyone lightly esteem His mission to planet earth? You can be that soul who will bear an everlasting witness to the love and grace of our Saviour. Never has so much been provided for so little. By a single step of faith we may exchange the deadly birthrights of the first Adam for the unsearchable riches of the second Adam. In a moment of surrender and acceptance we begin to share the life He deserved, because He was willing to bear the guilt, condemnation, and death we deserved. What an exchange! It will be the exhaustless theme of our study for all eternity. And as ages roll by, we will continue to get new, thrilling insights into the nature of His atoning love and sacrifice. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Hebrews 2:3. So great? *So very great!* There is no answer to the question because there is *no escape*. Accept that salvation now that costs so much to provide. Don't neglect it another moment.

The Last Night on Earth

Joe Crews

Ezekiel 7:2

One of the most dramatic verses in the Bible has been translated by Dr. Moffett in these words: "Evil on evil says the Lord, the Eternal ... it is coming, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end. Your doom has come." Ezekiel 7:5-7.

Based on this startling text, our attention is drawn to the most solemn message ever heard by human ears. It is a warning to each person alive on this planet today, because every individual must pass through their last night on earth. What will it be like to begin living that final 24 hours of time?

Perhaps you've heard about the city of Pompeii which nestled in the shadow of Mt. Vesuvius in old Italy long ago. In A.D. 79 that mountain simply exploded with volcanic fury and millions of tons of molten lava came pouring down upon Pompeii to completely inundate it, wiping out all its inhabitants. A friend of mine has walked over the hardened ash and pumice which still covers the excavated ruins of that ancient city. He described the contorted postures of the victims whose forms have been perfectly pre-served by molding the space occupied by their decayed bodies.

I've often thought, "If the stones of the street could speak, what a story they would have to tell about that last night on earth for Pompeii." The whole thing seems to come up before me as I think about it right now. The experience of an entire city full of people, overtaken without warning and thrust into eternity, whether they were ready or not. What will it be like when you and I face that same experience? Will it find us clinging to the same old sins that many of them were obviously committing as they were swept away by the sudden deluge of death?

Doubtless, many in Pompeii heard that initial explosion and had time to look up to see the terrifying wall of lava just before it engulfed them. We know nothing about their thoughts, but the graphic physical positions of their bodies reveal that sin had become a science, and few, if any, were thinking of death or the hereafter.

I wonder what Paul must have felt when he preached his gospel of grace to the inhabitants of Pompeii. Surely in his ranging over the chief cities of the Roman Empire he would have visited that center of vice and evil repute. But it is highly unlikely that the apostle received any favorable hearing from the dwellers in that seaport sin-city. Perhaps they expelled him out of hand, and Paul had to shake the dust from his feet as he departed.

It was from Pompeii that General Titus had drawn many of his soldiers for his infamous assault on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Perhaps it was one of the citizens of Pompeii who threw the flaming torch which burned the magnificent temple to its foundations.

But now those veterans of foreign wars have returned to their home place to live out their years of retirement in unrestrained indulgence. Slowly the cup of iniquity fills to the very brim, and on a night of unusual revelry and drunkenness, the angel of death flies low over the streets of Pompeii. It is not hard to imagine how the final call of God was extended to every man, woman, and child on that last night. Before the angel of mercy folded its wings, the Holy Spirit pleaded at the door of each heart. Long after the music and dancing had ended, people tossed on their beds, wrestling with the powerful convictions of conscience, but one by one, those tender impressions were suppressed and denied. The voice of the Spirit was drowned out by the fleshly clamor for more excitement and sin. The fate of Pompeii was sealed.

Lingering Over the Call

The Bible gives us another striking illustration of the last night on earth in the book of Genesis. A city was to be wiped out of existence because of its total abandonment to the perversions of iniquity. On the eve of its destruction, Lot made a final visit to his daughters and their Sodomite husbands who had made their home in the midst of the doomed city. But his urgent pleas were ridiculed as groundless fears. The Bible records that "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law." Genesis 19:14. They actually laughed at the old man as he wept over their unconcern. How different it would have been had they known that it was indeed a judgment message from God. Eagerly they would have responded and hastened out of Sodom had they truly believed that it was their last night on earth.

But they didn't know, and they didn't believe. Most of us will never recognize when that fatal moment approaches in our own lives. Many are snatched by sudden accident and death without a second's notice, much less a 24-hour alert. But suppose you did know that you had exactly two months, or two weeks, or two days. I've heard people say, "Oh, if I had that knowledge ahead of time, I could easily give up all my bad habits and make my decision to follow Christ fully." Of course, but the truth is that none of us are privy to that information, and for many who are reading these lines, that last night is much nearer than we can think or imagine.

How very clever Satan is in exploiting this personal area of the unknown in each one of us. He well recognizes that procrastination is his most effective weapon in causing people to be lost. The longer the decision is postponed, the easier it is to wait a little longer, until finally the putting off process turns into a lethal addiction. The will waxes weaker and weaker as delay saps the initiative and makes it less and less likely that the individual will act before it is too late.

The Bible has some very sobering things to say about this subject of lingering over the call of God. When Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness and judgment, we are told that the governor trembled and promised to call for Paul when he had a more "convenient season." That better time never came, and as far as we know, Felix went down into a Christless grave at the end of his life. King Agrippa was also deeply convicted as he listened to Paul's testimony about Christ. He cried out, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Acts 26:28. What a tragedy that, with all the trembling

and conviction, neither of those Roman rulers actually moved to obey what they knew to be right. "Almost" is not enough.

It is sometimes the case that individuals are faced with choices that must be made within a few minutes which will affect the entire future direction of their lives. In these rare instances (and perhaps they are not as rare as we think) that golden moment of opportunity flashes into focus, remains only a few precious moments, and then disappears forever. It seems patently true that Felix and Agrippa faced the most significant and favorable opportunity to choose life over death, and they blew it. They waited too long, and their conviction faded and disappeared.

Men and women do the same thing today. They wait for more convenient circumstances - a different job, retirement, or financial security. They make promises to themselves and others that they will surrender to Christ and obey the truth just as soon as the time is right. Somebody else - Satan - hears those promises and he immediately begins to manipulate events that will make that right moment impossible. Those people keep waiting and waiting and waiting, and many of them will be waiting when the water turns to blood and probation's door has closed on the human race. No wonder the Bible declares that "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:2.

When the flood came and the door of the ark closed, it did not matter how near or how far a person happened to be at that moment. Those who were one foot out-side that door were just as lost as those who were miles away. After 120 years of pleading, the Spirit of God was withdrawn from the earth, the hand of God closed the door, and the fate of a world was fixed and settled. Does that have anything to do with what is happening to the progeny of those eight ark survivors today? Indeed, it does. Because Jesus said, "As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:37.

Christ was referring to the end-time in which we now live. He said, "So shall it be." Are there similarities with the antediluvian culture and lifestyle? We are told that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5. Does that appraisal of man before the flood match the perverted picture of Noah's modern descendants?

For the answer to that question consult your morning newspaper and the local TV guide. Iniquity is rampant. Crime is out of control. Terrorists strike in unexpected places. No one would question that evil imagination marks the present age with its harvest of violence and lawlessness.

Is there also evidence that the Holy Spirit is striving with human hearts and confronting multitudes with their final invitation of mercy? As an evangelist, I can bear witness that there is a present raging controversy revolving around every living soul. Some who are reading these words are on the verge of making a decision that can mean life or death, and you need to go ahead with God. At the same time, Satan plays upon your ungrounded fears to try to hold you back from an all-out commitment. You are being tempted, like Felix, to wait for a more convenient season, but such will never come. To linger now is to become a part of the vast majority who were destroyed in the flood and who represent those who will be unprepared when Jesus comes again.

The Red Sea Place

Think for a moment what would have happened at the Red Sea if the people had hesitated to go forward at the command of God! Suppose the leaders had pressed for a committee meeting to discuss the radical option of marching the entire encampment into an apparent death trap. The truth is that there was only time for action. Delay of any kind would have brought the pursuing Egyptian army upon them, and they would have been on their way back to the land of bondage in chains.

What does this experience have to teach us? It has much to say to those who have recently broken free from the slavery of sin. This parallels the escape from Egypt. And the Red Sea experience symbolizes baptism for the newborn Christian. How do we know that? In 1 Corinthians 10:2, we read that "they were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." God set before them that golden opportunity which we talked about earlier and which may appear only once in a lifetime. The decision made within the next five minutes would settle their destiny for years to come. This was it. Either trust God and obey His command to step into that restless sea, or run the risk of capture by the enemy.

Have you come to that Red Sea place in your life? I've observed thousands struggle with that step of total surrender in baptism. It signifies a complete yielding of the entire life and a willingness to move forward in obedience - regardless of the consequences. It is not an easy decision to make. I know one lady whose baptism was set three different times, and she failed to show up at any of them. Her faith was not strong enough to take that final step which would place her wholly in the family of God. You can imagine the result of her procrastination. She was finally overtaken by the enemy, drawn back into smoking, and was soon back in total bondage of the flesh.

I'm just glad that somebody at the head of the line had strong faith when Moses gave the orders to go forward into the sea, and just as surely as the waters parted under their feet, so will the forbidding circumstances disappear as God's people today move forward in obedience to Him. It is interesting to note that the next move was up to the people in the days of Moses, and the same is true for those who have departed from spiritual bondage. God cannot and will not make the decision for us, but as soon as we take the first step in obedience, He fills us with the power to overcome every obstacle.

Some might object that I am pressing too hard upon those who are lingering in the twilight zone of indecision. You may get offended by my strong urging for you to act quickly to follow Jesus. But please remember that I am addressing those who may be living their last night on earth. I do not believe it is possible to obey God too quickly, and somehow I don't think anyone will ever chide me in heaven because I made the call to them clear, concise, and urgent. I'm very much in earnest about it because I have seen the results of waiting too long.

I could fill this book with emotional stories of those who postponed surrender until their hearts were cold and unresponsive. Further, I could give names and places where nightly attendees of the crusade meetings were taken in a moment by sudden accident or death. Time after time I have made calls for decision, not realizing that there were people in the audience listening to their last invitation to be saved.

Why So Few?

But why is it that such a comparative few respond to those calls for surrender? Why should anyone need to be begged to enter the glorious salvation of our Lord? I want to answer those questions in such a way that you will never forget it. Even Jesus confirmed that only a few would be willing to follow the narrow road to heaven. Most would choose the broad road of death where the great majority would be traveling.

Then we have that shocking statement by the Master to which we have already referred: "As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:37. How many were saved in those days from the global disaster? Only eight had the faith in God's word to be shut in that monstrosity of a boat. They were the only survivors. Will there be any kind of proportionate number spared "in the days of the Son of man"? All agree that this is talking about the end of the world and the coming of Jesus.

I've heard the statement, "Oh, if I had lived in those days, I would have gone into the ark with faithful Noah." How easy it is to say what we would have done under certain conditions of the past. Others have talked about the noble martyrs who died for their faith during the Dark Ages and have stated with great assurance that they would have gladly laid down their lives for the truth's sake also.

Now it may be true that some would have died for their faith, but few have any conception of what it meant to stand for Christ during those terrible days. Those brave men and women who were burned at the stake, thrown to the wild animals, or tortured in medieval dungeons could have saved their lives by a simple motion of the hand. In most cases they were offered amnesty and immediate freedom if they signaled their willingness to renounce their faith. So the choice was very clear as they watched the dry faggots being heaped around them. They could suffocate in the midst of the punishing smoke and flame or else walk back into the comfort of home and family. Untold millions chose the heroic but horrible living death rather than deny their Saviour.

How many Christians of your acquaintance have that kind of self-sacrificing faith and love? Which ones would have followed the martyrs to the stake or the arena? Some might, had they lived in those days. But of one thing we can be certain: Only those who would rather die right now than to break God's holy law would have proved loyal to Him during those years of severe persecution.

Unfortunately, we live in an easy, permissive age where self-denial is decidedly out of fashion. Truth has become very negotiable in the relaxed ecumenical climate of contemporary religion. Pluralism has become so acceptable that membership applicants are given a wide range of what they may believe or not believe. Very few, if any, issues of doctrine are considered important enough to even contend for, much less die for. There are notable exceptions, of course, but these are often found outside the comfortable contours of the so-called Christian West.

The Man Who Gave All

For example, every time I listen to people make excuses for not going all the way with Jesus, I think of Saddiq. It was on December 25, 1955, that I responded to the furious pounding on my door in Lahore, Pakistan. A typically dressed Moslem villager rushed past me into the house, crying out: "Baptize me quickly! Baptize me now!" After calming down somewhat, the man began to pour forth an amazing

story. His name was Saddiq and he lived in the tribal areas of the Khyber Pass near the Afghan border where there was little or no government control. Moslem law was invested in each man who possessed a knife, an ax, or a gun.

Saddiq had a good job and a wonderful family, and he was also a faithful Moslem who prayed five times a day toward Mecca. But recently he had started listening to an evangelist friend of mine who was holding a tent meeting in the area. Every evening on the way home from work Saddiq would stand outside in the shadows absorbing the thrilling truths of the gospel. He dared not go inside for fear of being killed as an infidel, and when the altar calls were made, Saddiq could only commit himself in his heart to follow Jesus.

Later, he confided to his wife that he was going to become a Christian. The following day he returned from work to find his house empty. His father-in-law had taken everything and everyone from the home. He was never to see his wife and children again. A few days later, he was fired from his job, as relatives intervened against him. Then, he was waylaid by members of his own family and beaten almost to death. Fleeing for his life, Saddiq had come to the teeming city of Lahore and sought out someone who could help him finish the journey from Islam to Christianity. I was happy to oblige. We filled the baptismal tank and buried that courageous man with his Lord on that Christmas afternoon.

I saw the scars on Saddiq's body as he came up out of the water - marks of devotion and sacrifice that he will carry for the rest of his life. He will also be a refugee and fugitive from the wrath of his own relatives for as long as he lives. Anyone who finds him will count it a duty to kill him.

I think often of Saddiq when I'm holding an evangelistic series, and most of the audience have been convicted by the same truths that my brother Saddiq learned outside the tent so long ago. But all do not respond in the same way he did. None of them face the lifelong loss of children, the constant threat of death, or the extreme physical persecution that will follow Saddiq the rest of his days on earth. A few, though, are being tested by the possible loss of a few dollars and perhaps even a few friends. They hold back and complain of the hardship and sacrifice involved in making the decision for baptism. The truth is that we don't know what real self-denial and sacrifice are. Unless we are ready to give our lives for the truth's sake, we are not worthy of the kingdom of heaven.

Sometimes we hear fervent saints declare, "If I had lived in the days of Jesus, I would have been one of His followers." But do we know what was involved in such an open alignment with Jesus of Nazareth? Regardless of their status, people were cast out of the synagogue immediately. This meant they were boycotted in their business, disinherited from their families, and considered to be dead by all their friends. Would some indeed have made that choice if they had lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago? Yes, but only the ones who would rather die than sin in their current situation would have stepped out to follow the lowly Nazarene then.

And would it be the same for the days of Noah? We've already learned that only eight were willing to risk the censure and ridicule of being a member of Noah's boat church. How many modern saints would have dared take a public stand for the outrageous project of building a huge ship on the side of a

dry hill? Probably no other religious group in world history has endured more negative publicity than Noah and his family.

Noah's Last Sermon

It has always been fascinating to me that Noah probably hired helpers to construct the ark, and they perished later on because they rejected the very means of salvation in which they invested much of their lives. And these were the people who had the greatest reason for believing that a flood was coming. Day after day, they listened to the earnest message of the old patriarch as he pleaded with relatives and friends to avail themselves of this way of escape. The Bible calls Noah "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) which indicates that he might have spent more time calling for decisions than driving nails into the ark.

How can we explain the amazing resistance to the powerful, Spirit-filled appeals of Noah and his sons? It seems almost a classic example of majority influence. The dread of being different has driven many sincere people to reject, out of hand, the appeal of conscience and sound judgment. It happened in Noah's day, and it still happens today. Prejudice and emotion, once aroused, has a greater influence on decision than all the logical truth in the world. None of the antediluvians could deny the persuasive evidence of those animals marching two by two and seven by seven into the completed ark, but the jeering multitude reminded them of the cost of non-conformity. They dared not be different and show any support for the unpopular little group of religious standouts.

I've tried to imagine the dynamics of that last appeal Noah made to the crowd of curious onlookers. The sounds of construction have ceased, and the tools have been put out of sight. The animals are all safely on board, and Noah's family has finished transferring all their possessions into the massive. Of all the sermons which have ever been preached in the history of man, this is the one I would have preferred to hear. The drama of this moment was captured by our Lord Jesus when He said, "As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Another last call - another final sermon, if you please - will be given to the doomed inhabitants of this equally wicked age. This time the destruction will not be by water but by fire. Yet, there is a terrible parallel between the urgent message of Noah and that of the faithful who will give the loud warning cry that the world is about to be destroyed again.

Jesus described the indifference with which that message will be received. "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." Luke 17:27. What a commentary on the paralyzing effect of sin! People continue, business as usual, while the last moments of probation slip away.

Has any other preacher operated under the emotional stress that constrained Noah that day? He was fully aware that in a few moments the door behind him would close forever on any hope of salvation for the human race. Only the words of this final sermon could make a difference for any living soul. The Scriptures indicate that Christ by the Holy Spirit was preaching through Noah to the spirits of those sin-bound people (1 Peter 3:18-20).

I'm sure there were tears in Noah's voice and on his cheeks as he pleaded with them to join him in the ark. Many in the audience were lifelong neighbors, and perhaps Noah even called them by name as he pressed his appeal for decision. A solemn conviction held the crowd motion-less as the old man paused to wipe his eyes. Then, there was a restless stirring as some began to edge forward as though they would join the little group, but they were instantly drawn back by the hands of relatives or friends.

I cannot enter fully into Noah's feelings as he turned to join his family in the ark for the last time, but I have a strong kinship with him in that lonely last call he extended to the crowd. I've felt it every time I close a crusade and give the final invitation. I always personally know individuals in that audience who are fighting the Spirit of God. They believe the truth, tremble with conviction, and are almost persuaded to come forward. That's the way it must have been with Noah as he turned to beseech just one more time. But finally he had to bring the meeting to a close and walk, weeping, through the open door. And suddenly that door began to move on its hinges, and within seconds it had swung shut with a solid thud.

There were nervous cries from some as the door closed, and then, a babble of excited conversation. "My, have you ever heard anything like that in your life?" one voice came out above the others. "Do you think he really could be correct about a flood?" asked another. But, then, there was sharp dissent, and some were pointing to the cloudless sky to loudly affirm what had been heard repeatedly since the ark project began, "It never has rained, and these people are wild fanatics to believe such foolishness."

For two or three days apprehension continued to grip the community, especially as they passed the tightly closed ark each morning on their way to work. But by mid-week it seemed obvious to all that Noah's prediction had been totally wrong, and even those who had been stirred deeply with conviction were embarrassed by their former concern. To cover their chagrin, some of them began to make mocking comments to anyone who would listen. By the seventh day not one sympathetic sentiment was to be found favoring the cloistered family.

And then it happened! Clouds seemed to appear out of nowhere, and drops of rain began to spatter against the hungry earth. Screams and cries rent the air as men, women, and children fled toward any shelter available. But then the water was pouring in torrents from the heavens, and out of huge cavernous cracks in the ground. Those who were able to struggle to higher levels were quickly overwhelmed and dragged to their deaths, while the great cypress ark floated gently and safely on the rising waves.

"As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man." A few faithful ones, counted as fools and fanatics, but courageous enough to follow unpopular truth and proclaim a special warning that the end is near, will be saved. Have you heard it? Do you grasp the lesson our Lord was teaching in the Noah sermon? "As it was ... so shall it be." No ifs or ands or buts - "So *shall* it be." The last night on earth will come for everyone when the heavens split wide open, and the glorious retinue of angels provide a dazzling freeway of splendor for the King of kings and Lord of lords. It will be unexpected, and it will be too late for those who waited till the door of mercy closed.

Gambling For Time

Just as the probation of the antediluvian world ended seven days before the flood, so the probation of the planet will close seven plagues before Jesus appears. During those desolating, end-time seven last plagues, the Bible says no one can enter the temple in heaven (Revelation 15:8). There will be no intercessor for the human race. The great edict will have gone forth, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still ... and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly." Revelation 22: 11, 12.

Millions are waiting in the vain hope that some special event will signal that they can quickly make the necessary preparation to meet the returning Lord. Like Felix, they intend to take advantage of that "more convenient season." And while they linger, their hearts grow harder and their wills more indecisive. They lose the precious ability to judge their own need, or discern the panoramic signs of the end.

During the excavation of the ruins of Pompeii, they found the skeleton remains of a woman who was apparently running from the fiery river of lava that was pouring down the side of Mt. Vesuvius. Clutched in her bony, skeletal hands were two jeweled earrings. It was not hard to figure out exactly what had transpired in the experience of that woman. It was obvious that she had been alerted to the approaching destruction and had dashed back in the house to save the baubles in her hands. But the delay made it im-possible to outrun the stream of death, and she was overtaken and buried under the lava.

Let me ask you a question. What was wrong with that woman? Where did she make her big mistake? The answer is easy. *She thought she had more time than she really had.* That is the same mistake that the majority of human beings are making today as the holocaust of destruction approaches. There is not an unbaptized, uncommitted individual in the world who is not making that mistake. They want to be saved and intend to do it some-day, but they calculate that there is still plenty of time.

Are you one who has been postponing the day of decision, that unreserved surrender of your will? Please let me address you for a moment. There is a small chance that you may be right and that you will have another opportunity - *but it is only a chance!* There is another chance that you are dead wrong. You are gambling over the salvation of your soul. You are playing a deadly game of Russian roulette over eternal life. Every day that passes, the stakes go higher and higher, and your chances of winning become less and less. The cards are stacked against you. Why gamble that you will have another chance in the future? You don't have to gamble. You have a chance right now.

The door of the ark is still open, and it's only a step inside. Why not settle the uncertainty this very moment? Surrender your will and say Yes to the loving Saviour, who longs to give you His peace and assurance.

The Pastor Prescribes

Joe Damazo

Proverbs 3:1

Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

For Those Who Need a Counselor

"We should go to Jesus and tell Him all our needs. We may bring Him our little cares and perplexities as well as our greater troubles. Whatever arises to disturb or distress us, we should take it to the Lord in prayer.

"We lose many precious blessings by failing to bring our needs and cares and sorrows to our Saviour. He is the wonderful Counselor." HP 74.

"Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue. And they will receive not only wisdom, but strength. Power for obedience, for service, will be imparted to them, as Christ has promised." DA 668.

"Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend." COL 173.

See also: James 1:5; Psalm 32:8.

For Those Who Feel Cut Off

Revelation 3:8-"Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."

"The way to the throne of God is always open." CH 362.

"When we breathe out our desire, it may be inaudible to any human ear, but that word cannot die away into silence nor can it be lost, though the activities of business are going on. Nothing can drown the soul's desire. It rises above the din of the street, above the noise of machinery, to the heavenly courts. It is God to whom we are speaking, and the prayer is heard." HP 69.

See also: John 15:5; Psalm 9:10; 37:9; Proverbs 3:5,6.

For Those Desiring Peace

Psalm 119:165-"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

"The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." Isaiah 32:17.

"Whoever consents to renounce sin and open his heart to the love of Christ, becomes a partaker of this heavenly peace. There is no other ground of peace than this." HP 35.

"Peace I leave with you,' He (Christ) said, 'my peace I give unto you. ...' This peace is not the peace that comes through conformity to the world. Christ never purchased peace by compromise with evil. The peace that Christ left His disciples is internal rather than external and was ever to remain with His witnesses through strife and contention." AA 84.

"Before our Lord went to His agony on the cross He made His will. He had no silver or gold or houses to leave His disciples. He was a poor man, as far as earthly possession were concerned. Few in Jerusalem were so poor as He. But He left His disciples a richer gift than any earthly monarch could bestow on his subjects. 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,' He said. ... He left them the peace which had been His during His life on earth." HP 249.

See also: Job 22:21; Romans 15:13, Philippians 4:7; John 14:27; Isaiah 26:3.

For Those Who Would Complain

Numbers 11:1-"And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord."

"I entreat of you never to utter one word of complaint, but to cherish feelings of gratitude and thankfulness. By so doing you will be learning to make melody in your hearts. Weave into your experience the warp and woof, the golden threads, of gratitude. Contemplate the better land, where tears are never shed, where temptations and trials are never experienced, where losses and reproaches are never known, where all is peace and joy and happiness. Here your imagination may have full scope." HP 36.

"Let us all forget self as much as possible, cultivate cheerfulness, seek to brighten the lives of others, and we shall then have less desire to complain of our own lot." HP 273.

"The melody of praise is the atmosphere of heaven; and when heaven comes in touch with the earth, there is music and song. ... Let there be singing in the home, of songs that are sweet and pure, and there will be fewer words of censure and more of cheerfulness and hope and joy." HP 94.

"Do not take your troubles to human beings. Take them to the Lord. ... No one who comes to Him goes away unhelped." HP 275.

See also: Isaiah 51:3; Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:11.

For Those Who Feel Lonely

Genesis 28:15-"Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

"If we surrender our lives to His service, we can never be placed in a position for which God has not made provision. Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend." COL 173.

"Christ has bought us with His life, and we belong to Him." HP 42.

"Those who study nature cannot be lonesome. They love the quiet hours of meditation, for they feel that they are brought in close communion with God while tracing His power in His created works." HP 9.

"The prayers you offer in loneliness, in weariness, in trial, God answers, not always according to your expectations, but always for your good." GW 258.

"There is no comforter like Christ, so tender and so true. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. ... Circumstances may separate us from our friends; the broad, restless ocean may roll between us and them. Though their sincere friendship may still exist, they may be unable to demonstrate it. ... But no circumstances, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always there." AG 195.

"At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all afflictions, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone, the Comforter will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith." DA 669, 670.

See also: Exodus 33:14; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 121; Romans 8:35-37; Isaiah 66:13.

For Those Unsure of Salvation

1 John 5:11, 12-"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

"There are souls who are trembling in unbelief. They ask, 'How can I know that God is reconciled to me? How can I be assured that He loves and pardons me?' It is not for you ... to make yourselves just with God. Jesus invites you to come to Him with all your burdens and perplexities. ... Accept the promise and the provision that God has made. ... Look away from self to Jesus." HP 16.

"Many judge of their religious state by their emotions, but these are not safe criterion. Our Christian life does not depend upon our feelings, but upon our having a right hold from above. We must believe the words of God just as He has spoken them; we must take Christ at His word, believe that He came to represent the Father, and that the Father, as is represented in Christ, is our friend, and that He desires not that we should perish, or He would never have given His Son to die our sacrifice." HP 45.

"God does not ask us to purchase His favor by any costly sacrifice. He asks only for the service of a humble, contrite heart, which has gladly and thankfully accepted His free gift. The one who receives Christ as his personal Saviour has in his possession the salvation provided by Christ." HP 318.

"All they have to do is to believe God's Word, just as they believe one another's word. He hath said it, and He will perform His Word. Calmly rely on His promise, because He means all that He says. Say, He has spoken to me in His Word, and He will fulfill every promise that He has made. ... Act as if your heavenly Father could be trusted." 1SM 83,84.

See also: John 5:24; 3:16,17.

For Those Who Desire Forgiveness

1 John 1:9-"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"God desires to restore His image in you. Believe that He is your Helper. Resolve to become acquainted with Him. As you draw nigh to Him with confession and repentance, He will draw nigh to you with mercy and forgiveness." HP 8.

"You are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins; you cannot change your heart and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You believe that promise. You confess your sins and give yourself to God. You will to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you." SC 51.

"Whatever the sin, if the soul repents and believes, the guilt is washed away in the blood of Christ." DA 322.

See also: Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 9:1-6; Ezekiel 36:26; Romans 8:1; Luke 15:11-24.

For Those Wrestling With a Sinful Past

Isaiah 43:25-"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

"If any have dark chapters in their experience let them bury them. Let this history not be kept bright by repetition. ... Cultivate only those thoughts and those feelings which will produce gratitude and praise." HP 36.

"God is not pleased to have us pass our lives in despondency and gloom, magnifying every trouble that visits us. By so doing we not only make ourselves miserable but cloud the happiness of those around us. We should not search out and linger over the dark shadows in our life experience, but rather open our eyes and arouse our senses to see and appreciate the many blessings surrounding us, which should make us not only grateful but very happy." HP 274.

"It is selfish to devote our precious time to mourning over disappointed hopes, indulging in useless grief that clouds the family circle. We should be cheerful, if only for the benefit of those who depend more or less upon us for happiness. ... It is our duty to make the best of everything, and to cultivate a habit of looking at the bright side of things." HP 273.

"The father of the prodigal son is the type that Christ chooses as a representation of God. ... The father says to the servants, 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry.'" (Luke 15:21-23).

"There is no taunting, no casting up to the prodigal of his evil course. The son feels that the past is forgiven and forgotten, blotted out forever. And so God says to the sinner, ... 'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:34)." HP 10.

See also: John 3:17; Philippians 3:13.

For Those Who Are Afflicted

Psalms 103:2, 3-"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."

"In all the sufferings and afflictions of man there is an Eye to pity, a Heart to love. ... God's tenderest care is exercised over us." HP 14.

"God is just as willing to restore the sick to health now. ... And Christ is the same compassionate physician now that He was during His earthly ministry. In Him there is healing balm for every disease, restoring power for every infirmity." MH 226.

"Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us. When any part of the body sustains injury, a healing process is at once begun; nature's agencies are set at work to restore soundness. But the power working through these agencies is the power of God. All life-giving power is from Him. When one recovers from disease, it is God who restores him." MH 112, 113.

"The laws of nature, as truly as the precepts of the Decalogue, are divine, and only in obedience to them can health be recovered or preserved. ... Every practice which destroys the physical, mental, or spiritual energies is sin, and health is to be secured through obedience to the laws that God has established for the good of all mankind." MH 113.

"We may tell the Lord all our trials, tell Him all our weaknesses, tell Him all our dependence upon His might and His power. This is true prayer." HP 87.

See also: Psalm 103:3, 4, 13; 40:1; Jeremiah 33:3; James 5:13-15.

For Those Who Are Thankless

Ephesians 5:20-"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"The Lord God ... is jealous for His honor. How then, I inquire, does He regard the inhabitants of this world, who live in His house and from His liberal treasury are provided by Him with food and clothing but who never so much as say, Thank You, to Him?" HP 343.

"If those who politely acknowledge the favors which they receive from earthly friends would realize how much they owe to God, their hearts would respond in grateful thanks for precious favors that are now unnoticed.

"We do not recount God's mercies often enough. ... By our failure to express gratitude we are dishonoring our Maker. His angels, thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. They guard us against temporal evil and press back the powers of darkness." HP 101.

See also: Luke 17:11-17.

For Those Who Feel Their Prayers Are Unanswered

Psalm 40:1-"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry."

"When our prayers seem not to be answered, we are to cling to the promise; for the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. ... God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly." SC 96.

"The answer to our prayers may not come as quickly as we desire, and it may not be just what we have asked; but He who knows what is for the highest good of His children will bestow a much greater good than we have asked, if we do not become faithless and discouraged." SD 92.

"God does not always answer our prayers the first time we call upon Him; for should He do this, we might take it for granted that we had a right to all the blessings and favors He bestowed upon us. Instead of searching our hearts to see if any evil was entertained by us, and sin indulged, we should become careless, and fail to recognize our dependence upon Him, and our need of His help." AG 88.

"The Father hears every prayer of His contrite children. The voice of supplication from the earth unites with the voice of our Intercessor, who pleads in heaven, whose voice the Father always hears. Let our prayers therefore continually ascend to God." HP 79.

"Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul." COL 206.

See also: Isaiah 65:24; Psalm 66:18; 1 Kings 18:41-45; Jeremiah 33:3.

For Those Who Face Emergencies

Psalm 31:2-"Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me."

"Our divine Lord is equal to any emergency. With Him nothing is impossible. ... Come to Christ just as you are. ... Cast yourself wholly on His mercy. There is no difficulty within or without that cannot be surmounted in His strength." HP 17.

"He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him." PP 493.

"In times of sudden difficulty or peril the heart may send up its cry for help to One who has pledged Himself to come to the aid of His faithful, believing ones whenever they call upon Him." PK 632.

See also: Psalm 46:1; 27:5; 102:1, 2; 67:17; 70; Isaiah 65:24; Job 14:15; Lamentations 3:24-26.

For Those Who Are Discouraged

Psalm 31:24-"Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

"When discouragement presses heavily upon you, read the following... :

"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? ... Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God' (Psalm 42:7-11)." HP 124.

"We may be despondent, even despairing; the heavy cloud of affliction may be over us; but there is light ahead. Beyond the gloom is a sympathetic, compassionate Friend, One who does not willingly grieve or afflict the children of men." HP 14.

"Walk not in the shadow of the cross. Do not give expression to weeping, lamentation, and woe; but encourage your soul to hope and joy. ... When you are deeply shadowed it is because Satan has interposed himself between you and the bright rays of the Sun of Righteousness." HP 52.

See also: Deuteronomy 1:21; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 27:14; 46:1-3; 48:14; Matthew 11:28, 29; John 14:1.

For Those Who Feel Unworthy

1 John 3:1-"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

"You who feel the most unworthy, fear not to commit your case to God. When He gave Himself in Christ for the sin of the world, He undertook the case of every soul. 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' (Rom. 8:32). Will He not fulfil the gracious word given for our encouragement and strength?" COL 174.

"Satan will come to you saying, You are a sinner. But do not let him fill your mind with the thought that, because you are sinful, God has cast you off. Say to him, Yes I am a sinner, and for that reason I need a Saviour. I need forgiveness and pardon, and Christ says that if I come to Him I shall not perish." HP 116.

"Look away from yourself to Jesus. Embrace Him as your Savior. Cease to bemoan your helpless condition. ... When you feel tempted to mourn, force your lips to utter the praises of God." HP116.

"If the enemy can lead the desponding to take their eyes off from Jesus, and look to themselves, and dwell upon their own unworthiness, instead of dwelling upon the worthiness of Jesus, His love, His merits, and His great mercy, he will get away their shield of faith and gain his object; they will be exposed to his fiery temptations. The weak should therefore look to Jesus, and believe in Him; they then exercise faith." EW 73.

See also: Isaiah 43:25, 26; Matthew 6:26-34; 10:29-31; Romans 6:22; Philippians 4:4; 1 John 1:9.

For Those Who Are Mothers

Exodus 20:12-"Honor ... thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

"The prayers of Christian mothers are not disregarded by the Father of all. ... He will not turn away your petitions and leave you and yours to the buffetings of Satan in the great day of final conflict. It is for you to work with simplicity and faithfulness, and God will establish the work of your hands." CG 526.

"The influence of a praying, God-fearing mother will last through eternity. She may die, but her work will endure." 4T 500.

"Your compassionate Redeemer is watching you with love and sympathy, ready to hear your prayers and to render you the assistance which you need. He knows the burdens of every mother's heart and is her best friend in every emergency. His everlasting arms support the God-fearing, faithful mother." AH 204.

"The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother. The mother is queen of her household. She has in her power the molding of her children's characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life. An angel could not ask for a higher mission: for in doing this work she is doing service for God." AH 231.

For Those Who Sorrow

Psalms 127:2-"It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."

"Whatever may be your circumstances, however dark and mysterious may be the ways of Providence, though the path may be through the deep waters, and trials and bereavements may afflict again and again, the assurance still comes, 'All things work together for good to them that love God' (Rom. 8:28). 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day' (2 Tim. 1:12)." 2SM 261.

"In all your conflicts, in all the trials and perplexities of life, seek counsel from God. The path of obedience to God is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Follow step by step in the path of duty. Steep places may have to be climbed, but go forward in the path of humility, of faith and self-denial, leaving the clouds of doubt behind you. Sorrow not in a hopeless way, for the living need your care and love." 2SM 272.

"Whatever our sorrow, bereavement or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend. If in our ignorance we make missteps, Christ does not leave us. His voice, clear and distinct, is heard saying, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life'" COL 173.

"Sorrow comes and goes; it is the lot of man; we should not seek to magnify it, but rather dwell upon that which is bright and pleasant." HP 274.

"To the believer, death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if it were of little moment. ... To the Christian, death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. The life is hid with Christ in God, and 'when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.'" DA 787.

"Not a sigh is breathed, not a pain felt, not a grief pierces the soul, but the throb vibrates to the Father's heart." DA 356.

See also: Psalm 30:5; 126:5; 32:10; Isaiah 43:2; Nahum 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

For Those Desiring Salvation

Revelation 3:20-"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

"God proposes cooperation with His frail, erring creatures, whom He has placed on vantage ground. On the one side there are infinite wisdom, goodness, compassion, power; on the other, weakness, sinfulness, absolute helplessness, poverty, dependence. ... Man is given the privilege of working with God in the saving of his own soul. He is to receive Christ as his personal Saviour and believe in Him. Receiving and believing is his part of the contract." HP 12.

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ." SC 70.

"It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. ... Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all

have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behaviour, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness." SC 18.

"He [Paul] longed for the purity, the righteousness, to which in himself he was powerless to attain, and cried out, 'O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of death?' (Romans 7:24, margin). Such is the cry that has gone up from burdened hearts in all lands and in all ages. To all, there is but one answer, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29)." SC 19.

See also: John 17:3; 3:16; Isaiah 55:6,7; 1:18, 19; Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 8:1; Matthew 16:24; John 14:4-6.

For Those Desiring to Witness

Isaiah 43:10-"Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he."

"A true, lovable Christian is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Bible truth." HP 318.

"In every one of His children, Jesus sends a letter to the world. If you are Christ's follower, He sends in you a letter to the family, the village, the street, where you live. Jesus, dwelling in you, desires to speak to the hearts of those who are not acquainted with Him." SC 115.

"Those who become children of God are under obligation to Him to do all in their power to seek and to save the lost." HP 328.

"Tell those whom you visit the end of all things is at hand. ... Tell them how you found Jesus and how blessed you have been since you gained an experience in His service. Tell them what blessing comes to you as you sit at the feet of Jesus and learn precious lessons from His word. Tell them of the gladness and joy that there is in the Christian life. Your warm, fervent words will convince them that you have found the pearl of great price. ... This is genuine missionary work, and as it is done, many will awake as from a dream." 9T 38.

"How may we witness for God? ... By rendering pure, whole-hearted obedience to God's law. If we will let Him, He will manifest Himself in us, and we shall be witnesses, before the universe of heaven and before an apostate world who are making void the law of God, to the power of redemption." ML 100.

See also: 2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 28:19, 20.

For Those Who Feel Hedged In

Psalm 139:3-"Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."

"When we are hedged about on every side, this is the time above all others to trust in God and in the power of His Spirit." PK 595.

"When the Israelites were overtaken by danger and difficulties, and their way seemed hedged up, their faith forsook them, and they murmured. ... The divine command was: 'Go forward.' They were not to wait until the way was made plain, and they could comprehend the entire plan of their deliverance. God's cause is onward, and He will open a path before His people." 4T 25.

"There are times when the Christian life seems beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before, and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly above all discouragements: 'Go forward.' We should obey this command, let the result be what it may, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness and though we feel the cold waves about our feet." 4T 26.

"Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet." MH 481.

See also: Jonah 2:1-10; Psalm 40:12, 13; 32:7, 10; Jeremiah 33:3; Proverbs 3:5,6.

For Those Who Are Weak

Isaiah 35:3, 4-"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not."

"Not one sincere prayer is lost. Amid the anthems of the celestial choir, God hears the cries of the weakest human being." COL 174.

"An appeal to Heaven by the humblest saint is more to be dreaded by Satan than the decrees of cabinets or the mandates of kings." HP 82.

"No power can take out of His hands the souls that go to Him for pardon." PP 516.

"He who constantly depends upon God through simple trust and prayerful confidence, will be surrounded by the angels of heaven. He who lives by faith in Christ will be strengthened and upheld, able to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold upon eternal life." HP 16.

"By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go." MH 182.

"God does not leave His erring children who are weak in faith, and who make mistakes. The Lord hearkens and hears their prayer and their testimony." HP 80.

See also: Mark 11:24; Psalm 6:2.

For Those Anxious Over Children

Jeremiah 31:16-"Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they [thy children] shall come again from the land of the enemy."

"Parents should make a hedge about their children by prayer; they should pray with full faith that God will abide with them and that holy angels will guard themselves and their children from Satan's cruel power." HP 90.

"Fathers and mothers, at least morning and evening lift up your hearts to God in humble supplication for yourselves and your children. Your dear ones are exposed to temptations and trials. There are frets and irritations that daily beset the path of old and young; and those who would live patient, loving, cheerful lives amid daily annoyances must pray." HP 90.

"It is the duty of Christian parents, morning and evening, by earnest prayer and persevering faith, to make a hedge about their children." CT 110.

"The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people." GC 517.

"Heaven's golden gate opens not to the self-exalted. It is not lifted up to the proud of spirit. But the everlasting portals will open wide to the trembling touch of a little child." COL 404.

"Parents, gather the rays of divine light which are shining upon your pathway. Walk in the light as Christ is in the light. As you take up the work of saving your children and maintaining your position on the highway of holiness, the most provoking trials will come. But do not lose your hold. ... Difficulties will arise. You will meet with obstacles. Look constantly to Jesus. When an emergency arises, ask, Lord, what shall I do now?

"The harder the battle, the greater their [parents] need of help from their heavenly Father, and the more marked will be the victory gained." AH 207, 208.

See also: Psalm 127; 132:12; Mark 10:14; Jeremiah 31:15-17; Acts 2:39.

For Those Who Are Confused

1 Corinthians 14:33-"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace."

"Our Saviour ... points us to the only path that will lead to the strait gate, opening into the narrow way, beyond which lie broad and pleasant pastures. He has marked out every step of the way; and that no one may make a mistake, He tells us just what to do." HP 53.

"All the perplexities of life's experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony." Ed 305.

"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. But Satan is a vigilant, unsleeping foe, ever at work upon human minds, seeking a soil in which he can sow his tares." TM 54.

"System and order are manifest in all the works of God throughout the universe. Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God's people on the earth." TM 26

"In acquiring earthly knowledge, men have thought to gain a treasure; and they have laid the Bible aside, ignorant that it contains a treasure worth everything else. A failure to study and obey God's word has brought confusion into the world. Men have left the guardianship of Christ for the guardianship of the great rebel, the prince of darkness." CT 440.

See also: Hebrews 12:2; Psalm 71:1; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Matthew 11:29, 30.

For Those Who Feel God Is Far Away

Psalm 145:18-"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth."

"It is our privilege to have daily a calm, close, happy walk with Jesus." HC 97.

"The oftener you engage in prayer, the closer your soul will be drawn into a sacred nearness to God." HP 89.

"Christ is the connecting link between God and man. ... As we approach God through the virtue of Christ's merits we are clothed with His priestly vestments. He places us close by His side, encircling us with His human arm, while with His divine arm He grasps the throne of the Infinite." HP 77.

"It is when ministering to others that man is most closely allied to God." HP 223.

"There is no comforter like Christ, so tender and so true. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. ... Circumstances may separate us from our friends; the broad, restless ocean may roll between us and them. Though their sincere friendship may still exist, they may be unable to demonstrate it. ... But no circumstances, no distance, can separate us from the heavenly Comforter." AG 195.

See also: Psalm 119:151; Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 34:17-19; Philippians 4:6.

For Those Desiring Promotion

Matthew 23:12-"Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

"Those who live in close fellowship with Christ will be promoted by Him to positions of trust." HP 58.

"If any are qualified for a higher position, the Lord will lay the burden, not alone on them, but on those who have tested them, who know their worth, and who can understandingly urge them forward. It is those who perform faithfully their appointed work day by day, who in God's own time will hear His call, 'Come up higher.'" MH 477.

"Let those who feel that their work is not appreciated, and who crave a position of greater responsibility, consider that 'promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, ... But God is the Judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another.' Psalm 75:6, 7." MH 476.

For Those Who Are Passing Through Darkness

Psalm 139:12-"Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."

"Let faith pierce the darkness. Walk with God in the dark as well as in the light, repeating the words, 'He is faithful that promised' (Heb. 10:23). Through the trial of our faith we shall be trained to trust in God." HP 89.

"When the evil one begins to settle his gloom about you, sing praise to God. When things go crossways at your homes, strike up a song about the matchless charms of the Son of God, and I tell you, when you touch this strain, Satan will leave you. You can drive out the enemy with his gloom." HP 95.

"We are to send our petitions through the darkest clouds that Satan may cast over us, and let our faith pierce to the throne of God." HP 125.

"Let faith pierce through the hellish shadow of Satan and center in Jesus, our High Priest, who hath entered for us within the veil. Whatever clouds overcast the sky, whatever storms surge around the soul, this anchor holds firm, and we may be sure of victory." HP 127.

"Christ is the light of the world; in Him is no darkness. Precious light! Let us live in that light! Bid adieu to sadness and repining. Rejoice in the Lord always." HP 273.

"When ... darkness compasses your own soul, the very best course you can pursue to get out of this darkness is to help someone else who is discouraged. As you try to lift others up, behold, you lift up yourself into close connection with God." HP 289.

"Let the cloud that shadows us pass over, while we wait patiently till the clear blue sky appears and the blessed sunshine is revealed." HP 273.

See also: Isaiah 43:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; John 8:12; Psalm 18:28.

For Those Concerned About the World Situation

Matthew 28:20-"I am with you alway, even to the end of the world."

"However black the clouds that roll upon the world at the present time, there is light beyond. Ignorance, superstition, darkness, unbelief strong and masterful, will meet us at every step we advance. But our faith must soar above all and see the bow of promise encircling the throne." HP 96.

"Angels are belting the world, refusing Satan his claims to supremacy, made because of the vast multitude of his adherents. We hear not the voices, we see not with the natural sight the work of these angels, but their hands are linked about the world, and with sleepless vigilance they are keeping the armies of Satan at bay till the sealing of God's people shall be accomplished." HP 98.

"Upon this earth there are thousands and tens of thousands of heavenly messengers commissioned by the Father to prevent Satan from obtaining any advantage over those who refuse to walk in the path of evil. And these angels who guard God's children on earth are in communication with the father in heaven." HP 99.

"Every believer who constantly realizes his dependence on God has his appointed angel, sent from heaven to minister to him. The ministry of these angels is especially essential now, for Satan is making his last desperate effort to secure the world." HP 101.

"Nothing in this world can harm those who are thus honored by a close connection with God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under them, but they need not fear." HP 241.

"Above the distraction of the earth He sits enthroned: all things are open to His divine survey; and from His great and calm eternity He orders that which His providence sees best." MH 417.

"Amidst the deepening shadows of earth's last great crisis, God's light will shine brightest, and the song of hope and trust will be heard in clearest and loftiest strains." Ed 166.

"We are coming to the crisis. Let us stand the test manfully, grasping the hand of Infinite Power. God will work for us. We have only to live one day at a time, and if we get acquainted with God, He will give us strength for what is coming tomorrow; grace sufficient for each day, and every day will find its own victories, just as it finds its trials. We shall have the power of the Highest with us, for we shall be clad with the armor of Christ's righteousness. We have the same God that has worked for His people in ages past. Jesus stands by our side, and shall we falter?-No, as the trials come, the power of God will come with them. God will help us to stand in faith on His Word, and when we are united, He will work with special power in our behalf." ML 94.

See also: Psalm 91; 46; 89:11; 91:11, 12; 27:5; 24:1; John 3:16.

For Those Who are "Down and Out"

Philippians 4:19-"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

"It is difficult to exercise living faith when we are in darkness and discouragement. But this of all others is the very time when we should exercise faith. 'But,' says one, 'I do not feel at such times like praying in faith.' Well, then, will you allow Satan to gain the victory, simply because you do not feel like resisting him?" ML 14.

"He [the Lord] longs to manifest Himself to us, and to reveal the abundant supplies at our disposal, and He permits trial and disappointment to come to us that we may realize our helplessness, and learn to call upon Him for aid. He can cause cooling streams to flow from the flinty rock." ML 12.

"The Lord Jesus has invited you to bring your troubles to One who understands every circumstance of your life." TM 487.

"Christ will prove a never-failing source of strength, a present help in every time of trouble." 2T 140.

See also: Psalm 3:3; 25:1, 2; James 4:10.

For Those Who Face Decisions

Psalm 32:8-"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."

"Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue. And they will receive not only wisdom, but strength." DA 668.

"Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor." COL 173.

"You endeavor to reach correct decisions regarding religious duties, and to make decisions regarding business enterprises, by the tossing up of a coin, and letting the position in which it falls decide what course you shall pursue. ... We are not to give encouragement to any such methods. ... They are not of the Lord, and those who depend upon them for direction will meet with failure and disappointment. ... The people of God can come to a correct understanding of their duty only through sincere prayer and earnest seeking for the sanctification of the Holy Spirit." 2SM 325.

See also: James 1:5; Proverbs 3:5, 6.

For Those Who Face Surgery

Psalm 3:5-"I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me."

"The Saviour is present in the sickroom, in the operating room; and His power for His name's glory accomplishes great things." 2SM 284.

"If there is need of a surgical operation, and the physician is willing to undertake the case, it is not a denial of faith to have the operation performed. After the patient has committed his will to the will of God, let him trust, drawing nigh to the Great Physician, the Mighty Healer, and giving himself up in perfect trust. The Lord will honor his faith in the very manner He sees is for His own name's glory." 2SM 284, 285.

"Before performing a critical operation, let the physician ask for the aid of the Great Physician." MH 118.

See also: Psalm 4:8; 37:5; 46:1; Proverbs 3:24; Isaiah 41:13; 43:2.

Key to Abbreviations of Sources

AA??The Acts of the Apostles

AG??God's Amazing Grace

AH??The Adventist Home
CG??Child Guidance
CH??Counsels on Health
CT??Counsels to Teachers
DA??The Desire of Ages
Ed??Education
EW??Early Writings
GC??The Great Controversy
GW??Gospel Workers
HP??In Heavenly Places
MB??Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing
MH??The Ministry of Healing
ML??My Life Today
Ms??Manuscript
OH??Our High Calling
PK??Prophets and Kings
PP??Patriarchs and Prophets
SC??Steps to Christ
SD??Sons and Daughters of God
ISM?Selected Messages, Book 1 (2SM, Book 2)
1T??Testimonies, Volume 1 (2T, etc., for Volumes 2-9)
TM??Testimonies to Ministers

The Power of a Positive No

Joe Crews
2 Peter 3:14

As most Bible students understand, Peter and Paul did not always agree with each other over methods of communicating the gospel. At one point they had a public disagreement in which one verbally chastised the other for being hypocritical. Nevertheless, in terms of believing and living the message of their beloved Master, they were in perfect agreement.

After describing the fiery destruction of earthly things at the end of human history, Peter posed this rhetorical question : "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" 2 Peter 3:11. To his own query he gave a very short answer: "Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." verse 14.

When Paul wrote on the same subject elsewhere in the Bible, he used language very similar in tone but longer in context. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:11-14.

We may be slightly confused by the convoluted series of phrases that Paul strings into this long, long sentence, but take a look at what he is saying. There can be no question about the meaning of his words. This masterpiece statement is probably the most complete description of God's ideal for His people to be found in the entire Bible. Paul somehow manages to touch on most of the great Christian lifestyle doctrines which should characterize the true church today.

Look closely at the principles so marvelously interlaced in those few verses:

1. "Redeemed from all iniquity"
2. "Purify unto himself a peculiar people"
3. "Zealous of good works"
4. "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts"
5. "Looking for that blessed hope"

In these words are found the doctrines of true sanctification and total victory over "all iniquity." Like Peter he boldly declares the possibility of being without spot and blameless, but he also identifies the overcoming group as standing forth in peculiar contrast to all others around them. Their zeal in the "good works" of obedience would mark them as God's special people.

Furthermore, Paul wrote that the grace which brings salvation would teach the faithful saints to look for the blessed hope of Christ's coming. They would be living in joyful expectancy of the soon advent of Jesus. This end-time church would separate from the indulgent life-style of the carnal majority and "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts." In this he was again in perfect accord with the burden of his fellow disciple Peter, who described the "manner of persons we ought to be in all holy conversation (life-style) and godliness."

How interesting it is that both of these close companions of Jesus made such strong statements about being different from the world. Unfortunately, their doctrine of self-denial and separation has been rejected by the modern church as a manifestation of legalism. As a reaction to this most tragic misconception, most pulpits today are sending forth a "soft" love message about justification, forgiveness, and acceptance and have largely eliminated references to obedience, law, or lifestyle. Any mention of standards of conduct or behavior is immediately dismissed as judgmental and unloving.

The Christian Needs to Refuse Some Things

There is something very strong and reassuring in Paul's use of the word "deny." What does it mean to *deny* ungodliness and worldly lusts? Obviously there is a time and place for true Christians to draw a line and say No in such a manner that none can misunderstand. There are some things we need to be positive about. I suggest that the power of a positive No is one of the greatest needs in this dissipated, permissive age. We must have the moral courage to refuse that which will cause pollution of the mind or body.

Has it always been necessary for God's children to take such unyielding stands on issues of right and wrong? Consider the life of that great Bible character, Moses. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Hebrews 11:24, 25.

The context indicates that Moses was being urged to take the easy route. There had to be another choice pressed upon him in order to *refuse* it. He had to make a decision for riches and pleasure on one side or affliction on the other. And you can be certain that all the pressure was coming from those on the wrong side. We have no doubt as to where his young friends in the court stood on the matter. They surely presented every enticing reason for him to remain in the palace. Moses was the heir apparent to the throne of Egypt. Nothing was withheld from him. There was music, dancing, and beautiful princesses to vie for his attention.

No one should suggest that it was easy for Moses to turn his back on that honor and royal position. It must have appeared to him that the throne was the only road to popularity, riches, and eternal fame. He had no way of knowing that the opposite was true. Today, Moses' name is known to millions of people all around the world, but the names of the pharaohs have long been forgotten. I visited the mummy room of the great museum in Cairo and saw the wrapped remains of some of the most illustrious rulers of Egypt. I read names such as Ahmose and Tutmose, which sounded almost like Moses, but his name was not on a single one of the elaborate stone coffins. Moses is not a mummy today. He is in heaven right now enjoying the "recompense of reward" which he counted as "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." According to Jude 9, he was granted a special resurrection as the first-fruit of those who will

be raised to meet their Lord at the last day. But to everyone of us, he is an example of the power of a positive No. He *refused!*

Most of us have read the Bible story of Joseph and his incredible experiences as a slave, and later as prime minister of Egypt. But it was his bondage which turned his whole life into a different direction. Potiphar's wife was physically attracted by the handsome and personable Joseph, and began a sexual-harassment program to draw him into adultery with her. Day after day she sought to entice him with her charms. Probably no young man has ever faced a more severe emotional test than Joseph, as he was constantly confronted by the seductive wiles of his beautiful mistress. As a normal red-blooded youth, Joseph felt the physical cravings and desires just as strongly as any young person living today. I'm quite certain also that Satan adorned every place and moment of temptation with all the glamour and allurements that could be devised.

How did Joseph relate to the daily harassment? We are not told about his thoughts or feelings, but we do have the simple account of what he did. "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused." Genesis 39:7,8. What a testimony! He said, "No, I will not sin against my God." Like Moses after him, Joseph took an immovable stand against any compromise with sin. Even when the conniving temptress tried to forcibly draw him to her bosom, Joseph wrenched away, leaving his coat in her hands, and fled from her presence (verse 12).

Saying No to Sexual Scenes

The incident I have just described took place thousands of years ago, but it represents a pattern which has been repeated in every succeeding generation. Satan has used the sensual appeal of sex and immorality to destroy souls in all ages of both past and present. But in this late-20th century he has perfected this weapon to the ultimate degree. We live in a sex-saturated society - a world almost wholly dominated by the flesh.

Today there are few young people who have the same relationship with God that Joseph had. They have been conditioned by a thousand indulgent excesses to yield to their impulses rather than live by principle. Television has had a big part in popularizing perversion and creating an attitude of tolerance toward promiscuous behavior. Instead of learning to suppress and control their legitimate sexual drives, the great majority of young people are learning to freely indulge them. The result has been an entire generation growing up with few inhibitions against fornication. Indeed, most of them have no understanding that God calls it an abomination.

No one living in today's world can escape the harmful influences which have produced such a state of moral anarchy. We are almost immersed in it from morning till night, and our only protection is to have the mind of Christ. It is the nature of fallen man to be carnal and to live according to the flesh. In fact, the flesh needs no encouragement in its natural course of self-gratification and sin. Nevertheless, it has been titillated and provoked by the rampant promotion of every form of sexual impurity.

But let us consider now the circumstances under which the Christian can claim protection from the daily bombardment in the midst of all the corruption and remain untainted. In short, this can happen

only through the sanctified exercise of a converted mind and will. Victory over sin, possible only through Christ, still involves a work of cooperation between the human and divine. Only as we recognize principles involving our human role in sanctification will we be able to claim God's delivering power. Holiness is not a passive transaction in which we sit back and allow God to separate us from the sin.

This leads us back to the power of a positive No. The command of God is very clear: "Be ye holy." 1 Peter 1:16. This does not mean that we can purify ourselves through human effort alone, nor does it mean that God will do it all without our cooperation. He will never do for us what He has given us the power and ability to do for ourselves. Even though the possibility of victory rests with God only, the *responsibility* for victory is ours to exercise. We have discovered already that God did not pick Joseph up to convey him out of Mrs. Potiphar's presence; Joseph himself had to make that decision and act upon it. No doubt God revealed to him what needed to be done, and I have no doubt that angels were there to give him fleetness of foot to escape, but Joseph had to start moving against the sin before divine intervention could take place.

Escape from Temptation; Who is Responsible?

This brings us to a very vital principle in dealing with the sin problem. There can be no accommodation of the flesh in claiming the victory. Sin is absolutely non-negotiable. Joseph did not stay around to argue or debate over the issue. Dickering with sin can be dangerous business. The Bible says simply that "he refused;" then he fled the scene to get away from the presence of the temptation. This also is a part of our responsibility in the victory process. It is unquestionable that there are spiritual laws of the mind which must be obeyed in order to be an overcomer. One of those laws decrees that "by beholding we become changed." Flaunting that law leads to defeat in the battle against sin. God has given us a mind to use; to reason with, to choose with, and to refuse with. Moses and Joseph knew how to use what God gave them, and that is why they exercised the power of a positive No. Not even God could make that decision for them.

Another important principle is that no one can follow Christ without deliberately saying no to self. Jesus magnified this spiritual rule when He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24. There lies at the root of every human sin an inherent disposition to indulge the self-nature. We often refer to it as the fallen nature, the lower nature, or the sinful nature. It does not pertain to personal guilt or condemnation, but without the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit that genetic bent will exert a controlling influence over both mind and body. The fallen nature will always be enticed by the attractions of external physical forces. This is why we are never safe in basing our lifestyle choices on emotional feelings. For 6,000 years the devil has used the sensory perceptions to assail the soul with temptation.

As we look back through history, as well as the Bible, we find the same principle at work. Satan has almost invariably utilized the pathway of the five senses in causing people to sin. The evil one has no other access to the citadel of the mind than through our sight, hearing, smell, touch, or taste. Since God has created the brain to automatically conform to whatever enters through these external channels, this is where the devil focuses his strongest attacks. Satan cannot force entry through the senses; therefore he must present his most powerful appeals through sight, hearing, etc., in an effort to secure permission from the mind for him to enter.

What is the secret, then, of maintaining a pure mind while being surrounded with evil scenes and enticing sounds? There is only one answer. Christ must be so fully received into the life that His Spirit has control of all functions of the will. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5. In the strength of that reigning power, every one of the five avenues may be closed off to any appeal of the enemy. The eyes are empowered to look away from sin, the ears are able to tune out evil, and every faculty of mind and body is submitted to the divine will - which has become one with the human will. This is the only way to have the mind of Christ and to think His thoughts after Him.

It is clear that the real struggle between good and evil takes place in the domain of the mind. In fact, the great controversy between Christ and Satan is not raging on some faraway galactic battlefield, but in the confines of the human brain. It is the will, with its freedom to choose, which determines the direction and destiny of each individual life. This is the truth which needs to be made plain for every youth, adult, and child. If all could understand the crucial role of personal choice and the consequences of making the wrong decision, millions of souls might be turned from darkness to light.

Spiritual Laws of Resisting Evil

Unfortunately, in their ignorance of the real issues most young people are playing a deadly game of Russian roulette over their own future destiny. Even professed Christian youth have failed to grasp the secret of closing off the only approaches by which Satan can access their minds. There is too much teasing and toying with deadly sin-bait - young men and women testing themselves for the excitement of it, and finding that they miscalculated their own strength or weakness.

There is a very good reason for the warnings of Peter, Paul, and all the other Bible writers to "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." 2 Corinthians 6:17. This is another of those laws of spiritual growth. We cannot mingle with the impure and remain pure. We cannot trifle with unholy thoughts and continue to be holy. Even those activities which merely lead in the direction of sin should be discontinued. If a certain place or a certain person presents a temptation which is hard to resist, that is the time to exercise the power of a positive No. Like Joseph and Moses, we can *refuse* to do that which would offend our loving God. We weaken our defenses by lingering in the atmosphere of temptation, and when our strength is dissipated the enemy prevails.

Immediately after describing the guilt of an adulterous look, Jesus spoke these significant words: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Matthew 5:29. What did the Master mean by that drastic statement? Was He recommending mutilation of the body? No, He was not referring to the literal eye at all. He was talking about the thing your eye is focused on - what you are looking at. If you find yourself viewing a scene which opens a door of temptation, Jesus commands that we cut it out of our sight, even if it is as painful as slicing out the physical eye with a sharp knife.

These words of the Son of God surely indicate that it will be a real test to turn away from some of the glamorous pictures prepared for our destruction. But the most urgent message He conveyed in that sermon on the mount was the shocker that we can be cast into hell just by looking at the wrong pictures! This concept is ridiculed today by modern theology which dismisses all lifestyle standards as legalistic works of the flesh. Great will be the remorse someday for those who fail to distinguish

between the works of the law performed to earn salvation and the good works of obedience produced from a heart of love.

Someone might protest that none can evade the visual offenses referred to by our Lord. So, does this mean we are all guilty for the glimpses of bad things which might flash across our vision as we walk along the street? Indeed not. We must distinguish between the momentary first look at some sudden evil which enters uninvited into our range of sight, and the deliberate gaze upon scenes which feed into carnal imaginations. It is that willful second look which most often blossoms into mental violation of God's revealed will. The sequence of sin moves from a focused look to a cherished thought and finally into a full-blown act of sin.

Is this not also the history of so many divorces and remarriages, even in the most conservative congregations? Too many do not repel that first thought of sin. They continue to look and feed the illicit desire until their own companion looks less desirable than someone else. Emotions sweep out of control, and lives are blasted as a result. Again, there is a failure to recognize that we are responsible for closing the door on that alluring scene.

We cannot be strong against a foe that we secretly admire, and the longer we gaze at sin the more appealing it becomes. David is a perfect example of that law of the mind. One day he saw his beautiful neighbor taking a bath on her rooftop. Even though he was a man of strength and noble character, David became a puppet of clay in the hands of Satan because he continued looking at that which God had forbidden. Later, that lingering look led him into adultery and even murder. It is totally presumptuous to keep looking at sin. Exposure to it increases our tolerance for it, and finally blinds us to the true nature of transgression. Sexual license is no longer considered evil by those who have viewed it so long. Many couples living in fornication are insulted if someone charges them with being immoral.

The greatest causative factor in the visual exposure to evil must be identified as television. When we consider the countless hours wasted by millions who watch and listen to the endless barrage of filth which pours forth, we can begin to understand why America leads the world in illegitimacy and sexual assaults. Survey after survey has pinpointed television as the culprit in rising rates of violence, the breakdown of family values and destruction of morals in general. Professed Christians nod in solemn agreement with the statistical reports, but how many of them have thrown the evil out of their living room? We might even ask, how many are guilty of feeding on the same slimy diet of programmed sin as the most confirmed unbelievers?

An Altered Definition of Sin

What is the explanation for such passive acceptance of the present moral mess in our society by church people? They do not speak out or take strong stands because their own convictions are too weak and they don't have the courage to practice what they preach. This is why religion has failed to impact or change the eroding morals of this spiritually bankrupt generation. Too few Christians are committed enough to take consistent, uncompromised stands against the social evils of the day. They cannot stand in the strength of a positive No because their own weak wills are not fully persuaded to give up the pleasures of the world.

We spoke earlier about the pervasiveness of the self-nature. There are fierce battles to be fought in resisting the inherited tendencies of the natural man. Unconverted people have no incentive to put forth such strenuous effort against pride and selfishness. In fact, in most cases they have no consciousness that those attitudes are sinful or even objectionable. Churches have often been responsible for exacerbating the problem by not speaking out against manifestations of the fleshly self-nature. Congregations glitter with enough ornamentation to construct another golden calf, but few pastors have the courage to tell the truth about the vanity. Movies, dancing, rock music, and television are often contextualized in sermons as being acceptable forms of entertainment. Members are not being provided with a single nail on which to hang their convictions.

This brings us to another reason that many church members have no strong feelings against practices of the world. The perception and definition of sin has been modified by many religious leaders in the world today. It is no wonder that the fruits of sin are not recognized when the root of sin is not even acknowledged. Much to the consternation of faithful church members, a new theology has gradually permeated both large and small denominations. Its largest focus seems to be against "works of the law." Ostensibly it purports to correct the problem of legalism in the church, hence its obsessive thrust against anything having to do with law-keeping.

In its extreme reaction against a perceived "works" or "behaviorism" theology, almost every sermon oozes with an overload of syrupy sentimentalism - a supposed "love" which does not produce obedience. Sin is no longer defined as breaking the great moral law of God, but in not maintaining a correct "relationship" with Jesus. Although the love experience is absolutely essential, we must never, in the least degree, diminish the role of the law as both teacher and moral guide. God's Word still declares that "sin is the transgression of the law." 1 John 3:4.

Bookstores are filled with publications which minimize the seriousness of sin. They claim that sin does not bring condemnation, and that it does not separate us from Christ. A recent popular book being acclaimed by thousands of conservative Christians states that "there is a world of difference between sinning under law and sinning under grace." In case you wonder what distinguishes sin committed by the converted from sin committed by the unconverted, the author gives this bit of enlightenment: "Stumbling under grace, falling into sin, does not deprive us of justification. Neither does it bring condemnation."

The illogic of this statement appears when we remember that justification and condemnation are diametrically opposite each other in the Bible. It is impossible to have both at the same time. The sinner is under condemnation, and the Christian is under justification. When the author says that a sinning Christian is not condemned by his sin, but that a sinning worldling is condemned by his sin, we stand in confused amazement. This type of reasoning would make disobedience by the Christian much less serious and reprehensible than in the life of a non-Christian.

Mark it down as a primary truth. Sin is deadly and brings its lethal results upon all who choose to practice it. The whole purpose of the gospel is to save us from the penalty and power of sin. Nowhere in the Bible do we find the least tolerance for the violation of God's law. Of course, there is mercy and grace in the gospel to forgive and cleanse from all sin, but there is no provision for anyone to keep on sinning. The true faith required for salvation is always attended by the empowering presence of the

Holy Spirit to keep us from falling (Jude 24). The righteousness-by-faith experience not only imputes the merits of Christ's perfect obedience to cover our past sins, but it imparts at the same time a sanctifying moment-by-moment power to keep us from sin in the here and now.

The Word of God has very much to say about that ugly word sin, but there is one thing which is never said about it. You will never read anything in the Bible about diminishing the amount of sin you commit. Isn't that strange? Nowhere does it say we should reduce our sinful practices. All the inspired writers seem to agree totally with Jesus when He said to the woman who had committed adultery, "Go, and sin no more." John 8:11.

Legalism Not the Final Issue

Are we suggesting that there is no danger of legalism springing up among Christians? No indeed. It is an enemy which has led millions to trust their works for salvation, and we must always be watchful against its subtle intrusion. Nevertheless those who see this as the great end-time issue in these closing days of history have not studied the prophecies very carefully. The books of Daniel and Revelation portray the final conflict between Christ and Satan to be in regard to the law of God.

The whole world will be divided and marked by a sign denoting obedience to His law or rebellion against it. From the Garden of Eden until the present, God has maintained a special test of man's love and loyalty. Jesus affirmed the test in His day when He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. John wrote that only those who kept the commandments would enter in through the gates into the city of God (Revelation 22:14).

Would it not be a masterful stroke on the part of Satan to infiltrate the churches just before the end with a campaign to belittle the law and the Sabbath? No better scheme could be plotted to prepare the world to reject the seal of God in favor of the mark of the beast. Very few would risk death to uphold a law whose authority was in question. Furthermore, a lenient attitude toward sin could be a softening factor in the final choice of many to abandon the Sabbath.

I see a systematic, underground operation of a very clever enemy in the present theological controversy - ostensibly between the liberals and the conservatives. But there is much more involved than the isolated issues so often raised. It is a very organized attack with connecting links to church structure, Bible translations, separationists and evangelicalism. But most of all, Satan's strong push has been to water down the message, compromise with the world, and destroy the distinctive doctrines and standards which have always identified God's true remnant church.

Diversions to Mask the True Problem

If indeed Satan is behind a diabolical plan to downplay the real issues in the approaching Armageddon contest, it makes perfect sense for him to create artificial issues to divert attention from the biblical scenario. That is why God's people today should be suspicious of any teaching which excludes sanctification from the salvation process. With so many winds of doctrine blowing, it becomes even more urgent to study and pray as never before. Every Christian who survives the terrible shaking ahead of us will find security only in a personal faith rooted in a knowledge of Scripture.

Our enemy is a master of deceit and subterfuge. Attacks on God's law will be refined and devilishly subtle. Only a consistent, living relationship with Christ and His Word can prepare any of us for the fiery crucible of deception which lies just ahead. We must saturate our minds with the truth as it is in Jesus. All must be especially certain of where they stand concerning sin and concerning God's law.

But being able to recognize the diversionary tactics of the enemy is only a part of the problem. Standing firmly and openly against them often involves the risk of alienating many good people who just don't understand the seriousness of the errors. Because Satan's strategy has always been to mingle error and truth together, those who are the quickest to spot the error and oppose it are apt to be labeled as attackers of the truth. True reformers have always had to face the difficult choice of stifling conscience to maintain status quo relationships, or run the gauntlet of ridicule and reproach for resisting an evil that others fail to see. Probably the true heroes in the sight of heaven are the unsung, maligned little people who have stubbornly said no to institutional or personal compromise wherever it appeared. Like Joseph and Moses, they also *refused* to take the easy popular route which crowd conformity pressed upon them. In moral independence they exercised the power of a positive No. Thank God, such heroes are still with us today.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Dennis Crews

Psalm 92:7

MUCH argument has taken place over whether the words of Jesus in Luke 16: 19-31 were intended to be understood literally or as a parable. Some Christians feel that in this story, Jesus was offering His hearers a glimpse of what existence in the afterlife is like. Others, citing numerous passages of Scripture which seem to contradict the portrayal of heaven and hell contained in this passage, feel that Jesus was teaching an altogether different kind of lesson. Unfortunately, many modern religious teachers have isolated the story from its original context and used it as a device for scaring people. Religious "conversions" resulting from a fear of hell as it is depicted in this passage have indeed occurred, but are based on a foundation sorely in need of the strength which comes only from a genuine appreciation of God's character and a proper understanding of Scripture.

To begin this study, we'll take a closer look at just what a parable really is, and then examine the setting in which Jesus told this story. Perhaps then we will better understand what lessons there are for us in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

The *Random House College Dictionary* describes a parable as "a short, allegorical story designed to convey a truth or moral lesson." *Cruden's Complete Concordance* further expands this concept, saying that parables in the Bible were used "more generally than elsewhere." We know that the Bible writers used situations both imaginary, as in the trees asking the bramble to be king over them (Judges 9:8-15), and realistic in parables. Whatever form the parable took, it was only a vehicle for the moral lesson being taught.

Jesus recognized the value of parables in teaching the people. He desired to stimulate their deepest thought and contemplation, and He knew if He spoke too literally, certain of His hearers would quickly forget His words. Not only that, but others, for whom certain of His parables contained stern rebuke, would be so angered by straight speaking that they would attempt to silence Him by violence. Wise as a serpent but harmless as a dove, Jesus recalled the words of Isaiah 6:9 and told His disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Luke 8:10. *Cruden's Concordance* explains: "Our Saviour in the gospels often speaks to the people in parables. He made use of them to veil the truth from those who were not willing to see it. Those who really desired to know would not rest till they had found out the meaning."

It is appropriate here to ask to whom Jesus was speaking in Luke 16:19-31. Which category of people was He dealing with? The last verse before Jesus' voice begins in this passage tells us. Verse 14 says, "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him." Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, a class of men who were notorious all through the gospels for their refusal to deal honestly with Him and the truths He taught.

We can be sure that of all the people Jesus taught, none were handled more guardedly than the wily Pharisees. They dealt in deception and subterfuge, but Jesus dealt with them wisely and truthfully. The

safest way for Him to do this was by parable and allegory. Evidence that they did not understand many of His teachings can be found in Jesus' prayer in Luke 10:21, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed them unto babes." Mark 4:33, 34 clearly shows that Jesus' lessons were almost invariably couched in parables: "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them: as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them; and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples."

Now we are ready to examine the story of the rich man and Lazarus itself, and try to ascertain the real message Jesus was seeking to convey through it.

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." Luke 16:19-21.

Who was the symbolic rich man? The Jews had been blessed above measure by a knowledge of God and his plan of salvation for all mankind. They had received "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Romans 9:4. Only a Jew would pray to "Father Abraham," as we find the rich man doing later in the story. The Jewish nation was clearly represented by this character.

By contrast, Lazarus symbolized all those people in spiritual poverty--the Gentiles--with whom the Israelites were to share their heritage. The words of Isaiah were well known to the Jews, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Isaiah 49:6.

Unfortunately, the Jews had not shared their spiritual wealth with the Gentiles at all. Instead, they considered them as "dogs" who would have to be satisfied with the spiritual crumbs falling from their masters' tables. The metaphor was known. Jesus had used it before, testing the faith of the Canaanite woman, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." She responded accordingly: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' tables." Matthew 15:26, 27.

The rich Jews had hoarded the truth, and in so doing had corrupted themselves. Only moments before relating this parable, Jesus had rebuked the Pharisees for their spiritual conceit, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Luke 16:15. What was to be the result of this terrible conceit?

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside

all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Luke 16:26.

The Jews had enjoyed "the good life" while on earth but had done nothing to bless or enrich their neighbors. No further reward was due. "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger." Luke 6:24, 25.

Conversely, the poor in spirit, symbolized by Lazarus, would inherit the kingdom of heaven. The Gentiles who hungered and thirsted after righteousness would be filled. The "dogs" and sinners, so despised by the self-righteous Pharisees, would enter heaven before they would, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Matthew 21:31.

The parable concludes with the rich man begging for his brethren to be warned against sharing his fate. Asking Abraham to send Lazarus on this mission, he alleges that "if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Luke 16:30. Abraham replies, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Verse 31.

Jesus thus rebuked the Pharisees for their disregard of the Scriptures, foreseeing that even a supernatural event would not change the hearts of those who persistently rejected the teachings of "Moses and the prophets." The miracle of raising the real-life Lazarus from the dead soon afterwards confirmed the accuracy of Jesus' conclusion. One did rise from the dead, yet the brothers of the "rich man" did not repent. In fact, the Pharisees even plotted to kill Lazarus after his resurrection. His very life was a reminder to them of their own hypocrisy.

Today many Christians believe that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a historical account of two individuals' literal experiences in the afterlife. On the basis of this belief, some people teach that those who are consigned to the fiery torments of hell will never stop burning throughout all eternity. As with the parable of the trees and the bramble (Judges 9:8-15), however, serious problems arise with a literal interpretation of the story elements.

Can we believe that all the saints are even now gathered in Abraham's bosom? If they are, in whose bosom does Abraham rest? And if there is really a great gulf fixed between heaven and hell, how could the rich man possibly have been heard by Abraham? Perhaps more disturbing, how could the saints enjoy the comforts of heaven while enduring the cries of the wicked being tormented?

Another dilemma that arises with a literal interpretation of this story could be called "the mystery of the empty graves." If this is taken literally, apparently neither of the two leading characters spent very long in the grave--both being whisked away rather quickly to their respective places of reward. Their bodies obviously came along, for we find the rich man lifting up his eyes, and desiring to have his *tongue* cooled by a drop of water from the *finger* of Lazarus who was resting, as we have seen, in Abraham's *bosom*. Enough graves have been exhumed in recent years to know that the bodies of the deceased are carried neither to heaven or hell after burial. They finally turn to dust and await the resurrection.

From these few examples, we begin to see that in this parable, Jesus was not trying to explain the physical realities of the afterlife. Instead, He was referring to the unfaithfulness of the Jews regarding their assigned responsibility. As stewards of the special message of truth, they utterly failed to share it with the Gentiles, who were eager to hear it. In fact, the entire chapter of Luke 16 is devoted to the subject of stewardship.

Beginning in verse one, Christ gave another parable about stewardship of money or property. "There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods." After dealing with the principle of being entrusted with material goods, Jesus opened up the issue of being entrusted with the truth. By the parable of another rich man, He graphically illustrated how they had proven just as unfaithful with spiritual riches as the first rich man's steward had been unfaithful with his physical wealth.

To attempt to stretch the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to cover the doctrine of hellfire is to miss the point Jesus intended to convey. The Bible speaks with unmistakable clarity on the subject of hell in many other places. Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that the wicked will continue to suffer in the fires of hell through the ceaseless ages of eternity. Rather, they will be utterly destroyed. Jesus never would have compromised the integrity of the Holy Scriptures by teaching a doctrine contrary to its own overwhelming testimony on the subject.

The truth about hell may be ascertained by examining even a few of the many Bible texts that speak directly on the subject. Before examining these, however, we must remember that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." Romans 6:23. There are only two alternatives for every soul. Those who accept Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice will live forever; those who do not accept Jesus will die. If the wicked suffered without end, eternal life-- however painful--would be theirs. But we know that eternal life is available only to those who accept Jesus.

Consider these clear texts of Scripture that speak of the reward of the wicked:

"But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall *consume*; into smoke shall they *consume away*." Psalm 37:20.

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." Malachi 4:1.

"And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they *shall be ashes* under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 4:3.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to *destroy both soul and body* in hell." Matthew 10:28.

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens *shall pass away* with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be *burned up*." 2 Peter 3:10.

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second *death*." Revelation 21:8.

Many other texts could be cited, but these clearly illustrate that the ultimate fate of the wicked is death. Notice that the Scriptures choose the strongest possible words to describe the complete annihilation of the wicked. In no way should these clear words be misunderstood by one who honestly desires to know truth. There is a fire reserved for the wicked, but a fire so hot it will utterly destroy all who are engulfed by it. When the fire has done its work, it will go out. Eternally burning fire is not taught anywhere in the Bible--not even in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. (Some people have wondered what the expression "for ever" means in the usage of Revelation 20:10. Other similar passages demonstrate this merely to mean as *long as a person lives*. See Exodus 21:6; 1 Samuel 1:22; Jonah 2:6, etc. Also, the expression "eternal fire" may be understood in terms of consequences rather than duration, as in the example of Sodom and Gomorrah in Jude 7).

It would be tragic to miss the actual point of the parable by removing it from the setting in which Jesus gave it. Let's accept the lesson He was trying to teach and apply it to our own lives. Are we doing all we can to spread the message of salvation to others? Do we have a genuine love for those around us, and have we invited them to share our spiritual inheritance? If we hoard our riches, like the Jews of old, we will become selfrighteous and corrupt. In contrast, by active, loving service, our relationship with Christ as well as with others will become stronger and more meaningful.

Let us not make scary stories the basis of our Christian experience. Instead, let us understand that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Some Difficult Texts Explained

1 Samuel 28:14: *"And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself."*

This spiritualistic seance has been cited as evidence for life after death. But here are points to the contrary:

1. Wizards had been sentenced to death and banned from the land (verse 3; Leviticus 20:27).

2. God had left Saul and would not communicate with him (verse 15).

3. Samuel was supposedly "brought up." Other expressions: "ascending out of the earth," "Cometh up," and "Bring ... up." Is this where the righteous dead are--down in the earth? Not according to those who believe in the immortal soul.

4. "Samuel" is described as "an old man covered with a mantle." Is this the way immortal souls appear? And where did the soul get the body? They're supposed to be disembodied. Was there a resurrection? Did God obey the beck and call of the witch, and raise up Samuel? If not, can Satan raise the dead?

5. The apparition of Samuel told Saul, "Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." Saul committed suicide on the battlefield the next day. Where did Samuel dwell, if the wicked Saul was to go to the same place?

6. The record never says that Saul saw Samuel. He received his information as second hand from the witch, and only concluded it was Samuel from her description. The truth is that the devil deceived the dissolute old woman, and she deceived Saul. It was nothing more than a devil-generated seance.

7. The enormity of Saul's sin is revealed in these words, "So Saul died ... for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; And inquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him." 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14.

Matthew 10:28: *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Jesus clearly teaches in this text that the soul is not naturally immortal. It can and will be destroyed in hell. But what does He mean about killing the body, but not the soul? Is it possible for the soul to exist apart from the body? Some say it is, but the Bible indicates otherwise.

The Hebrew word "psuche" has been translated "soul" in this text, but in forty other texts it has been translated "life." For example, Jesus said, "Whosoever shall lose his life (psuche) for my sake shall find it." Matthew 16:25. Obviously "psuche" could not mean soul in this instance, or people could be said to lose their soul for Christ's sake. It is properly translated "life."

But what of Matthew 10:28? Put in the word "life" instead of "soul" and the text makes perfect sense in its consistency with the rest of the Bible. The contrast is between one who can take the physical life, and He who can take away eternal life. Here is proof in the words of Jesus: "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell." Luke 12:4, 5.

In other words, the word "soul" here means not only life, but eternal life. Notice that Luke says everything just like Matthew except that he does not say "kills the soul." Instead he says "cast into hell." They mean the same thing. Men can only kill the body and take away the physical life. God will cast into hell and take away eternal life. Not only will their bodies be destroyed in that fire, but their lives will be snuffed out for all eternity.

Matthew 25:46: *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."*

It is well to notice that Jesus did not say that the wicked would suffer "everlasting punishing." He said "everlasting punishment." What is the punishment for sin? The punishment is destruction, and it is of eternal duration. 2 Thessalonians 1:9. In other words, it is a destruction which never ends, because there will be no resurrection from that destruction.

Paul says, "the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. John describes that death as "the second death" in Revelation 21:8. That death or destruction will be eternal.

Mark 9:43, 44: *"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."*

In this verse the word "hell" is translated from the Greek word "Gehenna," which is another name for the Valley of Hinnom just outside the walls of Jerusalem. There the refuse and bodies of animals were cast into an ever-smoldering fire to be consumed. What might escape the flames was constantly being destroyed by maggots which fed on the dead bodies. Gehenna symbolized a place of total destruction.

Jesus taught in this verse that the fire of hell could not be quenched or put out by anyone. Isaiah said "they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame." Isaiah 47:14. Yet he hastened to say in the same verse, "there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before it." So the unquenchable fire will go out after it has finished its work. Jerusalem burned with unquenchable fire (Jeremiah 17:27) but it was totally destroyed (2 Chronicles 36:19-21).

The flames and worms of Gehenna represented the total annihilation and obliteration of sin and sinners. With the fires of Gehenna burning before their eyes Jesus could not have spoken a more graphic word to the Pharisees to describe the final total destruction of sinners.

Those who cite this text to support their doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul are thrown into a real dilemma. Why? Because the fire and worms are working, not upon disembodied souls, but *bodies*! In Matthew 5:30 Christ said, "the whole body" would be cast into hell.

In Isaiah 66:24 the same Gehenna picture of hell is presented with the unquenchable flame and the

destroying worms. But in this case the word "carcasses" is used, revealing the fact that the fire consumes dead bodies, not disembodied souls.

Luke 23:43: *"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."*

Some have assumed from this verse that souls go to their reward immediately after death, contrary to scores of other Bible texts. But notice two things wrong with this assumption. First, even though Jesus told the thief "verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise," three days later He told Mary that He had not yet ascended to His Father. Here is the evidence that His Father was in Paradise: Revelation 2:7 says the tree of life "is in the midst of the paradise of God," and Revelation 22:1, 2 describes the tree of life by the side of the river of life which flows, in turn, from the throne of God. So there is no question about Paradise being where the Father's throne is located. The question is: How could Jesus tell the thief that he would be with Him in Paradise that day, when He did not go there until three days later?

In the second place, Jesus and the thief did not even die on the same day. When the soldiers came just before sunset to take the bodies off the cross, Jesus was already dead (John 19:32-34). The thieves were very much alive, and their legs were broken to hasten death and to prevent them from escaping. They undoubtedly lived on past sunset into the hours of the Sabbath and possibly longer. So how could Jesus assure the thief of being with Him in Paradise that day when they did not both die on "that day"?

The apparent contradictions clear up when we consider that the punctuation of Luke 23:43 was added by uninspired men when our English Bible was translated. They placed a comma before the word "today," when in reality it should have been placed after "today." Then the verse would correctly read, "Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise." In other words, Jesus was saying, "I give you the assurance today, when it seems I can save no man; today when my own disciples have forsaken me and I'm dying as a criminal dies--yet I assure you of salvation right now."

Please notice that the thief did not ask to be taken to Paradise then. He asked, "Lord, remember me *when thou comest into thy kingdom.*" That's exactly when he will be remembered and taken into that Kingdom.

2 Corinthians 5:6, 8: *"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ... We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."*

In verses 1-8, Paul is contrasting the present mortal state with the future immortal life in Heaven. Notice the expressions he uses for the two conditions:

Mortal	Immortal
earthly house	building of God
this tabernacle	house not made with hands
mortality	our house from Heaven
in the body	absent from the body
absent from the Lord	present with the Lord

He also speaks of being clothed with "our house which is from heaven," (verse 2) and again, he longs "that mortality might be swallowed up of life.)' Verse 4. But the key to the entire discourse lies in the description of a third condition. After desiring to be clothed upon with immortality, Paul states that "being clothed we shall not be found naked." Verse 3. Putting it yet another way, he said, "not for that we would be unclothed." Verse 4.

Clearly the naked or unclothed state was neither mortality nor immortality but death and the grave. Paul realized that one did not pass instantly from being clothed with this tabernacle into being clothed with our house from Heaven. Death and the grave came in between, and he referred to it as being unclothed and naked.

In another text Paul spelled out exactly when that change from mortality would take place. In 1 Corinthians 15:52, 53 he wrote, "the trumpet shall sound ... and this mortal must put on immortality." That will be when Jesus comes.

1 Peter 3:18-20: *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."*

There has been considerable misunderstanding of these verses of Scripture. It has been preached that Christ actually descended into the lower regions of the earth and preached to lost souls that were in prison in some purgatory or limbo. This is very far from what the text actually says. Let's look at it closely now and get the real message of these verses. It says, "Christ hath once suffered for sin that He might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh. But quickened by the Spirit by which also He went and preached...." First of all, notice how Christ preached to those spirits in prison. He did it by the Spirit, and that word is capitalized in your Bible. It actually refers to the Holy Spirit. So whatever Christ did in preaching during this period of time, He did it through or by the Holy Spirit.

With that in view, let's ask this: When was the preaching done? The answer is plainly given in verse 20, "When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing." So the preaching was actually done while the ark was being built-- during the preaching of Noah to that antediluvian world. Now, one more question: To whom was the preaching done? The text says here "to the spirits in prison." Throughout the Bible we find this terminology used in describing those who are bound in the prison house of sin. David prayed "Bring my soul out of prison." Psalm 142:7. Paul spoke of his experience in these words, "bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." Romans 7:23.

What Peter is telling us here is simply that Christ through the Holy Spirit was present while Noah preached; Christ was there through the Holy Spirit to speak conviction to their hearts and appeal to them to come into the ark. There is absolutely nothing here which indicates that Jesus departed from the body during the time He was dead to go to any subterranean place to minister to wicked spirits. The three questions are clearly answered in the text itself, that He preached by the Holy Spirit, He did it while the ark was preparing, and He did it to the spirits in prison or to those individuals whose sinful lives were bound in the prison house of sin.

Revelation 14:10,11: *"the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."*

The words "for ever" do not necessarily mean "without end." In fact, the Bible uses the term fifty-six times ("For ever" can be found in your biblical concordance under "Ever") in connection with the things which have already ended. In Exodus 21 :1-6 the Hebrew servant was to serve his master "for ever," but it was obviously only as long as he lived. Hannah took her son Samuel to God's house to abide "for ever," but she plainly limited that time to "as long as he liveth." 1 Samuel 1:22, 28.

The term is clearly defined in Psalms 48:14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." The desolation of Edom was to continue "for ever and ever." Isaiah 34:10. Christ is called "a priest for ever" (Hebrews 5:6), yet after sin is blotted out, Christ's work as a priest will end. The Bible states, "The wicked ... shall be destroyed for ever." Psalm 92:7.

The Scarlet Woman

Joe Crews

Revelation 12:17

Everywhere people are asking the same questions about the modern church. Why does it appear so weak and compromised? Where is the old-time fire and power that marked the church of a generation ago? These are questions which prey on the minds of many Christians as they witness the dwindling influence of religious institutions. Something seems to have gone wrong. Church members spend more time in places of entertainment and amusement than they do in the house of God. There is little firmness of faith, and almost no discipline for those who weakly bend to the indulgent lifestyle of the flesh and the world.

Where can we find courageous pastors who fear not to call sin by its right name? Paul urged the shepherds of his day to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Then, he made this astounding prediction: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

These words are being fulfilled before our very eyes. Fables are being taught, doctrinal messages are drying up, and millions are turning from truth to pleasing platitudes. Any sermon that demands obedience or self-denial is rejected out of hand as legalistic and judgmental. The voice of rebuke is seldom heard, and pointed preaching which identifies the biblical antichrist is looked upon as harsh and unloving.

Have we overdrawn the picture? I don't believe any careful observer of the religious scene would contend that we have. Surely Satan is working harder inside the church than he is on the outside, and his plan is to produce the most clever counterfeit of truth that has ever existed. By creating a diabolical parallel system of doctrinal error within the church itself, he has already led millions into a false worship. The nefarious plot was recognized and exposed by the Holy Spirit shortly before the great deceiver began to implement the major elements of his plan in the post-apostolic church.

But before we turn to John's inspired account of the sordid story in the book of Revelation, let's read another prophetic description of the spiritual state of that turbulent period. Paul warned: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Acts 20:29. Again, he wrote, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.

Paul's words do not reveal the nature of the apostasy nor the identity of the "man of sin" who would assume the prerogatives of God, but the program would clearly begin to unfold in the early church.

Shortly after Paul's cryptic caution about an antichrist movement within the church, the beloved John began to record his mysterious apocalyptic visions on the isle of Patmos. As the symbols of those revelations have been more clearly explained through comparative study of the prophecies, it is easy to see that John was simply enlarging upon Paul's earlier oblique references to a developing dichotomy of good and evil within the post-apostolic church.

Without understanding the historical significance of his own enigmatic language, John faithfully described the cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan from its very inception. The age-old conflict would finally focus upon the emergence of a counterfeit Christ manipulated by Satan himself, who would seek to destroy God's law, His government, and His people. In a climactic clash called the battle of Armageddon, the great adversary would consolidate both secular and religious powers of earth against the minority group of faithful loyalists who would refuse to transgress the commandments of God. The antichrist system, under the control of Satan, would be the major force to suppress truth and to seek the death sentence against those who refused to cooperate with the evil confederation.

In his epistles the beloved John had declared, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." 1 John 4:3. Because he recognized that the "spirit" of that prophesied antichrist was operating in his own day, John cooperated fully with the Holy Spirit by clothing his exposures of that power with symbolic language, unrecognizable to enemies who might have sought to exterminate the inspired record altogether.

The Two Sides in Conflict

John used a variety of colorful types and symbols to portray the elements involved in the final controversy between Christ and Satan: for example, a dragon, a lamb, and two fierce wild beasts. But the most prominent representation of the two sides centers in the two striking women described in chapters 12 and 17. No words could be found to identify more vividly the nature of the contending forces in this contest. On one side is the pure woman of Revelation 12, clothed in the glory of the sun, wearing a crown of stars, and standing on the moon. Here is represented the true church, the bride of Christ. The prophets had written, "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman." Jeremiah 6:2. "Say unto Zion, Thou art my people." Isaiah 51:16.

Later, Paul used the same symbolism of the church when he wrote, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:2.

On the other side, John wrote in Revelation 17 of the activities of a drunken, scarlet-clothed harlot, sitting upon many waters and holding a golden cup of abominations in her hand. Here is the antithesis of the pure woman of chapter 12. The woman still symbolizes a church, but one which has committed spiritual adultery. Her cup is filled with fornications. According to the Bible, this represents a turning away from Christ and unfaithfulness to His Word. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God?" James 4:4. Although married to Christ, this church has been disobedient to His Word, taken the teachings of the world, His enemy, and therefore become a spiritual harlot. The fornications in the cup would constitute false teachings and doctrines that would be contrary to Christ, the true husband.

Just as the book of Revelation classifies all the world's inhabitants as ultimately following Christ or the dragon, obeying truth or error, receiving the mark of the beast or seal of God, so it pictures every individual at the end of time on the side of the symbolic harlot or the side of the pure virgin. What a solemn thought it is that everyone reading these words right now will belong to one category or the other. There will be no middle ground. It will be the camp of the saved or the camp of the lost. The prophet looked on one side and saw the wrath of God falling upon those with the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:10, 11). Then, he looked on the other side and declared, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. A faith experience-a Jesus experience-that produces obedience to His commandments, is the chief distinction between the followers of Christ and the followers of the beast.

The Harlot System

Since most of our study is to focus upon this false religious system which gradually evolved from an early church apostasy, we should read the full description of the "great whore" as given by John. "And there came one of the seven angels which has the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." Revelation 17:1-6.

It is no exaggeration to observe that our eternal salvation could well depend upon a proper identification of this corrupt church system. The Revelator declared that "all the world wondered after the beast." Revelation 13:3. There is no time to assemble the persuasive list of Bible characteristics of the beast power in this study, but it has been dealt with fully in the Amazing Facts' book entitled The Beast, the Dragon, and the Woman. Here we will consider the contextual evidence of Revelation 17 to identify the fallen woman and her daughters who are assigned the name of "Babylon."

Let us keep the points in clear, logical perspective as we look at the revealed facts. First, the woman has been shown to represent a religious system, howbeit a false one. Secondly, she is being supported by a dragon-like beast with seven heads and ten horns. Who is this beast holding up the woman? Again, we cannot exhaust the evidence for lack of time, but verse 9 gives us a very strong clue. "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth."

These words strike a very familiar chord. What city is built on seven hills? The old pagan Roman Empire had its center in the city of Rome, which was sprawled across seven hills by the river Tiber. Even though this mystery beast involves much more than pagan Rome, we have sufficient evidence that Rome was definitely a part of that which gave support to the harlot church system. This leads us to the question, what church received support from the pagan Roman Empire? Only one, of course, and that was the Catholic Church, whose papal head also assumed the title Pontifex Maximus, as the direct successor of the Roman caesars.

The second line of evidence which points to the papacy is found in verse 6. "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." History reveals only one church which waged such a frenzied warfare against faithful Christians. Over 50 million martyrs fell victim to the terrible inquisitions of the Church of Rome, according to the most conservative estimates. It was indeed a persecuting church. Multiple evidence, including admissions of the church itself, could be presented to support this particular mark of identification.

Another interesting clue is found in verse 4: "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour." Anyone who has visited the Vatican can confirm that these are the predominant colors which are in evidence around St. Peter's Square. Scarlet-robed cardinals are among the most frequent visitors to the papal head of state and church.

John observes further that the woman was "decked with gold and precious stones and pearls." What a contrast to the simplicity of the pure woman of Revelation 12 who has no artificial adornment at all—only the glory of her raiment of light. Throughout the Bible, jewelry and articles of adornment are used symbolically as indications of apostasy and unfaithfulness. (With such negative spiritual connotations, the true Christian should avoid the vanities of such fleshly display and pride.)

In passing, we should also note that the beast on which the harlot sits has ten horns. The angel explained them in these words: "The ten horns ... are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: ... these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Revelation 17:12-16.

This prophetic scenario is very interesting indeed. Since the number ten designates earthly completeness, just as seven indicates divine perfection, we can recognize in this prophecy a universal confederacy of earthly governments giving support to the beast for a certain period of time. Just as pagan Rome was one of the major political powers passing on its strength to the papal system, we now see at the endtimes a joining together of all the kings of earth in support of Catholic aims. John declared that "all the world wondered after the beast." Revelation 13:3.

But a change was to take place just before the judgment of the great whore. The earthly kingdoms, apparently, would recognize that they had been duped by the Babylon system and would withdraw their support. The prophetic language leads us to believe that at the very end they violently turn against the woman and "make her desolate ... and burn her with fire."

This helps us understand another symbolic account of the woman's experience. Although she was seated on "many waters," those waters were to be "dried up." Revelation 16:12. The angel explained, "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Revelation 17:15.

When those waters, of people and nations, turn away from their support, there is truly a drying up of the waters which held the woman in her position. The details of this future development is impossible to define in detail, but the broad picture stands clearly before us in the language of the prophet.

The Harlot's Golden Cup

Now, we need to give closer attention to the contents of the golden cup in the harlot's hand. We have already established the spiritual nature of those abominable fornications. A church can only commit such infidelities by turning away from the law of her husband, which is Christ. Without question, the cup overflows with unscriptural doctrines and practices. Many of them are easily identifiable because they have been absorbed by other subsequent religious bodies. Of these we will have more to say a bit later.

In the cup can be found sprinkling in place of baptism. Here is a custom never practiced or endorsed by our Lord. When Jesus spoke of baptism, He used a special word that has only one possible definition. It cannot connote sprinkling or a partial effusion of water. It literally means to dip under and totally immerse.

Also included in the cup would be the teaching of Sunday-keeping instead of Sabbath observance. Nowhere in the Bible has God's great hand-written law of Ten Commandments been abrogated or changed. Jesus kept the seventh-day Sabbath, "as his custom was," and knew absolutely nothing about the observance of the first day of the week. Luke 4:12. The pagan "day of the sun" was adopted long after the days of the apostles in order to placate the massive influx of Mithraic sun worshippers and their professedly "converted" pagan emperor Constantine.

A major element in the golden cup would undoubtedly be the Graeco-pagan concept that man's naturally immortal soul flies away at death to either eternal punishment or reward. The truth is that the Bible nowhere speaks of undying souls. Jesus called death a sleep. According to His doctrine, there is an unconscious, dreamless sleep of death in the grave from which all will be awakened in the day of judgment to receive everlasting life or eternal death. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5:28, 29.

Jesus also contradicted another popular fallacy held in the golden cup of abominations. The doctrine of eternal torment in an endless fiery hell has been responsible for turning multitudes away from the gracious provisions of a loving Saviour. Again, the words of Jesus are clear and unambiguous: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Matthew 10:28.

This text establishes beyond question and on the highest authority that the soul is subject to death. Only the righteous receive the gift of eternal life. "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezekiel 18:4. "All that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, ... And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet." Malachi 4:1, 3.

The consistent testimony of Scripture points to a final execution of judgment upon the wicked in the lake of fire. It will be an eternal death from which there can be no survival or resurrection. Since the soul is not immortal by nature, all the wicked will suffer the fate so vividly described by Jesus, "destroy both soul and body in hell."

The Harlot's Name

These and numerous other "isms" and perversions of true doctrine may be identified in the mystery cup of the harlot. Every one of them constitutes disloyalty and infidelity to the spiritual relationship which every true Christian should sustain with Christ. This is why the woman carries the name on her forehead "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of Harlots and abominations of the earth." What a title!

The word "Babylon" denotes confusion. It originated with the Tower of Babel where God confounded their language so that they could not understand each other. We speak of a babbling of voices. God calls this woman Babylon because of her unholy blend of truth and error which causes "the inhabitants of the earth" to be "made drunk with the wine of her fornication." In other words, the whole world will be contaminated and confused by her teachings.

But now, let's look at that emblazoned name more closely. Notice that it is obviously a family name, because she has daughters; and they are designated as harlots, just like their mother. Having established that women symbolize churches in these prophetic writings, we now inquire as to the identity of these daughters. Since they are guilty of infidelity also, we must conclude that they are churches which share some of the same false doctrines which constitute spiritual fornication. In other words, they would be drinking out of the same golden cup with its unscriptural potion of pseudo-Christian teachings. What churches could be represented by these daughters? Since the mother has been identified as the Catholic Church, we must look for other religious bodies that came forth from the mother church of Rome and carried with them some of the same confused doctrines of that church.

None can escape the conclusion that those daughters are Protestant churches who have inherited many of the empty traditions of their Catholic forebears. Whether we like it or not, we must admit that many of the most popular doctrines of the established Protestant churches are rooted in that quasi-Christian twilight period when the post-apostolic church was being overwhelmed by pagan influences.

We need only look at one example of the moral law to see how seriously the infiltration affected the teachings of the church, both then and now. With the most explicit words of the Ten Commandments before them, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work," those leaders of the early church yielded to the political clamor to take in millions of former sun worshippers who did not want to give up their custom of worshipping on the first day of the week—a day they named and observed in honor of their venerable sun-god.

The Catholic Church hierarchy simply changed the day of worship from the seventh to the first day, under the claim that God bestowed such power upon them. Millions of Protestants continue that altered practice, even though it rests solely upon the illegitimate actions of the apostate Catholic system. No

human church leaders, whether bishops, priests, or pope, have been given any authority to change the great moral law of the universe, the Ten Commandments.

Isn't it interesting that the daughters blindly followed the majority practice of the compromised Catholic Church even though they properly identified her as the antichrist power of prophecy? How could this be? Why was it so easy to accept something that was such a flagrant violation of a plain command of God? Perhaps the answer to that question will be more apparent as we ourselves are confronted with a command just as concise and specific. We turn now to the crux of this tremendous prophecy and ask the question: What does God think about this woman and her daughters?

The Call Out of Babylon

The answer is found in the first few verses of Revelation 18. Here also we find the command of God which few are willing to obey in our day. "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Revelation 18:1-5.

A close examination of these verses reveal that a very special message is being proclaimed which will profoundly affect every corner of the planet. Under the symbol of a powerful fourth angel, a warning sounds forth against the counterfeit gospel being communicated through the woman and her daughters. Not only is she spiritually fallen from favor with God, but her wine of deceptive doctrines have placed her in unholy alliance with the kings of the earth. All nations are represented as committing fornication with her by giving support to her false teachings. They use the illicit relationship to their own political advantage, and "wax rich through the abundance of her delicacies."

But then, suddenly, the call of the fourth angel is cut off by an even more urgent voice which sounds forth from heaven itself. This time there is no doubt about the one whose message rolls from one end of the heavens to the other. God is speaking! And He is speaking to an exclusive group. He addresses Himself to "my people."

Here are the exact words, "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Revelation 18:4. Now the picture becomes more distinct. There are sincere people in all of those fallen churches represented by the harlot mother and her daughters. Because they have been faithful to all the light of truth which had been revealed to them, God extends a final invitation of mercy. But what a message! This is undoubtedly the most shocking and revolutionary call to ever fall on human ears.

What does it mean? There is only one answer. Those religious bodies represented by the fallen Babylon system have departed so far from the foundations of Bible truth that God can no longer acknowledge

them as His. By choosing the traditions of men over the commandments of God they have disqualified themselves as reliable shepherds of the flock of God. In almost every crusade, members come to me from a variety of churches weeping and asking what they should do about their church or their pastor. Instead of receiving loving counsel and Bible answers, they are being taught to break God's law. "The ten commandments were nailed to the cross. You don't have to keep the Sabbath today. You can choose any other day of rest and worship," they are told.

Apostasy and betrayal has reached its limits when leaders comfort people in their practice of sin. God says, "This is it, my people. You can no longer remain in fellowship with a church that is so spiritually fallen that it teaches you to break my law. Come out of that confusion." What a fearful and emotional command that is to most people who hear it for the first time, and how easy it is to empathize with their mixed feelings. They love their church. Their fondest memories revolve around its ministry-baptism, marriage, and commitment. And even though they recognize the apostasy and the necessity to separate, it is one of the hardest commands to obey.

How strange it is that the strongest and most condemnatory language in the Bible is used against religious people. Jesus pronounced terrible judgment upon the Pharisees who pretended to be so righteous while violating every principle of truth. Similarly, God speaks again directly from heaven against those who profess His name while willfully transgressing His commandments. His extreme displeasure is revealed toward both religious groups-hypocrites, whited sepulchres, generation of vipers, hold of every foul spirit, habitation of devils, cage of every unclean and hateful bird-these are some of the charges He leveled against them. Are they justified? Why such a scathing reaction against those who were so very religious?

The answer to this question is important. These churches-every one of them-had allowed the popular traditions of men to crowd out the self-denying truths of His Word and His law. Rejecting the Sabbath of the Lord in favor of a pagan substitute, they had been guilty of condoning sin instead of righteousness. Said Jesus, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:9.

Who then is Babylon and her children? Any contemporary church who teaches contrary to Jesus. Errors and "isms" could be multiplied, but the height of abomination was reached by giving deliberate encouragement to the breaking of God's great moral law. By teaching men to break the Sabbath, the sign and seal of our salvation-rest in Christ, the churches became the spoilers of God's people. Very soon those same churches will be so bitter against the obedient ones that they will lend their influence to force compliance by religious legislation. To such organizations no true child of God can give support. It would be equivalent to subscribing to the erroneous beliefs and actions of those church groups.

No wonder then, that God sounds that radical call, "come out of her, my people. You must leave those churches which have rejected my law." But where should they go when they come out of the fallen churches? Does God want them now to be rootless, with no church, no pastor, and no fellowship? Indeed not. Just as surely as there is a harlot woman of prophecy representing a counterfeit religion, there is also a pure woman who symbolizes the true church of Jesus Christ.

The Woman in White

We only have time for a brief look at Revelation 12 where the exciting history of the true church is recorded. A complete in- depth study is found in the Amazing Facts' booklet entitled The Search For the True Church.

John begins his narrative of the woman in white with this description: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." Revelation 12:1, 2.

The remainder of the chapter follows the course of this beautiful pregnant woman and her offspring. Standing in the glorious light of the New Testament age, with the symbols of the 12 apostles on her head, she is about to give birth to a baby. A terrible red dragon stands before her to destroy the child as soon as it is born, but the baby boy eludes the dragon. Later, he is caught up to the throne of God. Who was the baby? John declares that he was to rule all the nations of earth; therefore, we must conclude that it was Jesus. He was also the only one caught up to the throne of God.

Afterward, the woman, the true church, fled into a wilderness hiding place for 1,260 days. Since a prophetic day equals a literal year, the woman had to be hidden away for exactly 1,260 years (Ezekiel 4:6). History confirms that the total period of papal civil rule, during which the true saints were persecuted, was from 538 A.D. until 1798 A.D. During those Dark Ages, the Bible was suppressed, and the true church was not to be seen before the world.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 1,260 years, or sometime after 1798, the truth was to emerge from its hiding place. John provides a dramatic description of the woman as she would appear at the very end of time, and how Satan would still be trying to silence her witness of truth to the world. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.

This verse contains one of the most exciting revelations in the Bible. It reveals that the remnant, or last part, of the true church will be characterized by obedience to the commandments of God. The scarlet woman of Revelation 17 had turned away from God's law, rejected the Sabbath, and spiritually adulterated the doctrines with traditions of men. Now the breach is healed and the original truths are being restored by the last part of the pure woman's seed, the remnant church.

At last, the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth." Isaiah 58:12-14.

So the whole circle of apostasy has been uncovered. From the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 to the seed of the woman of Revelation 12:17, the true church pressed its relentless warfare against confusion of doctrine. In the final contest, the scarlet woman seemed at times to prevail with a majority support, but the faithful little remnant of the woman in white which "keep the commandments of God" ultimately triumphs. And out of all the fierce beasts portrayed in the book of Revelation, it is the bleeding Lamb who prevails in the end. Through the blood of that Lamb may we all be gathered to Mount Zion, the place of rest and eternal security.

The Surrender of Self

Joe Crews
Romans 6:13

Would you look into your heart right now and respond to a very personal and important question? Do you judge yourself to be stronger in the things of God than you have ever been before? I hope so, because that is exactly the way it is supposed to be. Every day with Jesus should be sweeter than the day before. Each moment should find us moving up in our experience with a deeper sweeter faith than we had the moment before.

Yet I hope no one is satisfied that God has finished His work of growth and sanctification in the life. This very moment He wants to lead us out deeper into the waters of surrender and consecration. There are still victories to be won; there are sins to be put away, and there is a drawing together that needs to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit. And it needs to be done right now. Let me ask you a question. Does God really mean what He says in the fantastic promises of Romans six? No other chapter of the Bible is so lavishly excessive in giving assurance to a struggling Christian. Consider these extravagant phrases for example:

"Shall we continue in sin? ... God forbid." Verse 1, 2.

"We that are dead to sin." Verse 2.

"Henceforth we should not serve sin." Verse 6.

"Freed from sin." Verse 7.

"Dead indeed to sin." Verse 11.

"Let not sin therefore reign." Verse 12.

"Being made free from sin." Verse 18.

There is certainly nothing ambiguous about any of those texts. But is there some secret meaning or perhaps some hidden reservation which might not apply literally to us in these promises? We are tempted to believe so because of the almost fanatical element of certainty in every verse and line.

Some people are frightened by the book of Romans simply because it describes the perfect work God wants to do in sanctifying us from our sins. Many people are also afraid of that word "perfect." They are fearful that God will ask them to do something that they are not willing to do.

Before proceeding further, let's settle this question once and for all. God will never do anything in our spiritual lives that we are not willing for Him to do. He never coerces the will or pressures us into any actions to which we have not given consent. So we can totally disabuse our minds of being forced into any life choices which are not free and sovereign.

But now we come face to face with the basic root weakness which has led millions into discouragement and defeat. They simply have not been reconciled to giving up the enjoyment of their sins. There is a certain shallow, short-lived pleasure in sin which dances over the emotions and seeks to capture the mind through the sensory pathway of the flesh. In every case there must be a decision of the will to forfeit those temporary physical "pleasures of sin for a season." Until that choice is made and acted upon, there can be no real victory over sin in the life.

Let me ask you right now whether you are resigned to the stripping away of all your darling indulgences. Are you prepared to accept all the results of a complete surrender to Christ? The mortifying of every fleshly evil? I am convinced that there are only two possible reasons for a person holding back and failing to gain the victory over sin. Either he is not willing to give up the enjoyment of the sin or else he does not believe that God will give him deliverance from it. Being willing, of course, is our problem, but seeing it done is God's part alone. We must be willing, but we can never be able. Let us now look at these two great mental blocks which have stolen the victory from so many of God's people.

Self-The Greatest Enemy

I think it has probably already been revealed to most of us that self is the greatest enemy we face. Once we have settled it with that old man of the flesh who seeks to rule over us, all the other victories will come in their course.

God has given every one of us a powerful personal weapon to use in combating the self-nature. The will is our only natural reserve weapon, and absolutely everything depends on the right action of this resource. The ultimate sin in the eyes of God, the final factor that will cause a soul to be lost, is to deliberately say no to the will of God. We become whatever we choose to be. We are not what we feel, or what we might do or say in a single impulsive moment of our life. We are what we will to be. We cannot always control our emotions, but we can control our will.

Feelings have nothing to do with the truth of God. It is not your feelings, your emotions, that make you a child of God, but the doing of God's will. Perhaps you had a headache or arthritis pain when you woke up this morning, but does that change the fact that God loves you? Does it alter the truth that the seventh day is the Sabbath? Whether you feel good or bad, the truth remains exactly the same.

Some people can feel wonderful during an evangelistic crusade or a special revival weekend, but when the meetings are finished, their faith plummets to rock bottom. It is a yo-yo effect with everything tied to emotions generated by circumstances.

We must recognize the fact that our will and God's will, at some point, must come into violent collision. Either we let Him have His way or we choose our own course. And when it happens, most people are not willing to admit the true cause behind the raging conflict. They do not see the battle as primarily linked to the self-nature.

In evangelism I have listened to hundreds of "reasons" for not going all the way with Christ. They tell me it is because of Sabbath work, or doubts about the Bible, or opposition of relatives. But none of those things are the true reasons. It goes much deeper than the words they are uttering. There is a basic nature problem behind their lack of commitment. They talk about twigs and leaves when the real problem is the roots. The truth is that God wants something that self is not willing to give up. They love something more than they love God.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus made that strange statement in Matthew 16:24, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"? Why didn't the Master finish the sentence by spelling out the thing to be denied? "Let him deny himself"-what? Drugs, alcohol, tobacco, Sabbath-breaking? No. Just deny himself, period. Jesus knew that self was behind every angry battle against the truth. Once that victory is gained, all other victories will be won also.

Multitudes are outside the will of God and outside the church because they are not willing to give up something that they love more than they love God. Thousands are in the church and are perfectly miserable because something in their life has been fighting the will of God for years. What I am trying to say is this: to be a true Christian requires surrender above everything else.

Do you recall the time that your desire and God's will met in fearful conflict? There was a titanic struggle. The old self-nature hardened itself and resisted every impulse to turn away from rebellion and sin. Under deep conviction you wrestled and agonized against the powers of the flesh, but to no avail. Then, finally, you surrendered your stubborn will and the battle was over. Peace flooded into your heart, and glorious victory was immediately realized.

What happened to change the picture? Did you finally manage to drive back the devil? Definitely not. Your battle was with self, and when you became willing, God gave you the victory over that carnal enemy. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57.

It may sound foolish, but it is still true: before you can have, you must give away; before you can be full, you must be empty; before you can live, you must die; and before you have the victory, you must surrender.

I don't believe anyone ever felt so defeated, depressed, and cheated as eleven men did on a Friday night almost two thousand years ago. Jesus had promised them the world. They were going to sit on thrones and rule kingdoms. Life would be marvelous for them. They were important. Then, suddenly, Jesus was arrested, tortured, and crucified. The world had come to an end for them. Nothing will bring us as low as the cross brought them. Not even crippling disease, financial failure, desertion of friends, death of dear ones, or injustices of life. But was it defeat? On the contrary, it was the most glorious moment of victory this world has ever known.

Is Trying the Answer?

But now let's come back to the question of your sin and mine. We have to admit that we fight an enemy who is stronger than we are. In the weakness of the flesh we find ourselves bound in mind and body by the superior strength of our spiritual enemy. We resolutely struggle to extricate ourselves from the bondage, but the harder we try the deeper we sink into the mire. At last, when we are totally exhausted from the effort, a well-meaning friend comes by and says "I know what the problem is. You need to try harder."

Listen, if that is the only answer we have to the sin problem, we should stop sending missionaries to India. I've never seen anyone try harder to be saved than the Hindus. I've watched the wretched penitents prostrating in the hot dust, painfully measuring their length, mile after mile, as they inch toward some sacred river rendezvous. There they will dip under the filthy water, look up at the blazing sun, and pray-then repeat the process again, and again, and again.

Millionaire businessmen will give away all their wealth, take a beggars bowl, and spend the rest of their life feeding on scraps of shared food-all in an effort to earn salvation. Never have I seen a Christian try as hard to be saved as a Hindu does. Yet, I have never met a single Hindu seeker who had found any assurance or peace of mind-not even among the Brahmin brotherhood of the highest caste.

Do you know why "trying" will not break the chain of sin? Because sinful propensities are deeply embedded in the very nature of every baby born into the world. We are brought into this life with inherent weaknesses which predispose us toward disobedience. Furthermore, we have all yielded to those propensities. Jesus, born with the same fallen nature, is the only One who never gave way to those weaknesses. He lived a totally sanctified life of obedience.

We do not need instruction in theology to acquaint us with the facts about our fallen nature. All of us have struggled with memories of failure and compromise. We have desperately tried to blot out scenes of unfaithfulness from our minds, but every such effort has ended in utter defeat.

I heard of a holy man in India who traveled from village to village laying claim to special creative power. As a result of his Himalayan pilgrimage, this sadhu professed to hold the secret for making gold. He would fill a large caldron with water and then stir the contents vigorously while uttering his sacred incantations. But in the process of stirring he also slyly slipped some gold nuggets into the water without being detected.

The head man of one village wanted to buy the secret for making gold and the holy man agreed to sell it for 500 rupees. After explaining the stirring and the prayers to be repeated the priest took his 500 rupees and started to leave. Then he turned back and gave a final word of warning, "When you are stirring the water and uttering the prayers you must never once think of the red-faced monkey, or the gold will not come!"

As you can imagine the headman never could make the formula work because every single time he stirred the water, there was the red-faced monkey sitting at the edge of his mind, grinning at him.

We have absolutely no natural ability to keep the thoughts and imagination under control for the simple reason that they are rooted in our sinful natures. Only when the mind has been regenerated through the process of conversion can the individual subjugate the lower, physical powers and bring them under the effective control of the Holy Spirit. Only in this way may the very intents of the heart be sanctified and brought into harmony with Christ. Without the transforming grace of the new birth, "the carnal mind ... is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7.

For three years I studied the language in India under the tutelage of a Hindu priest who came to my house daily on his bicycle. This gave me the opportunity to ask questions about various aspects of Hindu worship. Only after many months of classroom camaraderie did I feel clear in asking my teacher about one puzzling feature of his ancestral religion. "Why," I asked, "did most all the temples have obscene carvings all over the front of the buildings?"

My pundit seemed genuinely shocked by the question and vociferously denied that any such carvings existed. Whereupon I invited him to walk down the street a block or two where a new temple was being constructed. I had watched the builders placing the obscenities by the front entrance door, so the teacher could not deny they were there. But once again he professed surprise and stated categorically that he had never seen anything like it before. He would find out the reason for it and tell me the next day.

On the following afternoon as he was mounting his bicycle to leave, I asked him about the carvings again. "Oh yes," he said, "I found out why they put them on the front of temples. You see, when the people go in to worship the gods they are not supposed to think of those evil things, so we place the carvings to remind them not to think of those things while worshipping inside.

I chuckled at his novel explanation, realizing that none of us need reminding about the intrusion of such thoughts. Without the restraining power of God they are ever with us. What we need is the panacea of divine grace to subdue and conquer them. The renewed mind holds the answer to both the inside and outside factors which lead to transgression.

Controlling the Inner Spirit

Have you noticed, though, that it is always easier to deal with external actions than with internal dispositions? Well-disciplined people can force themselves to act correctly on the outside, even when

the inward desires are at war with the outward conduct. The Bible teaches that this conflict must cease between how we think and how we act. A true Christian will be the same in both mind and body.

All of us have seen drivers dutifully slow down to fifteen miles per hour through the school zones. They appear so submissive and law-abiding as they creep along in front of the uniformed traffic patrol lady. Yet those drivers are usually seething with internal anger and rebellion because of missing an appointment. Self is behind that angry battle, and the stubborn will has simply not yielded to the idea of obedience. Here is where the desperate need lies for those who claim to be in the family of God. Almost anyone with minimum acting skills can force conformity to the rules (especially if they think someone is watching) but almost no one can force himself to be sweet about it. We can try till our dying breath and we will never be able to alter the unconverted disposition by dint of determination. Such a major shift requires the creation of new attitudes and thought patterns.

Many are convinced that they are Christians just because they act in a certain way and conform to certain biblical rules and principles. In other words, their lifestyle and behavior identifies them as not of this world. Or does it? Can we always recognize a true child of God by his conduct? Perhaps we can over a period of time, but pretenders are able to deceive most of us for a good while. Eventually the nature behind the good works begins to appear and the charade is seen for what it really is.

Isaiah wrote, "If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land." Isaiah 1:19. Some people are obedient without being willing, and their fruit is soon exposed as artificial. What does this teach us? It teaches us that two mistakes can be made concerning those who keep God's law carefully. We might wrongly assume they are legalists because they look so seriously upon the slightest disobedience, or we might wrongly assume they are true Christians just because they show zeal for conforming to the law.

Judging the Outward Actions

No one can read the motives of another. Therefore, it is a dangerous, judgmental attitude to deprecate the apparent caring concern that a fellow Christian has for keeping the commandments. If his works indeed are based upon principles of self-effort and do-it-yourself salvation the truth will be exposed soon enough. But if he has a genuine love relationship with Christ which constrains him to be meticulous in obedience, then he deserves commendation instead of criticism.

So we must conclude that it is a fatal delusion to depend upon trying harder and struggling longer to get the victory over sin. The secret is trusting instead of trying, and time will only make a young sinner into an old sinner. Finally, we must admit that we are not as strong as our adversary, and as we surrender our dependence upon human strength and effort, God provides the glorious gift of victory.

Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing." John 15:5. That is a tremendous truth, but we must go far beyond the negativism of this statement and experience the positive reality of Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The difference between "all things" and "no thing" is Christ.

This does not imply that we sit back in relaxed idleness while God assumes all the responsibility for our deliverance. There is a balance between the possibility and responsibility of overcoming sin. One belongs to God and the other to us. The possibility rests with God and the responsibility rests with us. And as we begin to act against the sin in our life, God provides the power to actually break with the sin.

How far may we go in utilizing that faith method of claiming the victory? John declares that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5:4. By submitting to that higher power which reaches down from above the soul is able to bring every thought into captivity to Christ.

Perhaps it can be clarified with an illustration. Suppose the farmer walks along his garden path and looks down at the soil beneath his feet. Aloud he wonders whether the minerals in that dirt could ever be transformed into vegetables. The human answer immediately fills his head. "Of course not. There are only three categories: vegetable, mineral, and animal; and they always remain distinct and recognizable."

Soon afterward the farmer laid out neat rows by the garden path and carefully planted the cabbage seed according to the instructions on the package. Then the gentle rains slowly moistened the ground, and the warming rays of the sun began to exercise their particular magic on the tiny seeds. They began to germinate and grow, and under those favorable influences from above the root system began to draw the actual mineral elements into the leaves of the cabbage. By some mysterious process still not fully comprehended by the scientist, the iron, phosphorus, and magnesium were incorporated into the plant and transformed into the vegetable form of the cabbage. The mineral had become a vegetable.

Later, as the farmer stood in the path admiring the rows of well-formed heads the question came to him: Could these vegetables ever become animal? And the answer from his human reasoning was clearly, "No. Vegetable is vegetable and animal is animal, and they are two distinct and separate categories."

But a few days later the farmer carelessly leaves the bars down on the nearby pasture, and the cows wander into the garden. As they consume the succulent young cabbage a truly remarkable thing happens within their bodies. The vegetable leaves are assimilated into the organs of digestion and in very short order the vegetable has literally been turned into animal. What a miracle! And it did not happen because of any effort put forth by the cabbage. It merely yielded to the higher power which reached down from above, and the miraculous change was effected.

How Far Can We Go In Victory?

Now we take the illustration one step further and ask the question: Is it possible for the animal, or the physical, to ever become spiritual? Again the obvious answer would be: "No. That is another sphere, and could never happen in this world." But I submit to you that this kind of transformation is not only possible, but it has actually happened to everyone who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

By yielding our will to the higher powers from above, we can be delivered from the bondage of the flesh. The entire being is made captive to the Spirit of God, and we are able to think His thoughts after

Him. Paul declares that we partake of the divine nature and have the mind of Christ. Again, and again, the process is described as a surrendering of the will, and a giving up of our own way. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Romans 6:13.

Paul further described the surrender process as a literal crucifixion of the self-nature. He said, "I am crucified with Christ;" and again, "I die daily." This constant subjection of the will is not achieved by any decision or effort which we can manufacture from within ourselves. Self will never make the choice to put itself to death. Only the Holy Spirit can create the desire to escape from the domination of a sin-loving nature. Only He can bring us to the point of being willing to give up every indulgence of that corrupt, fallen nature.

As the mind and will cooperates with the Holy Spirit, a faith-reckoning renders the death blow to the old man of sin. The life opens up to the sweet, triumphant in-filling of a new spiritual power. Little idols disappear as they are dethroned from the heart. There are no more secrets from God, no longer anything to hide or to be ashamed of, no more defeatism as a way of life. Joyfully we put aside the ornaments of self and the world to allow more capacity for the loving character of Christ to be revealed.

Although there are brief superficial pleasures in a life of sin, those indulgences cannot be compared with the delight of following Jesus. Self makes the Christian path seem dark and fearsome; but when self is surrendered and crucified, the narrow road is filled with joy unspeakable.

The Enigma of Miserable Christians

Every time you see an unhappy Christian you are looking at someone who has not surrendered self to the cross of Christ. That inward life of the flesh, that self-nature, has been allowed to survive; and there can be no peace in a divided loyalty. Those who have not submitted to be crucified with Christ still carry their religion like a heavy burden. They remind me of the Hindu processions I observed, again and again, on the crowded streets of India. The priests and devotees staggered along bearing the heavy idol on their shoulders. Occasionally they stopped to rest, and it was an obvious relief to put down their god momentarily to relieve themselves of the burden.

Isaiah described the same thing in his day as he must have watched similar scenes. He wrote, "They lavish gold out of the bag ... and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble." Isaiah 46:6, 7.

How accurately this describes what I observed in India. Their god was so helpless that they had to carry it from place to place. They wearied themselves with the effort to move it to another location. It was a burden which they were relieved to be rid of when they stopped to rest.

What kind of religion is it that must be painfully endured and borne like some miserable weight? I've seen professed Christians with that same kind of experience. They have a religion that seems to do nothing for them but to make them weary and disgruntled. They are like the man with a headache. He didn't want to cut off his head, but it hurt him to keep it. These people don't want to give up their religion, but it is painful to keep it.

There is only one explanation for this kind of bizarre situation. It is abnormal in the extreme. Christians should be the happiest people in the world. If they are not, it is because self has not been surrendered and crucified.

Come back now to the text in Isaiah where the prophet described the idol processions of his day. In truth it is not Isaiah speaking but the Lord God Himself. In verse 7 He said, concerning the idol god, "they carry him." Now read verse 4 where God declared to Israel, "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

Which god do you serve today? What kind of religion do you profess? You can only serve God or self. When you unreservedly surrender that spoiled, greedy, indulgent self to be put to death, you may reckon yourself dead to the sins which self promotes. Trying to live a Christian life without dying to self is just as miserable as struggling to carry a pagan god. In fact, when self has not been given up to the death of the cross, it comes between you and the Saviour, becoming a real god. The constant strain of trying to subdue that self-god by human effort can wear out the most determined saint.

What happens then when faith claims the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil? We are relieved of the strain, because God promises to carry us. "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57. "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." 1 John 5 :4. "I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you." Isaiah 46:4.

It is not hard to imagine that Satan's strongest efforts are aimed at the exaltation of self. He can only control the individuals who continue to feed the carnal nature. I have often imagined that our great enemy has a computer list of self-related indulgences which he constantly holds out to the fallen human race. Each category has been honed and adapted to exploit the particular weakness of the self-nature which Satan recognizes so easily in every member of Adam's family. Perhaps some of the most appealing subtitles in his list would include self-righteousness, self-dependence, self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-will, self-defense, and self-glory.

Because he is the temporary prince of this world, the devil has inspired an avalanche of material which focuses on developing the love of self. Counselors of every stripe and hue urge us to improve our self-worth and our self-esteem. Even ministers preach sermons around their interpretation of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Are these perversions of the biblical admonitions to "crucify self" and "deny self"? How can we seek to esteem and exalt that which we are told to subdue and put to death?

There is a sense, of course, in which we need to recognize our value in the sight of God. He counted every one of us as more precious than His own life. But that objective recognition is entirely distinct from the basic self-centeredness of the fallen human race. God can love us in spite of our genetic weaknesses and indulged carnal appetites, but the closer we come to Jesus, the less charmed we should be by our own perverse ways. In fact, as we enter into the converted life through the Holy Spirit, the confidence we placed in the flesh will be wholly shifted to the Saviour. In describing the new birth experience, Paul compared it to spiritual circumcision. "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Philippians 3:3.

As we have noted already, the great apostle equated this conversion experience to the crucifixion of self. The truth is that the egocentric nature of every baby, child, and adult is to have their own way. This nature must be crucified, and under the mastery of the new spiritual nature, the affections are set upon Jesus. Self is no longer important. The flesh has no strength to control the life or fulfill its own will. The song of the soul now is, "Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the potter; I am the clay." God grant us this experience.

Thieves in the Church

Joe Crews

Luke 12:15

Do you know about the sin nobody admits? It's a sin we're afraid to mention. We must be afraid to mention it, because nobody ever mentions it about himself, anyway. Now people have confessed to me that they've committed some terrible, dark sins. I can recall people who have admitted being drunkards, who confessed to stealing, breaking up another's home, murder, taking the Lord's name in vain, trifling on the marriage partner, Sabbath breaking - all the rest - but as far as I can remember in all my time in the ministry, nobody has ever admitted to me that he was guilty of the sin we're going to talk about now. And I suppose the reason for it is that it's the root sin; the basic sin; the very foundation sin.

The Lord Jesus Himself solemnly warned us of this sin in Luke 12:15: "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Now the sin that nobody admits is covetousness.

People just simply don't say "Well, I'm a covetous person. I want to get hold of that extra dollar. I want to reach out and grab and pull in everything I can get hold of." And people never come to you and say, "I want to admit something. Greediness is my problem. I'm just a covetous person." It has always amazed me just a little bit. People don't mind at all admitting some of those grosser, blacker sins; but when it comes right down to those refined sins like covetousness, I guess it is just too humiliating. Of course, it is a sin that's not condemned very much by our materialistic age, either. It is not even condemned very much by the church, it seems. You break any of the other commandments and immediately you get into trouble, but coveting - well, nobody knows whether you're coveting or not. But there it is - it is a commandment of the Lord, and it is one that most people seem to overlook; yet in God's sight it's one of the blackest of all sins because it's the root of every other sin. Remember what the apostle Paul said in Romans 7:7. He said, "I had not known sin ... except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." The point he was trying to get across was this: Every single sin has its roots in the sin of covetousness, and that's why God thought it was important enough to include in the Ten Commandments. It's the sin that comes before and leads to every other sin that you could possibly commit.

God Called a Man "Fool"

Now I may as well warn you ahead of time that there's no possible way of getting rid of coveting except through the Lord Jesus Christ - absolutely no way at all. It takes special power from heaven to overcome this sin. But now let's go back to Luke 12 for a moment. After Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness," He told a story to illustrate the point a little bit further. Let me read it to you, beginning with verse 16: "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much good laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him,

Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Now, notice something. God calls this man a fool. Now I may call a man a fool and be entirely mistaken, but when God calls a man a fool, he's a fool. Now this man was a fool. Why? Well, because he was concerned only about himself - "I," "I," "I," - and he forgot all about the solemn fact that one of these days we all have to stand before the Lord in judgment. So God said, "You're a fool. Tonight your soul will be required of you. Then whose will all these things be?"

This is a very solemn story. Every single Christian should give it very earnest attention and heed. The Lord is just saying here, "You go ahead. If that's the way you want it, get anything you want. Keep the things that are not yours. Make provisions for more and more sins. You have the right to choose, but when the day of reckoning comes and your soul will be required of you, then whose will these things be?"

You know, a lot of people think they are getting by with secret sins - things that are on the inside; things that don't show up - like coveting, for example. A person can go along and be quite a respectable Christian as far as other people are concerned, and yet be guilty of coveting. It just doesn't show up like many of the grosser, outward sins. But mark you this: On the great judgment day when the light from the judgment throne of God shines into every life, all of those things are going to be revealed and people are going to see them in all their rotten, disgusting fullness. And one of the worst sins to be shown upon the judgment day will be the sin of coveting.

Coveting Another's Praise, Honor, or Position

I'm afraid we don't realize just how far this thing reaches. Take for example, professional jealousy. Have you ever heard that expression? I want to tell you, it's not limited to just the professions, either. It's a term that we ought to use loosely, because it can apply to everybody, everywhere. Wives are jealous of other wives; husbands of other husbands; workmen of other workmen; and it's covetousness - this professional jealousy - coveting another person's praise, or his honor, or his position. It's so widespread that there is hardly a place anywhere that it's not named. It even exists among preachers, and here's where the thing comes home. A person could build a very beautiful home and I could go look at it one day and say, "You know, this is a lovely home. It's a masterpiece. You've done a very beautiful job." And that wouldn't take anything out of me - it would be easy for me to say that, because I'm not a builder. A person could paint a beautiful masterpiece - delightful, exquisite - and I could say, "Listen, that's beautiful; it's superb; never have I seen anything like it." I could just lavish praise on that man and it could be nothing to me because I'm not a painter. But when somebody stands up and preaches a better sermon than I can preach - then for me to say honestly and truly from the heart, "It's a masterpiece; the Lord was with you" - then that is something else.

Do you see what I mean? Now that is what we're talking about today. This matter of coveting somebody else's praise, somebody else's success, somebody else's prestige, is one of the greatest sins mentioned in the Book of God. It is my prayer that as we go further into this study, every person will determine in his heart to begin right now laying hold of God for victory. It's a very terrible thing for a Christian to be guilty of coveting. It is bad enough for a worldling, but it's an awful thing for a person

who names the name of Christ to be guilty of coveting something. We need to learn to give God the praise for everything; then we will stop worrying about credit - who deserves credit for that. We will give it all to God, where it belongs in the first place.

Another place where many of God's people seem to be crippled by the sin of coveting is the area of giving. Far too many of God's professed people are guilty of embezzling God's money.

Every Day We Handle Someone Else's Money

We often read in newspapers about individuals who misappropriated millions of dollars. These embezzlers often skip the country, taking the money, and leaving financial ruin for scores of people who lost all they had. We secretly hope the law will catch up with them, and throw the book at them. But now, wait a minute. Let's not move too fast here. All of us handle money.

Furthermore, regardless of who you are - you handle money that is not yours. You handle money that belongs to God. Could it be that someone reading this is guilty of embezzling heavenly funds? Did you know the greatest holder of lands and good in the world has been chiseled and robbed repeatedly without going out of business? God is that great Owner of whom I speak. I'm referring specifically to tithes and offerings. In Leviticus 27:30 the Scripture says that the tithe is the Lord's. There is just no possible way to miss it.

Perhaps I should read that verse. This is what it says: "All the tithe of the land ... is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord." *All* the tithe is the Lord's; that is specific. Then in Malachi 3 we find something added. Verse 8 says: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Now notice: A person who does not tithe is a robber, but in addition, a person who does not give offerings is guilty before God of robbing Him; so, your tithes *and your offerings* belong to God. Oh, may it be engraved upon every heart with a pen of fire: These things do not belong to us; they are God's. We are handling sacred funds, and the question is - how are we handling them? Could it be that some of us are guilty of misusing God's money?

What is a tithe anyway? Read Leviticus 27:32: "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." This means that one-tenth of all our increase belongs to God. We may not have thought of it before, but ten percent of our income is holy for the Lord. We can't keep it for ourselves without actually breaking that eighth commandment again and stealing what is not ours. If a man earns \$1,000 a month, \$100 is not really his own. Of course only the profit, or increase, is subject to the tithe. In other words, a businessman might realize an increase of \$5,000 a month but \$4,000 would be needed to pay the salaries of his helpers and other overhead expense. In such a case, he would only have to pay \$100 tithe on the \$1,000 profit for that month.

Somebody is bound to object that tithing belongs to the Mosaic Law, the Old Testament, and doesn't apply to us in the New Testament. But the fact is that this plan of tithing antedates the time of Moses by hundreds of years. Abraham paid tithe at the Lord's own direction long before the days of Moses. Jacob

also tithed on all that he had. It was an obligation before either the Jewish race or the ceremonial law had even come into existence.

But now let's read what Jesus had to say about tithing. After all, He's the great guide and example for all of us in spiritual things. In Matthew 23:23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." That word "ought" denotes obligation and immediately creates a moral basis for the doctrine. It is moral because it involved stealing from God, as we have already read.

Tithe Is to Be Used for Only One Purpose

Let's ask this question before we go further. What is the tithe money to be used for in the Lord's work? Please turn to 1 Corinthians 9:13: "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?" Here Paul is referring to the priesthood of the Old Testament and how they received a livelihood for their work of ministry at the ancient altar. But now read the very next verse: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Verse 14. This text clearly teaches that the gospel minister is to be supported exactly the same way as the priests of the Old Testament.

We now turn to the Scriptures to find out what God's plan was for the support of the ministry, both in the Old Testament and in the New. In Numbers 18:21 we read, "And behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." The tribe of Levi was not given any inheritance as the other Israelites were. They had no herds, or business ventures. All the other tribes paid tithe and that one-tenth was used to pay the priests, the Levites.

All right, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel," so Paul said. The tithe is not to be used for an education fund, a church expense fund, or even a poor fund. It is ordained of God only to pay the ministry. This is the biblical way for preachers to be supported.

I heard of one preacher who closed all the doors of the church and refused to preach until the offering goal of a certain sum was reached. Other churches have resorted to religious fairs, lotteries, bingo, etc. to meet their pastoral financial obligations. Is this the plan of God? Is this the way He had ordained for churches to meet the deficit in their budgets? This is not according to God's plan. Something is desperately wrong with a church which has to bring the world into its operating plan. If Christ should walk into some of these temples and cathedrals of our day, He would be just as indignant as He was in days of old. He would say once more, "Take these things hence. You have made my house of prayer a den of thieves." What a tragedy it is that many young people have learned to be expert in gambling inside the walls of their own church. What a sad commentary on the state of modern religious leaders who encourage such demonstrations. Is this what God expects from the people who are called by His name?

Some Preachers Fear to Preach Truth

Because of Money

God never intended for preachers to dabble in real estate, car sales, or some side business. A man called of God should give his whole time to the Word of God. His livelihood, in other words, should be supplied by the divine plan of the tithing system. This system eliminates one of the greatest temptations facing the modern minister of the gospel. Some preachers are actually afraid to preach the plain truth for fear of cutting off their own salary.

When a pastor is paid directly by the local congregation and has to depend solely upon the liberality of one church group, he is in an anxious dilemma. If he rebukes sin as it should be rebuked, he may offend the very ones who may stop giving offerings, and thus his own salary will be jeopardized. Now I know that no true pastor would preach smooth things just for worldly gain; nevertheless, many are actually afraid to preach plainly under the conditions I've just described. God's plan eliminates that temptation to soften the truth. A local congregation shouldn't be directly paying the man who preaches to them, and this would eliminate that great danger.

Some people complain that they can't pay the tithe because there's nothing left after all the bills are paid. But, are we doing the right thing by waiting until everything else is paid before we give God the tithe? In Proverbs 3:9 we read: "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase." In other words, pay the tithe first. Even the ministers pay one-tenth of their salary although they are paid from the tithe fund themselves. After all, everything belongs to God, doesn't it? All the silver and gold and the cattle on a thousand hills - we are simply stewards of these things. He has let us use them. We pay the rent on a house in order to acknowledge that the house is not really ours. We just use it. In the same way, we give the tenth back to God to acknowledge that all our possessions are just given to us to use. They really belong to God, the great Creator, and Owner of all things.

Now, a great many people say, "I go to church and I pay my tithe," when what they really mean is that they go to church and give offerings; because nobody is a tithe payer who does not give one-tenth of his income. Tithe means one-tenth. And that is what the Bible is speaking of, one-tenth of a person's increase. Some people say, "Isn't that a great deal to give, one-tenth?" Suppose somebody came to you and said, "I would like to set you up in business. I would like to furnish the capital, the buildings, the equipment - everything. I want you to run it. Then at the close of the month I want you to figure up the profit. When you have found the profit, I want you to keep nine-tenths and give me one-tenth." Would you say, "Whew, you mean you want a whole tenth?" No, you would look at the man and say, "You've made a mistake, haven't you? You mean you want nine-tenths and give me one-tenth."

Why, you have never heard of an offer like that. People don't make offers like that today - not at all - but that is the offer God has made. There is no question about it. This world and everything in it belongs to God. He made the whole thing and everything here is His. The Bible is so clear on it. I read from Psalms 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Psalms 50:10-12: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." In Haggai 2:8: "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." We forget that sometimes, but he says, "It is mine." Now notice Deuteronomy 8:18: "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth."

When we add that all up and put it together, the Bible is simply saying this: Everything is God's. If you have anything at all, God gave you the power and the strength, the intelligence to obtain what you do have. And then He says to you, "Now, ten percent of what you receive is mine. I want you to give it to me." Is that a fair offer? I submit to you today, you have never heard a more fair, generous offer anywhere. Remember the text, Leviticus 27:30, that says *the tithe is the Lord's*. Oh, may God impress us with that point. It isn't a question of our deciding whether we ought to turn it over to Him, whether it *should* become His, or *will* become His; it already is the Lord's. That has been settled. The tithe *is* the Lord's, and so one-tenth of every man's income belongs to God. He may be a complete heathen and knows nothing of our God, but still one-tenth belongs to the Lord God of heaven.

Finally, we come to that very important text in Malachi 3:8-11: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground."

There it is, people robbing God! In one year the FBI records revealed that there were 111,750 cases of robbery in the United States and more than a million cases of burglary. But this is only a fraction of the true picture. How many million church members have been guilty of the worst type of stealing - and from God, at that? Probably there are more thieves in the church, on this basis, than outside the church. In fact, there's no question about it; God says if we take the tithe, we are stealing from Him.

Incidentally, have you noticed the amazing parallel between the tithing tenth and the tenth commandment of the Decalogue? The command against coveting is the tenth one, and the command to give a tenth is God's remedy for covetousness. The root reason for breaking either one of these basic biblical laws is *selfishness*. The opposite of self is love, and all obedience should be based on loving God more than ourselves.

Love means giving, as we learn from John 3:16: "For God so loved ... that he gave." We could never match the love-gift of God in surrendering His Son, but we should love him enough that the surrender of 10 or 50 percent of all we possess should not be counted a sacrifice. God's challenge to "prove me" has always produced the same results in those who took Him at His word. The promise is literal that "there shall not be room enough to receive" the blessing as it returns to us "pressed down, shaken together, and running over."

Never underestimate the blessings and benefits of turning away from the robbing business. When we rob God we are, in reality, robbing ourselves. We lose the blessings which are a part of the package called *obedience*. Unbelievable promises of protection and prosperity are made to those who go into partnership with God through faithful giving. The fruits of unselfish stewardship, based upon love, are fantastic to contemplate. "Prove me," says the Owner of everything. Will you dare to do it right now by making a covenant with God to be an honest steward in both tithes and offerings?

What Is Time Worth?

A few days ago I wasted thirty minutes of valuable time waiting for a shoe repairman to finish a job that had been promised earlier. Mentally I did some rough computations and concluded that my thirty minutes of time was worth much more than the cost of the shoe repair. I can assure you that the results of my arithmetic did not relieve my frustration in the least degree, but it did start me thinking more about the worth of minutes and hours.

Unfortunately, we equate the value of time with a certain number of dollars and cents. People are paid so much an hour, or so many dollars a month. On the basis that one is paid \$10 an hour for his work, let's try to evaluate the true worth of that 60 minutes. The equation would go something like this: one hour of time equals \$10 in cash money.

Having translated the hour into money, and assuming that the money is fully equivalent to the 60 minutes of time, we can determine the true value of the hour of time as we trace the value of the \$10. How valuable is that \$10 to the person who exchanged his time for it? How much good will it perform for him, and how much will it contribute to his quality of life? If the \$10 adds more happiness, longer life, and greater security, then we must conclude that the man's time was easily worth the amount and perhaps even more.

But suppose the \$10 is spent for liquor, which leads to alcoholism or disease? Instead of having any real worth, the money would have a negative value, and the hour's time would also really be worth less than nothing. In other words, our time is worth only as much as we are able to squeeze out of the money we are paid for our time. If the things we spend the money for result in better living and longer, happier life, our time may be worth infinitely more than any amount of money. On the other hand, if we spend the money for things which create disease, cheapen the moral worth, and prevent our receiving eternal life, then our time has a negative worth.

If this principle is true, the world's standard of evaluating time is totally wrong. Some men who are paid over a million dollars a year are using their wealth to defile body and mind, and destroy spiritual perceptions. Society can say what it will, but those men are wasting their time, because they waste the money which their time purchased.

Other men are paid little in dollars, but they invest that little in things which contribute to peace of mind, building a strong moral character, and preparing for eternal life - they are the people whose time is really valuable; in fact, more valuable than the highest paid executive in the corporate structure who is misusing his wealth.

Do you get the picture clearly in mind, that your money represents your time? What you do with your money, then, is the same as what you do with your time. The benefits drawn from your money represent the true value of your time.

Think about it for a moment. How are you using those dollars? Are they invested in ways that will lead to your eternal happiness and security? Are you making it possible for others to reap the blessing of God's saving grace? As a result of your use of money, will souls be able to rejoice with you in Heaven?

The imprudent, wasteful manner of treating money will lead millions to lose eternal life. Not only are their years of earthly time lost, but the endless time of a future eternity is also forfeited. All the money purchased by a lifetime of labor is worthless unless it contributes to building up the true quality of life. Sorrowfully we observe how billions of dollars are spent for selfish indulgence, drug addiction, and destructive purposes. How many wasted lives are represented in those wasted dollars!

Much has been written about Howard Hughes, the eccentric millionaire, whose limitless wealth became the ultimate cause of his horrible and dehumanized death. Suspicious of everyone, he isolated himself from friends and society for fear of being exploited for his money. After his death additional animosities and selfishness were stirred among those who fought like animals to acquire a portion for themselves.

Was Howard Hughes' time really that important and valuable? His time produced money that produced misery which finally brought death. Make no mistake about it, it is better for a man never to be born than to live for self and to lose eternal life in the end. It is better for a man to be a pauper than to earn millions which cause himself or others to be lost.

At the risk of sounding redundant I come back to the question, How are you spending your money? The years of your life are tied up in that money. Disposing of it is disposing of years of your time. When your life is over, all your years of remunerated time will be reflected in your estate. It may be small, but it is important, because it represents the value of all the time you exchanged for it.

How do you value that time? How do you appraise those years that made up so much of your life? The answer to those questions will be revealed by the way you relate to your possessions. If that money now ministers to your deepest priority needs, then the time it took to acquire the money was well spent. And if the money becomes a vehicle for reaching souls for God's Kingdom, the value of the time in earning it is far beyond the computation. Why so? Let me illustrate.

If your money can be used to turn just one soul to Christ, how much would the time investment be worth? Try to understand it in these terms: one soul saved for eternity will live longer than all the combined years of all the people who ever lived and died on this earth. Can you grasp that fact? Eventually that one person's life in eternity will outstrip the total number of years that all the millionaires, corporation presidents and world thought leaders lived out in their lifetimes. And if those millionaires and famous personalities are not saved, then the time of that one redeemed soul will have been more valuable than the time of all those leaders combined.

What I'm really saying is this: money, success, and all that goes with it are less than worthless unless those things are used to prepare for eternity, and to help others prepare. Our time is valuable, but it is only valuable in proportion to the eternal benefits we derive from the money we receive in exchange for our time. If our money is wasted, our time has gone down the drain in earning the money. How true the saying of Jesus, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:26.

Even Christ spoke of a trade-off. There is an investing of one thing to get another. We exchange our time for money. Then we trade off the money - for what? For things that unfit us for heaven? If so, our time as well as our money is misspent and worthless. I repeat, it would be better never to be born than to live and die without Christ. It would be a thousandfold better to live as a pauper than to be a billionaire oilman who fell one step short of heaven.

Analyze that statement carefully. The Christian pauper had to live with physical want and deprivation, *but he had peace of mind and joy in his heart*. The rich man lived with all the creature comforts, but his mind was distressed and unhappy. Even if there were no eternal life beyond the grave, the Christian pauper had a better life in this world than the unsaved billionaire.

But think about those two men in terms of eternity. For a sextillion times longer than the rich man had life, that redeemed pauper will live in a mansion more magnificent than the oilman could have imagined. When his years finally exceed the life span of earth's total population, the saved poor man will still be in the bloom of radiant health and immortal youth.

And what of the man who had everything? (Well, *almost* everything! He really lacked only one thing - a simple, saving faith in Jesus.) What will happen to him? Just before being cast into the lake of fire he will have opportunity to look through the transparent walls of the New Jerusalem. In the total recall of that moment the miserable Midas will recognize the utter emptiness of a life lived without God. The time which had been worth a million dollars a year will be seen in retrospect as vainly squandered. The agonizing remorse of that instant in eternity will overpower the mind and constitute the most sensitive and supreme punishment that anyone will ever have to suffer.

Now, aren't you thankful that we are still living in the realm of time where things can be changed? Eternity is at the door, but we have a fragment of time left in which every one of us will be exchanging minutes for money. But then what? The money will be exchanged for something else. That something else will either help fit us for heaven or condition us to be lost. Which will it be for you?

One more important truth about money: since it really is the equivalent of the time you invested in earning it, as long as your accrued money remains, your influence can still be felt in time. Even after your death your money will be representing hours, months, and years that you spent in gathering it. Many are abdicating all responsibility for the influence of that time after they die. The accumulative result of an entire lifetime is casually left in the hands of disinterested relatives or even unscrupulous lawyers. It is used often to tear down and disannul the very cause for which the deceased gave his life. His invested time, in the form of money, now turns against the investor, and is employed to blot out the results of carefully planned years.

All men and women should have a will which can protect the interest of their time investment. Just as they did not want their time wasted in life, they do not want their money, representing their time, squandered after life is over. By designating in a will exactly how the estate should be divided, an individual can guarantee that his influence will still be extended in time. The value of those invested years can still be revealed through the spiritual benefits of his bequeathed wealth, whether small or great.

Even those who have been fearful of making expenditures while living need have no fear of boldly assigning, in a will to be executed after death, the fruits of their lifetime investment.

Many have a legitimate fear of depleting their saving and becoming dependent on others. But after death they have nothing to fear. They can accomplish for Christ what circumstances never permitted while they were alive. Souls can still be won for the Kingdom. Their means can prepare people for heaven. Many a Christian who never had the personal joy of winning a soul for Christ, will meet souls in the kingdom who will thank them for their post-humous provisions, which made it possible for them to hear the truth and be saved.

Perhaps you are now in this category. You dare not give largely to God's cause for fear future disease and hospital costs will require all your savings. You long for Jesus to come, and the gospel to be proclaimed everywhere, but you dare not invest the nest-egg which might be your only buffer against dire need. You do well to make provision and retain that nest-egg for future eventualities. I think God wants us to be wise in planning for economic independence and security. But if, through His blessing and protection, those funds are not needed, they can be directed into the winning of souls; but only by the one who makes the careful, deliberate decision beforehand.

Many souls have been won to Christ just because people cared enough, and designated their funds to keep working after their death. What a thrill it will be for those committed Christians, in the resurrection of the righteous, to learn the wonderful results of their dedicated means which continued speaking for them long after their departure.

Three Days and Three Nights

Joe Crews

Matthew 12:39

Some of the strongest and most controversial opinions have built up around the statement of Jesus concerning Jonah and the whale. Strangely enough, the chief issue has nothing at all to do with the oft-challenged fact of a man being swallowed by a sea monster. The decisive point for many revolves around the length of time Jonah spent in the stomach of the whale. Here are the exact words Jesus used in describing the experience of the runaway prophet: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Matthew 12:39-41.

Now this statement of Jesus is significant in more ways than one. In the first place, it positively affirms that the Old Testament story of Jonah did actually take place as the Scriptures record it. But more than that, the event constituted a sign of Christ's own death, and burial, and resurrection. Jesus referred to the preaching of Jonah on two other occasions as a sign to the unbelieving Pharisees.

Today there is a vocal minority of Christians who have made a tremendous issue out of the phrase "three days and three nights." They insist that Jesus used the expression because He was to be in the grave exactly seventy-two hours, not a second more or second less. This conviction has led them to conclude that Christ was crucified on Wednesday afternoon and was resurrected at the same hour late Sabbath afternoon. In this way they account for the full seventy-two hours which they believe Christ spent in the tomb.

Does this interpretation harmonize with the full Bible record on the subject? Does it fit with the many other inspired accounts of the time element involved? Is there other information given in the Word of God which will make it clear exactly how the three days and three nights are to be understood?

Fortunately, we have an abundance of Bible evidence to answer these questions. In fact, on seventeen separate occasions Jesus or His friends spoke of the timetable involving His death and resurrection. Ten times it was specified that the resurrection would take place on the "third day." On five occasions they said, "in" or "within three days." Twice they used the term, "after three days," and one time only Jesus spoke of His death as "three days and three nights."

Without question all of these various expressions are used to describe the very same event. There seems to be no controversy regarding this point. "The third day," "in three days," "after three days," and "three days and three nights" are equivalent terms used in the Bible in reference to the resurrection of Jesus.

Expressions Cannot

Be Literal

Now we ask the question: Can all of these expressions be taken in a strictly literal sense and still harmonize with each other? Absolutely not! For example, "after three days" would certainly have to be interpreted as longer than seventy-two hours. "Within three days" could mean anytime less than seventy-two hours, and "three days and three nights" could only mean exactly seventy-two hours to the second. And "the third day" presents even greater problems as we shall notice in a moment.

Does this sound terribly confusing? If so, it is only because men have placed their own interpretation upon the meaning of God's Word. We must let the Bible explain itself, and especially, we must let Christ provide definitions for the words which He spoke. It would be a mammoth mistake to seize upon any one of the expressions used and force its strict compliance with our interpretation without reference to the other sixteen texts on the subject.

Is it possible for all these texts to be explained so that they will not contradict each other? If they cannot be harmonized, then Jesus Himself was guilty of compounding the confusion, because He used all of the expressions at different times in speaking of His death and resurrection. In Matthew 12:40 He said, "three days and three nights," but in Mark 8:31 He said, "after three days." He referred to the same event in John 2:19 as "in three days," and on five occasions He said, "the third day." Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 13:32; 24:46.

Inclusive Reckoning

The only way we can harmonize all of these apparently contradictory statements of Jesus is to understand them in the light of inclusive reckoning of time. This was the method used throughout the Bible in computing time, and we must apply the same method now, unless we want mass confusion. The unreasonable insistence upon the use of twentieth century English idioms of speech to interpret first century Greek or Hebrew has led to some extreme views indeed. Jesus and His friends spoke and wrote in harmony with the common literacy usage of the day, and that usage recognized inclusive reckoning of time. In simple language, this means that any part of a day was counted as a whole day.

Before we turn to the Bible for confirmation of this principle, let us read the authoritative statement of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* on the matter. "A short time in the morning of the seventh day is counted as the seventh day; circumcision takes place on the eighth day, even though, of the first day only a few minutes after the birth of the child, these being counted as one day." Vol. 4, p. 475. How clearly this defines the Hebrew method of computing time. Any small part of a day was reckoned as the entire twenty-four hour period. It is the Hebrew form of speech and language. Scores of contradictions would appear in both Old and New Testament if this principle were ignored. We must compare Scripture with Scripture and use the idiom of the language in which the Bible was written. Inclusive reckoning was taken for granted by all writers of the Scripture.

Let us now notice a few examples of this usage in the Bible that will clarify the problem before us. In Genesis 7:4 God said to Noah, "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth." But in verse 10 we read, "And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth." The marginal reading expresses it as "on the seventh day." Pity the poor chronologer who tries to figure that one out. When did the flood come? In seven days? On the seventh day? Or after seven

days? The answer is simple when inclusive reckoning is applied. The day on which God spoke to Noah counted as the first day, and the day on which it started raining was the seventh day. Even if God spoke just ten minutes before the end of that first day, it was still counted as one of the seven. And if it started raining at noon on the last day, it was also counted one of the seven. The same principle is revealed in the circumcision of babies. Genesis 17:12 specifies "he that is eight days old." But Luke 1:59 reads "on the eighth day." Luke 2:21 uses still another expression: "When eight days were accomplished."

Further proof for inclusive reckoning is seen in Joseph's dealing with his brethren. "He put them all together into ward three days. And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; ... go ye. ..." Genesis 42:17-19. Consider also the tax issue between King Rehoboam and the people. "Come again unto me after three days. ... So ... all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day." 2 Chronicles 10:5, 12.

These examples are only a few of the many which could be cited to establish this important point. The Hebrew usage requires only that some part of each of the days should be involved in the time period.

The Third Day

Now we are ready to apply this clearly established rule to the time Jesus was in the tomb. At least a part of three days had to be included in the period He was actually dead. The most frequent expression Jesus used in describing the resurrection was the "third day." He defended His repetition of the term on the basis of the Scriptures. "And said unto them, *Thus it is written*, and thus is behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." Luke 24:46.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus employed the same expression when they spoke of the terrible events surrounding the crucifixion. Unconscious of the fact that they were talking to Jesus, who had been resurrected earlier that same day, one of them said, "To day is the third day since these things were done." Luke 24:21.

Clearly, those people understood how to count the days and to determine which was the third one. They knew because it was a common idiom of their language. But Jesus did not leave any question in the matter. It almost seems that He anticipated the perplexity of later Christians who might not know about inclusive reckoning. Therefore, He gave such a plain, conclusive explanation of how to locate the third day that no one would ever need to doubt again. "Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following." Luke 13:32, 33.

How simple Jesus made it! Even a child can figure when the third day comes. The third day will always be the day after "to morrow" from any certain event. The first day is counted in its entirety, the whole of the second day, and the third day in its entirety.

Now we can understand the conversation Jesus had with the Jewish leaders and why they interpreted it as they did. He said, "Destroy this temple, and *in three days* I will raise it up." John 2:19-21. Later, after the crucifixion, the chief priest said to Pilate, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he

was yet alive, *After three days* I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until *the third day*, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away." Matthew 27:63, 64.

With Christ's definition of time before us, the picture snaps into clear focus. Speaking prophetically of His own death and resurrection, He said, "To day (crucifixion) and to morrow (in tomb), and the third day I shall be perfected (resurrection)." There are all three days in their sequence. Even though He died in the late afternoon, the entire day would be counted as the first day. The second day would span the Sabbath when He slept in the tomb. Even though He was resurrected in the early hours on the third day, inclusive reckoning would make it one of the three days.

The Resurrection on Sunday

Now the time has come to pinpoint the actual days of the week when these events took place. Again, we are amazed at the perfect harmony of the Scriptures on the subject. There can be no question but that He arose on Sunday, the first day of the week. Mark emphatically states, "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene." Mark 16:9. Sunday is the first day of the week, and that is when He was resurrected. Words could be no plainer. Even the original Greek construction of the text will allow no other meaning. He did not rise from the grave on Saturday, as some contend. Neither was He crucified on Wednesday. There is not a scintilla of Bible evidence that He died on the fourth day of the week.

According to the inspired record, Christ was put to death on the "preparation day," and the preparation day was not Wednesday. In all the pages of biblical history, the preparation day has been Friday. Please read Mark 15:42, 43, "And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea ... went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus."

Some might question whether this could be one of the ceremonial yearly sabbaths of the ordinance system. Notice these words, "The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." John 19:31.

The day following the crucifixion was not only the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, but it was a *high Sabbath*. This means that a yearly Sabbath in that particular year happened to fall on the weekly Sabbath. In this case it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Luke clearly identified that preparation day as the one immediately preceding the weekly Sabbath. "And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day *according to the commandment*. Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared." Luke 23:54-24:1.

Surely there can be no question as to the time elements involved. He died on the preparation day, or the day before the weekly Sabbath. The next day is designated as "the sabbath according to the

commandment." Since the commandment says, "The seventh day is the sabbath," we know that this had to be the day we call Saturday. Furthermore, after describing the events of the preparation day in verse 55 and the Sabbath day in verse 56, the very next verse says, "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared." Luke 24:1.

Please take note that after preparing the spices on the afternoon of the crucifixion (Friday), and resting over the Sabbath (Saturday), they came to the tomb with the spices on the first day of the week (Sunday) to do the work of anointing. This was their first opportunity after the Sabbath to carry out the preparations made on Friday afternoon. This is when they discovered that Christ was risen.

If the crucifixion took place on Wednesday, how can we explain why the women waited until Sunday to come to the sepulchre? Why didn't they come Thursday or Friday to anoint His body? Did they not understand that after four days His body would be decomposing and their work of love would be in vain? The answers to these questions constitute the strongest case against a Wednesday crucifixion.

The Bible, in fact, offers incontestable proof that no one would have attempted such an anointing under those circumstances. When Lazarus had been dead four days, Jesus ordered the stone removed from his tomb. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, protested in these words, "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." John 11:39.

These words of Martha reveal the fact that no woman of that day would have considered it possible to prepare a body for burial four days after death. To Martha it seemed an irrational act even to open the tomb of Lazarus. To the other women who prepared the spices it would have been equally unreasonable to enter Christ's sepulchre four days after He had been crucified.

In view of the amazing weight of biblical evidence to the contrary, how can some still cling to the Wednesday crucifixion idea? The entire scheme is based upon the twisted interpretation of a single Bible text. The "three days and three nights" phrase is forced into artificial conformity with current English forms of speech, instead of the common usage of the people living at that time.

Those who believe that Jesus died on Wednesday and rose on Saturday base much of their evidence on Matthew 28:1: "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre."

Figuring that the first day of the week "dawns" at sundown Saturday night as the Sabbath ends, these people assume that the women discovered the empty tomb in the twilight moments of the Sabbath, just before sundown. They count backwards exactly seventy-two hours and arrive at Wednesday evening just before sundown for the crucifixion.

Is this a valid conclusion? Or is there evidence that the women could not have visited the empty tomb on Saturday evening? There is indeed positive biblical proof that they did not. We find that evidence in

Mark's account of the visit to the sepulchre: "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Mark 16:1-3.

There is no question about this being an early Sunday morning visit. It is at sunrise. The very same women are named as in Matthew's account. Can we correctly assume that these same women had been to the tomb the night before and found Jesus risen? Impossible. Why? Because of the question they asked as they approached the garden on Sunday morning, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" If they had been there Saturday just before sundown and found the tomb empty, they would have known that the stone was already rolled away from the door. This is absolute proof that they had not been to an empty tomb the day before.

It also proves that Matthew's "dawn" refers to the dawning represented by the sunrise and not sunset. There is no contradiction between the two accounts.

Seventy-Two Hours Not Biblical

Those who insist that Christ was in the grave a full seventy-two hours contend that the three days and three nights must be taken in the fullest literal sense. But such a contention is absolutely contrary to the testimony of the Scriptures. An example of the way the Bible uses the term is found in Esther 4:16. We read these words of Queen Esther to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, *night or day*: I also and my maidens will fast likewise." Esther 4:16. Do not overlook the fact that they were to fast three days and three nights. Yet almost the next verse tells us, "Now it came to pass on *the third day*, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court." Esther 5:1. Here is a perfect example of how three days and three nights terminate on the third day!

We have already learned how Jesus explained the third day. He said "to day, and to morrow, and the third day." Luke 13:32. Please think for a moment! When Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Sunday afternoon, after the resurrection, Cleopas said, "To day is the *third day since these things were done*." Luke 24:21.

No one denies that this was on Sunday. But listen, if Jesus had been crucified on Wednesday afternoon, Cleopas would have had to say "To day is the *fifth* day since these things were done." Count it for yourself - Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and most of Sunday! Later the same day - the first day of the week - Jesus made this statement: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." Luke 24:46. Who was right? Jesus was right and Cleopas was right! But those who claim the Wednesday crucifixion are wrong. Christ died on Friday, the preparation for the Sabbath - that was the first day. He rested in the tomb on the Sabbath according to the commandment - that was the second day. He arose on the first day of the week which was Sunday - that was the *third* day! How simple!

The proponents of a Wednesday crucifixion use a devious argument to explain away the words of Cleopas on the road to Emmaus. They contend that he was not counting the three days from the time of Christ's death, but rather from the sealing of the tomb by the Roman authorities the day after he was crucified. For this theoretical conjecture there is not a fragment of evidence in the Bible. Cleopas did speak about the trial of Jesus and certain events leading up to His crucifixion. By taking a bit of exegetical license one could possibly reach back to those events from which to reckon the third day. But by no stretch of the imagination could any point beyond the death of Christ be used in computing the three days.

In every related text the third day is counted from the time of His death on the cross.

Matthew said He would "be killed, and be raised again the third day." Matthew 16:21. Mark wrote that He must "be killed, and after three days rise again." Mark 8:31. Luke's account reports that He must "be slain, and be raised the third day." Luke 9:22.

Repeatedly, the Scriptures emphasize the death of Jesus as the starting point of the three days. To begin counting a full day after the crucifixion is not only unbiblical but grossly imaginary. The sealing of the tomb is never once referred to in connection with the period of time He was dead.

The expression "three days and three nights" does not indicate a precise computation of hours, minutes, seconds. We read that "forty days and forty nights" were spent by Christ in the wilderness of temptation. However, the writers of two of the gospels state it simply as a period of "forty days," showing that inspiration was not pinpointing the hours or minutes.

The Four Days of Cornelius

Now let us consider a final clear-cut example of inclusive reckoning that should lay this point to rest with every open-minded reader. It is taken from the New Testament and reveals graphically how days were numbered in the days of Jesus. In Acts 10:3 Cornelius "saw in a vision evidently about the *ninth hour* of the day an angel of God coming in to him."

Follow the story carefully now. He was instructed in the vision to send men to Joppa and call for Peter. "And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and ... he sent them to Joppa. On the *morrow*, as they went on their journey, and drew night unto the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray." Verse 7-9. While praying he had a vision, and the men knocked at his door when his vision ended. Verse 17. Please notice that this is one day after Cornelius received his angel visitor.

Peter invited the men to come in. He "lodged them. And *on the morrow* Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him." Verse 23. Take note that this is now the second day since the men were dispatched by Cornelius. "*And the morrow after* they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them." Verse 24. This is the third day since Cornelius had his angelic vision. But don't miss this point - a few minutes later, in talking to Peter, Cornelius said, "*Four days ago* I was

fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing." Verse 30.

Now we get the picture in mind - it had been exactly three days, to the very hour. Yet Cornelius said, "*Four days ago*." How could he say it was four days when it was only three days? Because he used inclusive reckoning, which meant that parts of four days were involved. In the same way the Bible described the time of Christ's death as three days and three nights even though it was only a part of those three days.

Passover Week Proves Resurrection

Now we are brought to another line of evidence which constitutes the final proof positive that the resurrection of Jesus occurred on Sunday. It was to this particular evidence that Paul turned in his persuasive Corinthian discourse on the resurrection. He said, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins *according to the scriptures*; And that he was buried, and that He rose again *the third day according to the scriptures*." 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4.

It is most significant that Paul confirmed the death of Jesus, and also His resurrection on the third day, on the basis of the Scriptures. Evidently, Paul understood that the Old Testament contained prophecies which set forth the time sequence of the crucifixion and the resurrection. According to Paul, Jesus had to rise on the third day in order to fulfill the word of God, Furthermore, Jesus also declared, "*Thus it is written*, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." Luke 24:46.

Is there such a Scripture - an "It is written" - in the Old Testament which can establish the actual day that Christ was raised from the dead? Yes! And it had to do with the special annual observance of the Passover service.

In Leviticus 23:5, 6 we read about the first two days of that solemn Passover week. "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord."

Right now we will not take the time to establish the days of the week for these special observances. It is not essential to the proof we are seeking to establish. Just let your mind grasp this truth - *the fourteenth day of the month was the slaying of the passover, and the fifteenth day was the feast of unleavened bread*.

Our next question is: What happened on the sixteenth day of the month? We shall now prove from the Scriptures that the sheaf of the firstfruits was offered on that sixteenth day. That service was first celebrated when the children of Israel came into the promised land. God commanded it in these words: "When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: *on the morrow after the sabbath* the priest shall wave it." Leviticus 23:10, 11.

What Sabbath is the verse talking about? The weekly Sabbath or the yearly passover sabbath? The answer appears as we read the actual experience of their entrance into the land, recorded by Joshua. God told them that after entering the promised land they should offer the firstfruits to Him before eating of the first harvest themselves. Joshua described how the Israelites passed over the Jordan while the river was flooded at the harvest time. "For Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest." Joshua 3:15. This is very important to understand because the grain was ready for reaping, and they would more quickly be able to eat of the land and offer the first sheaf to the Lord.

After crossing dryshod through the flooded Jordan, after God rolled back the waters, the children of Israel camped at Gilgal. "And it came to pass, when the priests that bare up the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho." Joshua 4:18, 19.

Now we come to the next event which took place four days later. "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho." Joshua 5:10.

In strict obedience to the commandment of the Lord, the grateful but weary wanderers stopped to slay the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. The next verse tells us what happened on the following day, "And they did eat of the old corn of the land *on the morrow after the passover*, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day." Joshua 5:11.

Please notice that they observed the feast of unleavened bread on the fifteenth day of the month, following the slaying of the Passover lamb on the fourteenth. They also ate the last of the old corn, because the new crop of grain was ready to harvest. We continue reading to discover what happened on the next day, which was the sixteenth day of the month. "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." Joshua 5:12.

The sheaf of firstfruits was to be offered to the Lord before they ate of the harvest of the land. Since they began to eat of the fruit of the land on the sixteenth day, following the feast of unleavened bread, it is certain that they offered the firstfruits also on that day. Please remember that the Lord had commanded them to offer the firstfruits of the harvest "on the morrow after the sabbath." Leviticus 23:11. It was indeed on the day following the yearly sabbath of unleavened bread that the wave sheaf was offered, and the new harvest began to be eaten by the people that selfsame day.

Now the sequence of Passover events appears in sharp focus, and we will list them in the exact order revealed in the Scriptures.

1. *Fourteenth day* - Slaying of Passover lamb,
2. *Fifteenth day* - Feast of Unleavened Bread,
3. *Sixteenth day* - Firstfruits of harvest presented.

By way of historical confirmation of these points, here is the testimony of Josephus, a contemporary of Jesus and a historian: "Nisan ... is the beginning of our year, on the *fourteenth day* of the lunar month ... and which was called the Passover. ... The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover, and falls on the *fifteenth day* of the month, and continues seven days. ... But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the *sixteenth day* of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth. ... They also at his anticipation of the firstfruits of the earth, sacrifice a lamb, as a burnt offering unto God." Book III, Chapter X, par. 5, pp. 79, 80.

Christ Our Passover

You may be wondering how these facts relate to the time of Christ's death and resurrection. Here is where the beauty of the Bible reveals itself. Jesus was the One to whom all those types and ceremonies pointed. He was the true Passover Lamb. That is why John cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God!" John 1:36. Paul showed how Jesus fulfilled the Passover: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, ... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Corinthians 5:7, 8.

This is exactly why Jesus died on the fourteenth of Nisan. He did it to fulfill the Scriptures. Paul declared that "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures." 1 Corinthians 15:3. He had to die on the same day that the Passover lamb died in order to meet the prophetic type and to establish His identity as the true Passover Lamb.

But just as surely as Jesus died on a certain day according to the Scriptures, He also "rose again the third day, according to the scriptures." 1 Corinthians 15:4. He not only was our Passover, but He was *also the firstfruits!* Paul ties it specifically to the resurrection: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." 1 Corinthians 15:20. Again in verse 23, "But every man in his own order: *Christ the firstfruits*; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

No wonder, then, that Paul wrote so confidently about the resurrection on the third day according to the Scriptures. Christ rose from the dead as the firstfruits of those that slept. He was the antitype of the wave sheaf, and His resurrection took place on the very day that the wave sheaf was to be presented before the Lord.

We can now understand why Jesus and His followers used the expression "third day" more than any other to describe the resurrection. Prophecy had decreed hundreds of years earlier that He would be the fulfillment of the types and shadows surrounding the Passover observance. As the firstfruits, it was essential for Christ to be "harvested" and "presented" before the Lord "on the morrow after the sabbath." In the year of the crucifixion the Passover sabbath coincided with the weekly Sabbath, making it "a high day." John 19:31. It was the next day after that Sabbath that Jesus arose from the grave - on Sunday.

When Mary saw Him in the garden after His resurrection, Jesus said, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." John 20:17. Why did Jesus bid Mary not to hold Him or delay Him (as the Greek text implies)? Because He had to ascend that same day to present Himself before the Father as the firstfruits from the dead.

The biblical proof of those three successive days during Passover week completely shatters the Wednesday crucifixion theory. He had to die on Friday to fulfill the Scriptures concerning His death as the Passover lamb. He had to be resurrected on the third day after His death to meet the scriptural type of the firstfruits. Only three days can be involved in the time sequence, or the Word of God is broken.

In the light of this tremendous, undeniable evidence of the Word of God, we can positively affirm that Jesus was not, and could not have been, resurrected on the Sabbath. Neither could He have been crucified on a Wednesday.

The issues here are much deeper than most people realize. Had Christ not fulfilled every single Old Testament type and shadow pointing forward to His atoning death and resurrection, He would be an imposter and fraud. It was absolutely essential that every prophecy of the Messiah should be fulfilled in His life and death. In a special sense, the prefiguring of His victory over the grave was the capstone of hope for both Old and New Testament believers. Just as the sheaf of firstfruit grain held the promise and assurance of abundant harvest, even so our blessed Lord's glorious resurrection is the guarantee of a mighty harvest in the resurrection soon to take place. "Because I live, ye shall live also." John 14:19.

Shadows Which Are Contrary To Us

The tragedy is that some Christians still cling to the dead types and ceremonies just as though the great antitype had never come. Because Jesus was the true Sin Offering, the daily animal sacrifices ceased the very moment He died on the cross. The veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom, signifying that there was to be no more sprinkled blood in the holy place. Matthew 27:51. That slain lamb on the altar had been only a shadow pointing forward to the death of the Messiah. When the shadow led up to the body which cast it, there could not possibly be any shadow beyond. Therefore, sacrifices became only empty rituals after the atoning death of Jesus.

In the same manner, the yearly Passover service, with its types and shadows, pointed forward to the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb on the cross. The annual typical lamb, the old leaven, and the yearly wave sheaf were the shadow leading up to the body, which was Christ. After His death and resurrection, the old observances would be just as meaningless as the daily sacrifice of sin offerings. In a sense, to continue observing the type after the antitype came would be a denial that Christ was the true fulfillment. This is why Paul spoke of the fulfilled types as being contrary to the Christians. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; ... Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, ... or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Colossians 2:14, 16, 17.

Please notice the clear evidence that meat and drink offerings, as well as certain *shadowy* holy days and sabbaths, came to an end when Jesus died. Now let us ask: Which sabbaths were nailed to the cross and canceled by the death of Jesus? Paul specified that they were "sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come." This certainly could not mean the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. It came into existence before sin came in to the world. It could not be a shadow. Shadows were introduced as a result of sin and pointed forward to the deliverance from sin. But there were other *yearly sabbaths* which were *shadows*, and they are specifically described in Leviticus 23:24, 25. They fell on certain set days of the month and came only once a year. "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, ... an holy convocation. ... Ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord." This was the annual feast of trumpets. It was called a sabbath, but it was a yearly, shadowy sabbath.

Three other annual sabbaths are described in that same chapter, one of them being the Passover sabbath and another the feast of unleavened bread. Verses 37 and 38 sum up all of them in these words: "These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: *Beside the sabbaths of the Lord.*"

These texts show without question that the shadowy annual sabbaths were distinct from the weekly sabbaths of the Lord which were observed each seventh day. But don't miss this point: Paul did not indicate that the weekly Sabbath was blotted out at the cross. He designated only the sabbaths that were shadows of things to come. The meat and drink clearly had reference to the various offerings which were required on those ceremonial sabbaths. *These were nailed to the cross!* The Passover and feast of unleavened bread were included in those sabbaths which were blotted out.

No Christian today needs to celebrate those annual feast days and typical observances. Paul implies that to do so is to go contrary to Christian principles. They are now dead forms, bereft of any meaning. Just as the animal sacrifice for sin is meaningless since Christ came, so the other types and shadows are empty since the real Lamb has died. This is why Paul wrote, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven ... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Corinthians 5:7, 8.

May we fasten our faith upon the true Sin Offering, the true Passover, and the true Firstfruits, refusing to be drawn back to hollow forms and empty shadows.

Three Steps to Heaven

Joe Crews

Hebrews 5:9

If there could be a highway to the moon, it would take 20 months of constant driving at the rate of 400 miles per day to reach the land of the moon. If there could be a railroad stretching up to the sun, a streamline train traveling 90 mph non-stop, day after day and year after year, would require 116 years to reach sunny land. An airplane flying at 500 mph would have to travel non-stop for 500 years to reach the nearest fixed star.

Yet far beyond the starry sky lies the pearly gates of God's great heavenly sky city. No one knows how far it is in miles, and no one will ever develop a space vehicle for going there, but every one of us can get to that beautiful place by taking three simple steps that we're going to talk about in this little book.

In the book of Revelation, John declared that "nothing which defileth" would go through the gates into that dwelling place of God. The only thing which defiles in God's sight is sin. Isaiah wrote that "your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Isaiah 59:2. In order to live again in the presence of God, each individual must be free from the condemnation brought on by sin. The apostle John confirmed this fact by his description of that great multitude whom he saw in vision standing before the throne of God. They had palms in their hands and were dressed in white robes, representing freedom from sin (Revelation 7:9).

So mark it down as the first giant step on the way from earth to heaven: we must have our sins forgiven. This is probably the best-known fact about the entire salvation process. Yet the most perplexing questions are raised about the way to take this step. The truth is that millions have only the vaguest idea about how to obtain relief from the guilt of their wrongdoing. How can a person obtain pardon and be restored to a saving union with God?

It is my belief that countless numbers of people really want to be Christians, but no one has made it clear enough or appealing enough to win their decision. In the next few pages you will read the most simple, bottom-line explanation of the plan of salvation. Even the children should be able to understand what it means to be saved. I do not believe that it is enough to just tell people they are lost and need to be found. We must show them step by step how to pass from death to life. The doctor doesn't tell his patients that they are sick and need to be well without giving a prescription for their healing. In the same way, we must be prepared to offer a specific cure for those who have been diagnosed with the disease of sin.

Conditions of Forgiveness

Now let's take a closer look at this first step marked Sins Forgiven. How does one obtain the requisite pardon for those sins which have become such a common lot for every human being? We need to

understand from the very beginning that there are three conditions to having our sins forgiven—repentance, confession, and restitution. Please do not let those long theological terms confuse you. We shall break them into such simple language that all will know what they mean and how to fulfill their requirements.

What about the first condition? What is repentance, and what are we to repent of? The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23. The meaning of these inspired words is very clear. Regardless of our wealth, sex, or station in life we have all made personal choices to break God's law. The Bible calls it sin. No resolute human effort has been sufficient to overcome the inherited tendencies to have our own way. The results of that original sin by Adam and Eve have been passed along to every succeeding generation, ours included. The inability to meet God's standard is a part of the carnal nature which has marked every member of the human family since the fall of our first parents.

We can better understand how "all have sinned" when we look at the beautiful, innocent little baby throwing a tantrum when its will is crossed. There is no age when the fallen nature has power of itself to control the life and modify the behavior. The Bible declares, "The carnal mind ... is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7. Jeremiah made the interesting observation: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jeremiah 13:23.

In other words, not one of us has the ability to change this lost and dying condition into which we have been thrust. We can not lift ourselves by our own bootstraps. Not even education, culture, or any of the other amenities of society are able to reverse the consequences of our sinful heritage.

After recognizing the fact that we have all been condemned by our yielding to the propensities of our genetic natures, we are next confronted with the result of our transgressions. Paul describes it very succinctly in these words: "The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. With this shocking line, the full horror of our situation appears before us. Not only are we all guilty, but we have been sentenced to die for our sins. Every member of the human family is consigned to a death-row status as a consequence of our willful disobedience.

Is it not more than alarming to be confronted with our own death sentence, realizing that there is not a court or judge in the universe who will declare us "not guilty"? The fact is, of course, that we are just as guilty as sin. Furthermore, the penalty is absolutely irreversible, and God Himself could not cancel it without contradicting His own character and law.

Is there a solution to our dilemma? Someone may suggest that our only recourse is to go ahead and pay the penalty for what we have done wrong. By dying for our sins, we can uphold the justice of God and satisfy the demands of a broken law at the same time. We could do that all right, but where would it leave us? Since we have no power to raise ourselves from the dead, we would be eternally cut off from life, with no hope of a resurrection. Certainly that course does not seem to be a very satisfactory answer to our problem.

Finally, we have to face the truly disturbing fact that we owe something we cannot pay. We owe our very lives for our sin-debt and have no way to pay without forfeiting all future existence. It is as though a man bought all of his month's groceries on credit and then had no way to settle the \$200.00 account at the end of the month. Out of embarrassment and shame, the man avoided the store with his delinquent account. But then his best friend heard about the poor man's financial problem. Immediately the friend went to the store and counted out the full \$200.00 to settle the account. Wasn't that a wonderful act of friendship and love? Now the man has no reason for feeling shame or guilt. The debt has been paid. His record is clear. What would you think of that reprieved man if he had refused the kindly act of his friend? Would it not be a gross insult to the one who made such a magnanimous gesture?

Now let's apply that little story to our own case. We also owe something we can't pay-our very lives. But a friend, in the person of Jesus, says: "I will assume your debt, suffer death in your place, and put it all to the credit of your personal account." That offer stands behind all three of the steps we are considering in the salvation experience. It constitutes the basis of our receiving forgiveness for our sins. How is the guilt, condemnation, and death sentence transferred from you and me and placed upon Jesus, our divine Substitute? The answer to that question brings us back to the three conditions for taking the big step of obtaining forgiveness. The first condition is Repentance.

What is Repentance?

I promised to simplify that long theological word. It literally means to feel a godly sorrow for the wrongs we have committed. Such genuine sorrow is only possible when we fully recognize that our only hope rests in the death of Jesus on the cross in our place. Helplessly we must turn away from self and "behold the lamb of God," who takes away the sin of the world. What happens as we watch Him bleeding, suffering, and dying on the cross? We realize that He was holy and innocent. We were the guilty ones. We should be hanging there instead of Him. We are overwhelmed to realize that He would have submitted to the torture and death for only one soul, even for you or me. Suddenly our eyes fill with tears as we realize that our sins caused His death on the cross. His heart was broken by the crushing weight of sins that had been taken from us. He was voluntarily suffering the punishment we deserved. We are filled with sorrow that we ever committed those very sins that now are taking the life of the Son of God. That sorrow is repentance.

We must clearly distinguish between a worldly sorrow and a genuine godly sorrow. Sometimes children say, "I'm sorry" when facing punishment for misbehavior, but often they are merely regretful that they got caught. This is not true repentance. When I was in high school one of my teachers was the sports coach. He was a nice enough fellow, but not a very effective communicator. Therefore, it was a treat when a young lady teacher took his place in the middle of the school year. All of us boys were especially delighted because this new teacher was very pretty and not much older than some of us.

In the beginning, we were vying for her attention in ways that were probably very distracting to everyone. One day I stayed after school with two friends to play some basketball. Later, after all the other students had left, we went by our room to pick up our books. Just before opening the door, we glanced through the one clear pane of glass in the door and there we saw our beautiful girl-teacher weeping at her desk. No one needed to tell us why she was crying, because we instantly remembered some of the things we had done during classes. None of us had any desire to hurt that teacher. We liked her very much and had no idea that we were causing her so much grief. We were sick and ashamed of ourselves that day, and it was three very sorry boys who crept down the hall without opening that door.

All three of us made a covenant that day that we would never do anything again that would hurt our pretty young teacher. We were truly repentant.

This same principle applies to those who feel sorrow for the pain their sins caused Jesus to suffer, and by God's grace they determine to turn away from everything displeasing to Him.

Why Should We Confess?

The second condition of forgiveness is called confession. John wrote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. That certainly sounds simple enough. Yet it is on this point that most people stumble and lose their way. The question most commonly asked is this: How do I know I have been forgiven? There is only one correct answer to that question. We know we are forgiven because God said we would be. Here is where the beautiful element of faith comes into the picture. We have every reason to know that God's Word cannot ever fail. Whatever it says will take place. There is built-in, self-fulfilling power in every promise of the Bible.

Could the man lame from birth stand upon his feet? No, it was impossible. He was carried every day to beg outside the temple in Jerusalem. Yet Peter commanded, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Acts 3:6. Suppose the man had remained on his pallet and said to Peter, "I can't even stand on my feet, much less walk or run. I've been crippled all my life, and have no strength in my feet to move off this bed." Do you think he would have been healed? No, he had to accept as a fact that Jesus of Nazareth had strengthened those ankle bones so that he could get up and walk. When he made the effort as though his feet were normal, they were restored to normal. "According to your faith so be it unto you."

You may not feel forgiven when you ask for it, but the promise is that you are forgiven. So forget about feeling. Believe that it's done because God said it would be. Thank Him for it and then act like it's done, because it is. Your faith makes it a fact.

Someone might say, "Well, I thought Christians got happy feelings as a result of accepting Jesus." Let me assure you, that feeling will follow as a result of your faith and forgiveness, but always remember that faith must come before feeling. Paul had it right when he wrote, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1. Just imagine for a moment that feeling came before faith in forgiveness. In that case you would be a peaceful, joyful unbeliever, and there is no such creature as that.

By the way, what is the real secret behind the confession process? Why do we need to tell God about our mistakes and sins? Doesn't He already know without my recounting them to Him? Of course, it is true that we do not inform God about anything He doesn't know already. Our confession does not change Him either; it changes us. Ask anyone who has been courageous enough to ask forgiveness. You can probably remember having to make something right with an individual in the past. Perhaps you had repeated some exaggerated rumor about the person and he found out that you were responsible. Even though it was hard, you gathered up your courage and stammered out your apology. What happened immediately? You felt as though a great weight had rolled off your shoulders.

Tremendous relief flooded your soul. Yet, you told that person nothing that he didn't know before. He was already fully aware of your words which brought him so much pain. You needed that confession more than he did.

Restitution

The third condition to having our sins forgiven is Restitution. This long word simply means that we make every effort to correct the things we have done wrong. Of course, we recognize that it is never possible to reach into the past and rectify every wrong, every lie, and every dishonest act. In the first place, we can't even remember all the times we were guilty of those things. It would probably drive a person insane to feel the responsibility for such an impossible demand. Nevertheless, the Spirit probes our consciences and reminds us of the matters which can be made right.

If something has been stolen, it certainly should be restored. If lies have been told which damaged someone's reputation, we can apologize and tell the truth in order to remove any stigma on that person's character. Sometimes prison might be a possible consequence if crimes of theft or robbery have been committed, but it is very important to arrange repayment whenever the possibility exists. In cases where restitution is not possible, the repentant one can safely trust the cleansing merits of Christ's blood to provide pardon and restoration.

Is it difficult to confront and correct our past sins? Indeed, it is probably the most excruciating part of the redemptive process. This may explain why so many have convinced themselves that it is not a biblical requirement. But might it not also provide a partial explanation as to why spiritual renewal has been so elusive in the modern church? Many believe that a tremendous revival would sweep the Christian churches if every member made genuine restitution to those they have wronged.

Meeting the three conditions of repentance, confession, and restitution brings assurance that the longest step has been taken in becoming a true Christian. The sins are now forgiven and can no longer crush the conscience with guilt. Here is where we encounter the real answer to the question about the transfer of sin onto the divine Substitute. When we reach out in faith, believing that He truly has taken our place on the cross, a very marvelous transaction is consummated. The death penalty which rested upon us is instantly removed from us and placed on Jesus. It is exactly as though we were with Him on the cross suffering the required sentence, and yet, we were only there by faith. He experienced the pain and punishment for us, but because we confess Him as our Saviour, He actually treats us as though we ourselves had died and paid the penalty for our own guilty acts.

But not only does God accept the atoning sacrifice of His Son as a total satisfaction of the universal death sentence against every member of the fallen race, He imputes to each one who chooses to accept it the credit for living a life just as holy as Jesus lived. In other words, they are not only declared "not guilty"; they are declared to be just as righteous as the sinless Saviour who lived here in the flesh for 33 years without committing a single sin. It is in this amazing manner that all degrees of transgression are canceled, and "whosoever will" may stand without condemnation before God. His faith alone has opened a door to a new "standing" in relation to God. It is called justification, and it provides forgiveness for every wrong-doing of the past which has been repented of, confessed, and forsaken. And even though it can be said that the death of Jesus, in one sense, made a corporate reconciliation of

all men to God, it is only through personal acceptance of the sacrifice that anyone can experience "justification by faith."

Does the totality of salvation, then, consist of a mere "accounting" on the part of God? Is our part only to believe that God does everything for us, and then wait for Him to waft us on rose-tinted clouds into the kingdom of heaven? Indeed not. So far, we have described that part of righteousness by faith which flows from outside ourselves. It is called justification and is based wholly upon the objective acts of God in our behalf. It is true that we cannot work for this imputed credit for being righteous. We can only accept the atoning merits of the blood of Jesus, which bears witness that somebody else paid the penalty for our sins. By exercising faith in this divine Substitute, who took our place in death, we acquire a certain "standing" of righteousness before God.

But it is most necessary that we understand that God does not ascribe some legal fiction to us by calling us righteous when we really are not. Righteousness by faith includes more than just a "standing" or "accounting." God not only imputes righteousness to us through justification to take care of our past sins, but He imparts righteousness to us through sanctification to keep us from future sins. In other words, there is a "state" of righteousness before God as well as a "standing" of being righteous. We'll have more to say about these two aspects of righteousness by faith as we move into the next chapter. Keep in mind, though, that whether imputed or imparted, all true righteousness originates with God and resides in us only as long as Christ abides in us through faith.

The Necessity of the New Birth

Now we are prepared to consider the second large step in this exciting journey from earth to heaven, and it is very closely tied to the faith transaction we have considered. That moment of acceptance not only brings an objective change of standing before God, but it also produces a fantastic subjective transformation in the heart and mind of the believer. Jesus referred to this dramatic experience as being "born of the Spirit." The necessity of it was revealed in the urgent words of the Master to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3.

There is no possible way to analyze or diagnose the miraculous, and often instantaneous, change which accompanies this act of faith. The apostle John seems to express it as simply as it can be communicated: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:12. But even though we can't understand the mystery, we can observe the results of it very clearly. Paul described it in these words. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Like a gentle brush of the invisible wind, God's Holy Spirit enters the life to replace the surrendered fleshly things with the exact opposite. Although the inherent fallen nature is not removed by the new birth, the carnal mind is replaced with a spiritual mind which has the power to subdue all the desires and passions which might arise from that fallen nature. It is this progressive work of conquering self and constantly submitting the will to Christ which leads us to the third giant step on our heavenly pilgrimage. We call it sanctification.

Again when we reduce this long theological word to its elementary meaning, all confusion evaporates. It simply means loving obedience to all of God's revealed will. The word "loving" distinguishes those acts of obedience from the legalistic forced conformity of those who might be trying to earn salvation by mere law-keeping. Some liberal-minded religionists equate obedience and legalism. They ignore the difference between heart service and head service. One is the very finest demonstration of true religion and the other shows forth the most dangerous counterfeit. Someone has suggested that millions will miss heaven by just eighteen inches-the distance from the head to the heart. Complying with God's law in order to fulfill a legal requirement for salvation is the head approach, but true heart obedience is the spontaneous outflow of a personal love relationship with Christ. When we talk about sanctification here, we are referring solely to the heart approach.

There has been much debate over the way justification and sanctification relate to each other, so let's clarify it with a few simple observations. We need both of these experiences in order to be ready for heaven. Justification imputes the perfect victory of Jesus to cover our past sins, but sanctification imparts the victorious power of Jesus to preserve us from committing further sin. We can't have one without the other. Anyone who exercises true faith is justified. All who are truly justified are converted, or turned into a new creation; and all who have experienced the new birth will walk in obedience out of love. The cause-effect is instantaneous and inseparable. There is no justification without sanctification and no sanctification without justification. Nevertheless, it is very important to keep in mind that justification, as the very first approach to God, is freely bestowed and is not granted in reference to our good works. This biblical principle requires that the believer receive the gift of justification before sanctified obedience is possible. Then the conformity to the law is recognized as the result of the born-again connection with the Saviour.

As you have probably realized by now, there are many professed Christians who consider step number three to be optional in the salvation experience. But unless we ignore many plain statements of scripture, it is impossible for us to come to such a conclusion. The Bible says, "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Hebrews 5:9. Obedience is truly one of the spiritual requirements for entrance into the kingdom. John declared that "there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." Revelation 21:27.

Sin, of course, is the only thing that defiles in God's sight, and it is specifically excluded from entering the gates of Paradise. Sin is defined in the Bible as transgression of the law. This means there will be no thieves, murderers, adulterers, etc. in heaven. Should it frighten us to learn that willful sin must be put away in order to be saved? Incidentally, we are not saying here that the good works of obedience are the grounds for our acceptance by Jesus, but they are the necessary accompaniment of a freely bestowed gift to all who believe.

None who have accepted that gift will be discouraged by the requirement to stop deliberately transgressing the revealed will of God. Converted hearts are eager to please the One they love supremely. They delight to walk in obedience because God's law has been written into their hearts and minds.

Why is it easier for most Christians to take the first two steps of the three we have dealt with so far? Is it because forgiveness and conversion are largely accomplished for us and in us by the power of God in

response to our faith alone, while sanctification demands strong effort in addition to our faith? It is entirely possible. For that reason, I want to share, in the next few paragraphs, the greatest secret I ever learned about living the Christian life. How does one turn away from sins which are rooted in strong physical or psychological addiction? What about smoking, alcoholism, and drugs?

Claiming the Victory-Sanctification

Total victory over all sin has been promised through scores of Bible texts, but four of them will suffice to bring deliverance to every one who will claim them in faith. May I address you personally about your besetting weakness, problem, or addiction? The simple, practical steps you are about to learn could make the difference between life and death in your future. Let nothing divert you from this biblical formula which is guaranteed to break any chain or habit in your life that you are willing to relinquish.

The first text contains a most important principle about victory over sin. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57. May this glorious truth grip your mind. Victory is a gift! It is not something you can earn or deserve. Neither is it bestowed as a reward for hard effort and struggle. It is freely granted to those who ask for it in the right way. But, you may inquire, what is the right way to ask God for this gift? The answer is contained in just one word-faith. Jesus said, "According to your faith so be it unto you." Everything promised in the Bible is yours for the asking, but you must believe it in order to receive it.

Now let's illustrate that principle by moving to the second text. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Matthew 7:11, emphasis added. Notice that this verse is also talking about asking for gifts, and the previous text told us that the gift is "victory" over sin. From these words of Jesus, we learn that His Father is more willing and eager to give us the "good things" we ask for than we are to feed our children when they are hungry!

Next question: "Is victory a good thing to ask for?" Of course, and victory is also a "gift," as we were told in 1 Corinthians 15:57. And on the authority of Jesus' own

words, if we ask for this good gift, God will give it more freely than loving parents would feed their children.

By the way, we don't even have to incorporate the phrase "If it be Thy will" into this prayer request, because the Bible already assures us that it is His will to free us from all sin. If we were asking for some physical gift, such as healing or a better job, we would certainly have to include that phrase in our prayer.

We are now prepared to make an observation. Whatever gift of victory over sin you ask for, it will be immediately bestowed. If you do not believe that with your whole heart, then do not pursue this plan any further. If you do believe victory will be yours the moment you ask, then drop on your knees and ask Him now, calling the sin by name. As you rise from your knees you will not feel that anything has

changed, but your feelings have nothing to do with it. A wonderful thing has happened. The instant you prayed, God placed a mighty reservoir of power into your life. That power is the victory over your sin! You have it now!

Some might ask, How can I know the victory has been given? Simply because God promised to give it when you asked Him. In some cases God actually removes the taste or desire for the activity, but that is not the usual way He does it. The appetite may remain strong in the majority of those who seek deliverance, but they still have the power from God never to yield to that craving again. The secret is to accept without question that what God promised has indeed taken place.

Do you remember how Peter walked on the water? Jesus assured him that he could do it, and the big fisherman stepped out of the boat and began to do the impossible. Nobody can walk on water, but Peter did it-for a while. How long did he do it? The Bible says the wind and the waves were boisterous, and he became afraid. What was he afraid of? Obviously, of sinking and drowning. But wasn't that doubting the word of Jesus? The Master had told Peter that he could come to Him.

In the same way, He has promised to give us the victory as a gift. He invites us to come to Him. What should our response be? Whatever our spiritual infirmity, we should "step out of the boat" and affirm that we have power from God never to yield to that sin again. We can tell anybody or everybody that God has set us free, and we no longer are bound by that habit. Our faith will grow as we bear witness to what God has done, and also as we constantly thank and praise Him for the gift of victory.

Paul wrote: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." Romans 6:11. These are the most important words for those following the faith plan of overcoming. The word "reckon" means to count it as done. There must be no reservation in considering the sin as "dead" on the basis of God's promise. Our greatest temptation, at this point, is to think about the many times we have tried and failed to put this sin out of our lives. Satan will attack our faith by suggesting that we cannot possibly survive without indulging this particular sin, and that we are much too weak to give it up. Our greatest test will be to overwhelm and drown that "trying" argument of the self-nature and focus by faith on God's gift-plan of total victory.

Faith Makes No Provision To Fail

The final text in claiming deliverance is found in Romans 13:14: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof." This lays the final timber in God's fool-proof, perfect plan of giving the victory. How can a dead person lay plans to keep sinning? If you knew you would be dead tomorrow morning, would you make any provisions for tomorrow afternoon? If you "reckon yourself dead" to any sin through the power of the Word, it would be a contradiction of nature to act as though the sin was still in control. It would also be a denial of the promise of God. If He says you have the victory, believe it!

Now we have clearly before us the uncomplicated scheme of salvation as it has been described in the Bible. The three big steps are Sins Forgiven, New Birth, and Obedience. Every child, youth, or adult can take those steps right now and pass from death to life. There is nothing mysterious about coming to Jesus to be saved. Sins are forgiven by meeting the three conditions laid down in the Bible-repentance,

confession, and restitution. We have reduced these long words to an equation that the most simple can understand.

We have shown that the second large step to Christ is the new-birth experience. This profound change takes place when an individual accepts Jesus as a personal substitute and Saviour. It often happens in conjunction with the imputed justification which is credited when sins are confessed. The resulting relationship of love, with its attendant obedience, fulfills the last step in the process of becoming a Christian.

If you haven't entered fully into this joyful relationship with the Lord Jesus, don't hesitate to take the three steps right now. And if there is any confusion about what to do or how to do it, just forget about protocol or procedures and tell the Lord exactly how you feel and what you desire. He will be there to lead you into the most satisfying experience you've ever imagined.

Three Unclean Spirits Unmasked

Joe Crews

Revelation 12:17

The book of Revelation is different from any other part of the Bible. As a prophetic history of the church of all the ages, it is quite largely a book of quotes. Someone has calculated that out of 404 verses, 276 are either directly quoted or paraphrased from the Old Testament Scriptures. It seems clearly evident that no one can properly understand this last book of the inspired canon unless he also has a close familiarity with the writings of Moses and the prophets.

This may account for the vast confusion which exists today over the meaning of John's apocalyptic beasts and symbolic horsemen. The so-called "New Testament" church bodies who view the Old Testament as only fulfillments of an antiquated past would certainly find no relevance in the writings of John the Revelator.

Paul wrote that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16. Since the New Testament had not yet been written, we can be certain that he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," Paul declared in Romans 15:4.

These texts establish that the composite prophecies of Revelation are especially applicable to our own day and were inspired for our "doctrine," "learning," and "instruction in righteousness."

Just as the book of Genesis delineates the beginning of the great controversy between good and evil, the last book of the Bible describes the close of the conflict. This makes it one of the most important books in the sacred Scriptures. It describes the kind of people God will take to heaven and how they become overcomers by the blood of the Lamb. It warns, also, against the final assaults which Satan will throw against the saints as the battle rages to its climax. What a document! And how the devil hates this book which exposes his origin, devices, and final destiny!

Can we logically expect Satan to attack these prophecies which lay open his deceptive plans and purposes? How has he done it? By introducing futurism, the adversary has struck a blow at the foundation of prophetic understanding. The biblical principle of historicism which establishes a "day for a year" has been rejected, and an unwarranted literalism has been applied to the great lines of prophecy laid out in Daniel and Revelation. Specifically, this type of confused hermeneutics has been utilized in the study of Armageddon and the king of the north. The symbolic portrayal of those events from the pen of the Revelator provides a key for correcting the error.

"And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." Revelation 16:12-16.

Armageddon - A Spiritual Battle

This is probably the key text in the Bible relating to the great world-ending struggle between Christ and Satan. Immediately, we can see that many symbols are brought to light in these verses. The beast, and dragon, and false prophet are not literal at all. And what can we say about the clothes described in verse 15? Why would this peculiar interruption take place in the midst of a description of Armageddon? These clothes are the garments of salvation and refer directly to the "fine linen" of that robe of righteousness described in Revelation 19:8.

From these verses also we notice that the coming of Jesus "as a thief" is related to the drying up of the river Euphrates and the appearing of the "kings of the east." And even the Battle of Armageddon is tied to these events. Do these phrases sound familiar? They should, because the same language is used in Isaiah 44:27 to describe the fall of ancient Babylon. Cyrus actually "dried up" the Euphrates River and thus delivered the literal Jews from Babylonian captivity. After referring to Cyrus as "the righteous man from the east" in Isaiah 41:2, Isaiah speaks of him as one who would "dry up thy rivers" and "open ... the two leaved gates." Isaiah 44:27, 28; 45:1.

Historians recognize these as references to the clever battle plan of King Cyrus to enter the city via the water gates through the wall, after the water had been diverted from its channel. Since the river flowed through the midst of Babylon, this ruse was a perfect means of access into the city while the drunken king partied with his military leaders.

Why is Revelation predicting a future drying up of Euphrates and an end-time deliverance of God's people? Hasn't this all been fulfilled in the days of Daniel the prophet? It has in its primary literal fulfillment, but John reveals that there is a secondary, symbolic application of those events. In the historical account, the literal Jews were freed from the literal Babylonians, but the book of Revelation pictures a spiritual Israel being saved from spiritual Babylon. Both rescues are made possible through the drying up of the Euphrates River, and both are accomplished by kings of the east.

Here we encounter an important principle of prophetic interpretation. The immediate fulfillment is always literal and local, while the future prophetic fulfillment is always spiritual and world-wide. Thus, God's people in one instance are the nation of Israel, and in the later case are His faithful people of all nations and races; in other words, two Israels—one physical in the book of Daniel, and the other spiritual in the book of Revelation. Two drying ups—one literally in the past, and one symbolically in the future.

This leads us to the conclusion that the battle of Armageddon, as portrayed in Revelation, is not a literal battle between East and West, but the spiritual climax of the 6,000-year conflict between Christ and Satan. Here the great adversary is symbolized as making a final attack against the people of God to destroy them. Using a combination of earthly powers he will influence world governments to unite in a program to wipe out those who refuse to receive his mark of authority. Those who stand loyal to God's law in the face of overwhelming opposition will finally be condemned to death. This is what Armageddon is all about.

John tells us that water represents people. "The waters which thou sawest ... are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Revelation 17:15. The harlot woman who sits on the "many waters" is identified as the apostate religious system. Drying up of the water represents the drying up of support by those multitudes who had been deluded by the woman and her spiritual daughters. The Bible declares that they "shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate ... and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." Revelation 17:16. Unfortunately, that awakening will come too late to reverse the fate of those who will have already been sealed in apostasy and error.

But who are the "kings of the east" in Revelation whose coming is preceded by these dramatic events? Whatever is symbolized here must follow on the heels of the three unclean spirits gathering the whole world to the Battle of Armageddon. Cyrus, king of the east, brought deliverance to Israel in the Old Testament, but who are the kings of the east in the book of Revelation who will save spiritual Israel from the wrath of spiritual Babylon?

The Scriptures describe only one rescue operation from the east after that final gathering of the nations. "For as the lightening cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:27. It is from that same direction that the sealing angel ascends to mark the saints for their deliverance. "And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God." Revelation 7:2.

The prophet Ezekiel identifies the east as God's special place of abode and operation. "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east." Ezekiel 43:2. These verses leave no doubt that the kings of the east symbolize the glorious intervention of Jesus and the armies of heaven in dealing with the warring factions of this earth. We note once more the inspired account of the opposing forces who will clash in this last encounter between good and evil. Revelation 16:12 speaks of the "kings of the east" and verse 14 describes the other side as "the kings of the earth." What a contest! The great controversy reaches its final stages in this cosmic involvement of every soul who lives on planet earth.

What circumstances lead up to the gathering of all nations to this apocalyptic Armageddon? John gives a graphic account of it: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ... And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." Revelation 16:13-16.

Three Spirits Like Frogs

Now we are prepared to identify the three major actors who will set the stage for this end-time holocaust. Time does not allow us to give the prophetic and historical background on each of the miracle-working trio who influence the earthly rulers to war against God. Suffice it to say that all three—the beast, dragon, and false prophet—are portrayed as being used by demonic power in their gathering of nations to the battle of Armageddon.

From the days of Martin Luther to the present, Bible commentators have recognized the papacy as the fulfillment of the score of biblical tests relating to the beast power. It was to rise among the nations of Western Europe, uprooting three tribes, speaking blasphemy, persecuting all opponents, ruling for 1,260 years, and finally receiving a deadly wound.

Only the papal system fulfills all of those characteristics so clearly delineated in both Daniel and Revelation. The deadly wound was given in 1798, at the end of an exact political reign of 1,260 years, and the pope was taken prisoner by French Revolutionary forces dispatched by Napoleon Bonaparte. This makes it clear that the modern papacy will indeed be one of the powerful catalysts which will bring on the ultimate threat against the remnant of the seed of the woman. Revelation 12:17.

The second force in the preparation for Armageddon will be the dragon. This is the symbol of satanic power in its most virulent and confrontational form. Certainly this would include every aspect of pagan worship, but specifically, it would also relate to the more respected elements of occultism, Spiritualism, and New Age, which have been adopted by many Christians today.

None can deny that churches of various persuasions have embraced the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul, the very root and foundation of all attempts to communicate with the dead. Such a belief opens the door for almost every form of modern New Age deception, including Spiritualism and the mind sciences. Thus, a strong sympathetic chain has been forged between Christianity and paganism. Such a federation will be one of the major influences in stirring up the kings of the earth to battle against the remnant of the woman, and finally, against the armies of heaven. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.

The third symbolic power who will prepare the world for the battle of that great day is described as the false prophet. He, like the others, causes miracles to be performed in order to effect a gathering of the nations to that last battle between Christ and Satan. Who is this false prophet? We find a clue in Revelation 19 which describes the disastrous outcome of the battle for the enemies of Christ. "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast." Verse 20.

This text describes how the false prophet works miracles in relation to those who receive the mark of the beast. Does the Bible identify the one who carries out these counterfeit miracles? In Revelation 13 we read, "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. ... And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles

which he had power to do in the sight of the beast. ... And he causeth all, both small and great, ... to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads." Verses 11-16.

By putting these verses together we discover that the second beast of Revelation 13 is the false prophet who also works miracles and causes all to receive the mark. Even the nature of the miracles is detailed by John: "he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." Verse 13. The description of this second beast establishes beyond question that the prophet is talking about Protestant America in its rise to world dominance. Note the significant reference to "coming up" as the first beast received its deadly wound. Was the United States rising to power in the very year the papacy went down? Indeed, in 1798 America was first recognized as a world power-the very year of the papal wound.

Contrary to the first beast rising out of the water, representing many people, the two-horned second beast came up out of the earth, signifying a place of no former civilization and peoples. Revelation 13:11.

The absence of crowns on its two horns also indicates a peaceful democracy in contrast to the crowns on the horns of the first beast which symbolized monarchies or dictatorships. It is also interesting to note, in passing, that the miracles had to do with bringing fire from heaven. John added that the work of the false prophet was like frogs, going forth to deceive.

Frogs capture their prey with their tongues, and the false prophet bringing fire down from heaven sounds very much like a counterfeit Pentecost. These symbols may well indicate how pseudo-Christian concepts will form a link between paganism and apostate Protestantism. The false prophet, instead of representing the United States as a political entity only, would extend to the "image of the beast" and portray fallen, compromised Protestantism doing the work of the first beast, or Catholicism.

Church and State Unite

There is no question but that Satan has woven an age-long network pattern of pagan infiltration in both government and religion. It has been done so cleverly, over the ages, that few recognize how much common ground now exists in these powerful institutions. Sunday, the ancient day of licentious sun-worship for every heathen culture, has been so artfully sanitized that it is now the accepted substitute for the biblical seventh-day Sabbath in both secular and religious settings. Incredibly, this has been accomplished while both church and state still give recognition to the moral nature of the Ten Commandments which declare unequivocally that "the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God." Exodus 20:10.

Consider the ease with which government can now lend support to a rest day which they themselves recognize by closing up all official functions of their own operation on Sunday. Repeatedly, laws have been instituted and enforced to make it a crime to violate the supposed sanctity of a day dedicated originally to satanic sun-worship. Amazing? Indeed, it is the most incredible religious fraud of the ages and one that only the prince of evil could have perpetrated.

Then, we must marvel again at the respectable status accorded to the New Age movement whose tentacles have extended equally through both religious and non-religious communities. Finally, the devil has been able to effect a revival of his most primitive approach to the human race. Through a variety of modern titles and high-sounding techniques, Satan is channeling his evil principles directly into the minds of millions today who cannot recognize that they are actually learning to worship Satan. All who subscribe to the pagan concept of a naturally immortal soul are vulnerable to the New Age appeal to communicate with these supposed "Spirit Masters."

Charismatic worshippers who have been conditioned by emotional and sensory manifestations stand in the greatest danger of being deceived by the New Age and Spiritualism appeal. Counterfeit gifts are not easily discerned by those who trust feeling as a valid test of true religion. Prophecy indicates that a counterfeit "tongues" could be one aspect of the three-fold preparation for the final deception.

Coming back to the words of the prophet, we now see the tri-lateral approach that Satan will make to the kings of the earth to prepare them for their part in Armageddon. Every effort will be made by our great enemy to unite secular and religious powers to destroy the little remnant people which "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.

Satan's wrath is especially aimed against the law of God. He hates it because it constitutes the foundation of God's government. He despises the saints who are repeatedly described in the book of Revelation as those who "keep the commandments of God." Revelation 14:12; 12:17; 22:14.

Thus far we have discovered that the common ground of Spiritualism (immortal soul), counterfeit tongues, and New Age errors will cement an end-time alliance between apostate Protestantism, Catholicism, and secular governments-an alliance which will unite them against the unpopular minority who refuse the mark of the beast. Under the influence of this confederation the nations of the earth, following the example of the United States, will be led to issue a death decree against all who will not receive that mark.

Counterfeit Miracles and the Kings of the Earth

It is interesting, at this point, to observe how this grand objective of unified action will be accomplished by these diverse political and religious entities. Some have held that they will be drawn together by economic necessity, as related world finances experience simultaneous collapse. Without discounting this and other possible factors, we must recognize that the prophecy itself plainly bears witness to the primary role of demonic miracles as the basic bonding force pulling the nations together for the final action against God's people and His government. In other words, it seems less political than it does spiritual from the biblical viewpoint.

Right now we can only speculate about the nature of those signs and wonders which Satan will use to impress the kings of the earth. With the rising influence of Spiritualism in many religious bodies and the growing emphasis on miracles and emotional feeling as the criteria of truth, we can expect some grandiose display of demonic power that will capture the attention and interest of every country in the world. We know that the great deceiver will impersonate the coming of Jesus in some spectacular manner, and no one should doubt that such miraculous displays could make intellectual believers and

cooperators out of Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Communists, or any other strain of national or religious identity.

And don't discount the providential influences which will be operating on the other side-God's side-to prepare for the final events of the great controversy. Even though Satan is the temporary prince of this world, God still has oversight of the rise and fall of nations. A divine destiny is even now influencing the political processes and pressures in which certain relationships are being established between countries.

The most atheistic observers have counted the rapid fall of international communism as an incredible development very close to a miracle. And almost everyone describes the lightning victory of the allied forces over Saddam Hussein as an unbelievable, impossible accomplishment. How could such a war be fought with so few casualties on one side? Yet in each of these recent cataclysmic actions-the fall of communism and the United States victory over Iraq-the results have been to place America in a center-stage position of influence over all the other nations. This is exactly what is demanded by the prophecy of Revelation 13. This country will "deceive them that dwell on the earth ... And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads." Revelation 13:14-16.

Another shocking activity of the second beast of Revelation 13 apparently is produced after it loses its lamblike quality and begins to speak as a dragon. John wrote, "And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed." Revelation 13:12.

As we have already discovered, the deadly wound was given to the papacy in 1798, and it has been in the process of healing since 1929 when the Vatican was established as a political state once again. According to this prophecy, the United States will begin to exercise a similar religious intolerance as the Catholic Church and will use her influence to cause people all over the world to give spiritual allegiance to that church.

If this scenario seemed far-fetched and unlikely at some time in the past, it certainly is not that way today. The growing political influence of Pope John Paul II in world affairs is a phenomenon of the very recent past. The United States has appointed an official representative to the head of that church state, and some amazing concessions have been made to accommodate the pope in his pilgrimage visits to this and other countries.

A very significant statement appeared in the August 13, 1990, issue of U.S. News and World Report magazine. "Pope John Paul II discusses world affairs on the telephone with George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev at least once a week, according to Professor Malachi Martin, a Roman Catholic theologian and Vatican insider. ... Martin says the Pope offers the President informed analyses prepared by the Vatican's intelligence network about developments in Eastern Europe and his personal assessments of the new leaders there as well as in the Soviet Union."

Such an unseemly alliance between papal churchmen and the heads of nations is certainly a violation of the traditional American concept of separation of church and state. But it fits in perfectly with the prophetic scenario of final events. Many students of prophecy found it difficult to believe that Catholicism could ever regain her powerful political clout after the "deadly wound" experience of the eighteenth century. It was felt that Communist totalitarianism would always be around to limit the expansionistic aims of the papacy. The two giant opposing forces were perceived as a necessary balance against each other so that neither could gain authoritarian superiority.

Now all that has changed. It is generally recognized that the Pope played a significant role in the collapse of international communism. The recent book *The Keys of This Blood*, written just before the iron curtain began its rapid dissolution, describes the obsessive determination of the present Pope to bring the entire world order under the spiritual domination of the so-called Holy See of Rome. The author describes the concentrated focus of the papal attack on the communistic system, long recognized as the greatest obstacle to the Church's goal.

If time allowed, we could study the prophecy of Daniel 11 where the precise victory of the king of the North (Catholicism) over the king of the South (Atheistic communism) is clearly predicted. For three tense, dramatic days in August, 1991, the world held its breath as the Russian coup appeared to reverse the prophetic agenda for the little time remaining. Now, the road seems to be wide open for the Catholic power to fulfill its particular role, along with the dragon and the false prophet.

Beginning with verse 40, we read the account of a mighty struggle taking place at the time of the end between these two contending forces. The identity of these symbolic kings can be established by comparing a few texts. In Isaiah 30:6, 7 the land of Egypt is identified as "of the south." John the Revelator refers to France's period of atheism around 1798 as that "which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt." Revelation 11:8. Thus, we find the land of the Pharaohs connected to atheism. Indeed, it was the king of Egypt who made the proud boast, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" Exodus 5:2.

As Daniel describes the continuing conflict between the king of the north and king of the south, we are made aware that his symbol of Egypt has come to represent not just the arrogant spirit of that large country south of Israel but last-day atheism in whatever form it is manifest. Communism is the virulent form that atheism has assumed for the past many years, and much of Daniel 11 is describing the life and death clash of communism with its great foe, the king of the north.

But who is this antagonist from the north who finally gains the ascendancy over the powers of atheism? Here are some texts which show beyond question that the primary application of this symbol was to Babylon. "Toward the north by the river Euphrates," "in the north country by the river Euphrates," "all the families of the north ... and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon." Jeremiah 46:6; 46:10; 25:9.

The literal city of Babylon was built right over the Euphrates river, but there is another future, spiritual application of Babylon revealed in the book of Revelation. The very last part of Daniel 11 also deals with the symbolic king of the north, or spiritual Babylon. Many phrases in this chapter give positive

evidence that this power is the papacy. For instance: it shall "pollute the sanctuary," "take away the daily sacrifice," "magnify himself above all," and "corrupt with flatteries." Daniel 11:31, 32.

Now consider the high drama of this prediction in Daniel 11:40. "And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, ... and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over."

How significant it is that Newsweek magazine on December 25, 1989, trumpeted the news of the fall of communism in these words, "Days of the Whirlwind." Commentary after commentary gave credit to the Pope for bringing down Gorbachev and the iron grip of atheism on Eastern Europe. The prophecy said it would be "like a whirlwind" and that is exactly how the media reported it.

Bible students have long debated how the whole world could be influenced to wonder after the beast, and also how the kings of the earth could be drawn into that final encounter between good and evil. Now we can see how the greatest barrier has been removed, and the three unclean spirits are working through the beast, dragon, and false prophet to involve every soul in that "battle of the great day of God."

What an age to be alive! Excitement mounts as we ride the crest of towering events which sweep us toward the grand climax of history-the coming of Jesus. We need to be constantly aware of the fast-breaking signs which point to His return, but our preparation for that moment in time involves more than knowledge. Only the pure in heart will see God and live in His presence. A total commitment of heart, mind, and body is the greatest need of every living soul.

While the angels of Revelation hold the four winds of strife from blowing on the earth, and the glory of God gathers in the eastern skies, a final invitation is beginning to confront every man, woman, and child on this crumbling planet. "Come out of her, my people" is the call of the hour. God is gathering His faithful ones, who love Him supremely, to Mount Zion, the place of safety and salvation. The three unclean spirits are gathering the forces of apostate religion and compromising governments to the great day of battle. Today we stand in the valley of decision.

Tiny Troublemaker

Joe Crews

Proverbs 6:19

"The nuclear bomb is a world of iniquity and sets on fire the course of nature. It is set on fire of hell, full of deadly poison." Those strong words about the world's most destructive weapon surprise no one. But, if we should make one small change in the first sentence and insert the word "tongue" instead of "nuclear bomb," would it still be true? God evidently thought so, because He inspired one of His disciples to write those very words about the tongue (James 3:6, 8).

We seldom think in terms of anything being more evil or destructive than a hydrogen bomb, but the Bible seems to indicate that the unsanctified words which roll so glibly from a chattering tongue can do more harm than an atomic explosion!

The Bible uses a variety of colorful words to describe the fruit of this rampagous little member of the body. Among them is one that surely has earned a reputation as the most cruel word in the in-spired record-whisperers. It has the hiss of the serpent in it, and very few people feel entirely comfortable with the word for reasons we shall soon discover.

It doesn't take a profound insight to understand what the wise man meant when he wrote these words: "A whisperer separateth chief friends." Proverbs 16:28. Even the earliest Levitical laws gave specific commandment against the practice of gossip and slander. "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." Leviticus 19:16. Does this injunction carry as much weight in our day as it did then? Let's find out.

There are many types of sin that God despises, many of them associated with abominable perversions and deviations. Yet, it is obvious that God does not classify sin as we often do. We have a disposition to look upon certain sins as quite respectable. They are generally the refined sins of the spirit such as pride, envy, jealousy, etc. Since they do not make embarrassing physical displays, we tend to tolerate them as personality quirks.

On the other hand, we recoil from an-other category of sins with justifiable disdain and even revulsion. Those fleshly indulgences like adultery, homo-sexuality, and stealing, are viewed as positively disrespectable and intolerable.

Do we have any reason to believe that God draws such distinctions in the qualifying of sin? The answer is found right in the middle of the Bible where we find listed the seven deadly sins which God hates. Among the depressing catalog of offenses we find this one: "A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." Proverbs 6:19. This is just another way -of describing a

whisperer. Think about that word for a moment. It has a soft, pleasing sound to it, but it has the noisiest, harshest echo of any word in the English language. It has also broken more homes and more hearts than any other word. Think, also, of the friendships which have been shattered in the wake of its influence.

A whisperer speaks in all languages, he crosses all boundaries, and he is a member of all churches. He is the bearer of false rumor and report. We cannot deny that there is a natural, perverse bent to every human mind to speak evil of other people. Probably no one will ever be able to explain it fully, but we know it is there because we have indulged in it at some time or another.

The usual explanation may not be to-tally adequate, but it certainly is true as far as it goes. The person who can find flaws in others is making himself look better by comparison, and the self-nature will resort to anything in order to satisfy its demand to be the center of attention.

The strangest thing about this sin is how it can so easily beset those who are saints in every other respect. Even where the entire being is brought into submission to Christ, that one wild faculty of the body often keeps running out of control.

James makes the astounding statement that the man is perfect who finally tames the organ of speech. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. ... But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." James 3:2-8.

The Gossiper-Tool of Satan

Perhaps God hates this sin so much because it is often done with a flair of religious sanctity. Usually the gossip speaks as though he is defending some violated biblical principle, and in order to justify the conscience he only implies or intimates that the evil has been committed. Here lies the root of alienation and disaffection. One false insinuation has more power than a hundred good deeds. A slanderous whisper never dies out until it has scorched and slashed an innocent soul into the dust. No wonder the Word of God labels it one of the seven deadly sins of man.

Do you know who really originated the scheme of misrepresentation and exaggeration? Jesus called Satan the father of lies because he told the first one to Adam and Eve, our first parents. But please take note that the form of that original granddaddy lie was very subtle and cunning. It was worded as a question, "Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree?"

Why did the devil ask such a question? He knew that God had not forbid-den every tree in the Garden. Only one had been restricted-the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was a lying intimation

in the question. We might not view such a practice as terribly wrong because we hear such statements almost daily from those around us, but Jesus called it a lie. To exaggerate, as Satan did, is to depart from the truth, and no amount of euphemistic language can hide the hard fact that it is a most despicable sin in God's sight.

By the time he confronted Eve in the Garden, Satan had become a specialist in the art of covering up truth with beautiful, high-sounding words. Most of his work of rebellion in heaven had consisted of deceptive implications against God's character. He was the author of the first whispering campaign, and the devastating results prove what a monstrous evil it really is! One-third of the angels were subverted by the treasonous suggestions of Lucifer.

Do Satan's modern disciples still use the half-truth, gossip plan to weaken and destroy innocent people? Indeed, whis-perers are still around, and their cam-paigns have destroyed more souls than all the military engagements fought on the battlefields of earth. They do not always appear as the enemies of God. Because their whispers contain only in-timations, they always retain a legal loophole to avoid responsibility for the results of their work.

Do you understand what I'm saying? Have you heard the whispers yourself? "What an unfortunate experience that poor girl had!" or "Many people have made mistakes, but we can't hold it against her." No details, mind you, just the basic material to pique the imagina-tion and start the rumor mill rolling. Then somebody picks it up, adds to it, and passes it on in a more exaggerated form. By repetition the story becomes horrible in content, and a sensitive soul is left crushed and dying.

What can we say about the person who started it all? Perhaps he is one of the most faithful attenders and supporters of the missionary program in the church. His loyalty has never been questioned. He is as upright as one of the stone pil-lars in the sanctuary, and just as cold and hard. He would be outraged at the sug-gestion that he had anything to do with the tragedy. His self-righteous soul would be ready to blame anyone or any-thing except his own original, whispered innuendo which mushroomed so rapidly into a juggernaut of destruction.

Whisperers Condemn Themselves

In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." Matthew 7:1, 2. Paul expanded on that theme when he wrote, "For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." Romans 2:1.

Is it true that we are guilty of the very sins we observe and condemn in others? It certainly seemed to be the case with those men who brought the adulteress to Jesus for stoning. When He invited the ones without sin to cast the first stone, the plot against the woman fell apart. The accusers slunk away, one after the other.

This principle should not be twisted in its application to God's watchmen, the ministers. They should not hesitate to speak out plainly against sin in every discourse. Even though Jesus saved the frightened

woman from the extreme penalty of the law, He did not hesitate to label her actions as sin when talking to her alone: "Go and sin no more."

God's ambassadors are not being judgmental when they expound the Word of God to condemn disobedience. The Word itself does the judging and condemning. Jesus did not hesitate to speak strong, scathing words of rebuke to the hypocritical religious leaders who had no disposition to repent. But to those who recognized their guilt and desired deliverance, He provided protection from unnecessary public scorn and condemnation. If the Master sought to spare this woman who was admittedly guilty and had been taken in the very act of adultery, how would He feel toward the innocent who have been unjustly accused on the basis of half-truths and false reports? Undoubtedly, Jesus would show the accusers a flashback of their own ugly past, causing them also to slink away in shame.

Judged by Our Words

What a solemn thought it is that each person must finally give an account of every word spoken. Christ said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matthew 12:36, 37. Think of it! A record is being made in the books of heaven. Those phone conversations are being preserved with all the original inflections and nuances.

Will we be happy to face all those words in the judgment? What about the idle chatter around the house, the unkind criticism of family or friend, and the occasional flare of angry temper? Every one of us can look back in shame upon words that never should have escaped our lips—words that we would give a fortune to recall and cancel out. But, the damage is done, and no power on earth is able to neutralize the sting of their influence. As the poet described it, "Boys flying kites can haul in their white-winged birds, but you can't do that when you're flying words."

The story is told of a farmer and his wife who were riding back from town in the old country wagon. As they rode along, the wife made the observation, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could pull along together like those horses are pulling the wagon?" The husband replied, "Yes, and we could do it, too, if we only had one tongue between us."

James was right when he described the tongue as a world of evil. It has set off dissension and division in millions of homes around the world. Someone has said that the first screw which comes loose in the head is the one which controls the tongue. In his epistles, Paul commended the women who were not busybodies, and who stayed quietly at home. This does not imply that only women are afflicted with this foot-in-mouth disease. Many men, also, spend time in idle chatter and gossip.

It has been said that we should make our words as palatable as possible because someday we may have to eat them.

One of the most delightful stories I've ever heard is about an old Puritan pastor who had just moved into a new parish. After a few weeks, one of the lady members of his congregation confronted him

following the Sunday-morning sermon. "Pastor," she said, "I have my scissors here, and I wonder if you would give me permission to do something? I've observed you now for a number of weeks, and there is something about you that bothers me a great deal; I wonder if you would permit me to correct it?" She continued, "The tassel on your robe is just too long and I'd like to shorten it."

Graciously, the pastor consented to her request, and she snipped away until the tassel met her approval. Then he said, "Madam, there is something I've also been observing, and it bothers me. I wonder if I could borrow your scissors, and if you would give me permission to correct something." She answered, "Of course you may." He took the scissors in hand and said simply, "Put out your tongue."

Whisperers Worthy of Death

Besides the seven hateful sins listed by the wise man, other Bible writers give long categories of special sins that God despises. Paul provides us with an alarming collection of fleshly practices and declares that "they which commit such things are worthy of death." What were they? "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, ..." Romans 1:29, 30, 32.

You will notice that the tongue is well represented in all those carnal excesses. The whisperers and backbiters are catalogued right alongside murderers and haters of God. Inspiration decrees that those who misuse the power of speech can be destroyed for it. To speak evil of others is a very, very serious violation of God's law. Jacob identified backbiting as the special besetting sin of his son Dan. "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." Genesis 49:17.

Ten of Dan's brothers had similar weaknesses, but they, by God's grace, overcame their sins. Their names are recorded in the book of Revelation as overcomers, who will be the spiritual representatives of all who pass through the gates of the New Jerusalem. But Dan's name, along with Ephraim, is not there. His backbiting was never conquered, and God cannot take that sin into heaven. God had declared, "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off." Psalm 101:5.

David asked the question, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour." Psalm 15:1-3.

Dan's name will not be inscribed on any of the twelve gates through which all the redeemed must pass. None who fail to claim the victory over a slanderous tongue will be permitted to inhabit those mansions of light. Not one of the favored 144,000 will be identified with the tribe of Dan.

What a dramatic illustration that this sin is not just a harmless weakness of the flesh! It is a malady of soul which will cause millions to be left out of the kingdom. God's people must claim the victory over a lying tongue, an exaggerating tongue, and a backbiting tongue. There will be no gossip in heaven.

You might say, "But I don't say things that aren't true about my neighbor; all I say about him is true." But why say anything if you can't find something good to say? How often do you pray for that erring neighbor? I think we can allow ourselves to speak about our erring brothers to men just as much as we pray for them to God.

Do you realize that many people treat their animals better than they treat other human beings? I've often thought what a heaven this world could be if people only behaved to their fellow man as they do to their dog. I've observed the petted, pampered lifestyle of many a little poodle. No human neighbor would be given such consideration. I'm not criticizing dog owners, but I do make a plea for equal treatment toward members of our own genetic kind. It seems that civilized man cannibalizes his own family members by devouring them verbally and traumatizing them spiritually.

History provides some interesting glimpses of misjudgments and gross smear campaigns that were launched against innocent people-and sometimes very famous people. When we think of kind men and self-effacing men, our thoughts go to Abraham Lincoln. His moving words at the Gettysburg battlefield have been properly classified among the most memorable speeches ever delivered. But do you know how that speech was described by some of the leading newspapers who reported it on the following day? The Chicago Times had this to say: "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, dishwatery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States." The local Harrisburg newspaper reported: "We pass over the silly remarks of the President. For the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them, and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of."

The London Times gave this appraisal of Lincoln's immortal speech: "Anything more dull and commonplace it wouldn't be easy to produce." You marvel, with me, that men could be so blind to truth and so insensitive to real greatness, but it's still happening every day all around us. We speak too much and too often from the platform of our emotional biases. We allow ourselves to be blinded by passion and lash out to get even with people we don't like. As a result, we hurt others, sometimes seriously and permanently. Our words cut and bruise.

The Bible says this kind of devouring of each other must cease, or we may despair of eternal life. God will not immortalize a cankerous spirit. Gossip and slanderous inferences will never enter the City of Light. False representation, exaggeration, and insinuations, are simply sugary descriptions of sin. The Bible calls it lies, also, and declares that none who speak them or love them will go through the gates of Paradise.

Gashmu Saith It

One of the most famous biblical records of whisperers at work is found in the Old Testament story of Nehemiah. He was one of the great heroes of the faith who set himself to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah became the victim of a whispering campaign. As he struggled to carry out his divinely appointed mission, a malicious opposition program was organized against him. Three men were at the head of the effort to sabotage his construction plans-Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gashmu, the Arabian.

Their tactics were psychologically de-signed to knock out the intrepid builder within a few days. Nehemiah's enemies opened their campaign with an attack of ridicule. They made a big joke out of the wall and claimed that it could be de-destroyed by a fox brushing against it. When that didn't work they tried an armed attack, but Nehemiah put weapons in the hands of his workmen and kept right on building. Then they tried to reach him from the inside by hiring counselors to give him dangerous advice. All of those strategies collapsed one after another as Nehemiah set his face like a flint to finish the job of restoring those walls.

Finally the three captains of deception put their heads together and came up with an orchestrated plan to slander Ne-hemiah by a false report. They felt he could be bugged out of his project by sheer force of public opinion. Created artificially by their tissue of fabricated misinformation, was a letter they circu-lated which stated: "It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words." Nehemiah 6:6.

Notice how these media experts com-posed their news releases. "It is reported" and "Gashmu saith it." Does that sound familiar? Many a good man has been discouraged from his ministry for God by those kinds of clever inferences. Oh yes, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Nehemiah have been dead for a long time, but this fellow Gashmu, strangely enough, is still alive. He is the author of "They say." Gashmu belongs to all races and languages. He has many aliases. Among them are these: "They tell me," "Have you heard," and "This is off the record, but ..."

Gashmu is hard to locate, also. His name is never found in the phone direc-tory, and if you locate an address, he has already moved on. He's the symbol of the talebearer, the defamer, the slan-derer, the whisperer. The Bible says, "They that do such things are worthy of death."

Do you say that your experience is not like Gashmu? You only tell a few friends about the bad report somebody else has already circulated? Take note that the Bible also condemns those who do that: "He that covereth a transgres-sion seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." Proverbs 17:9. This inspired counsel reveals that true love for our brother would lead us to cover his transgression. By repeating the report of his error, we break up friendships and become a destroyer of love.

Chasing the Devil's Dogs

Finally, how shall we relate to that most cruel word when it is directed against us? Sooner or later each one be-comes the victim of a whisperer whose vicious rumors threaten our reputation and our peace of mind. First of all, give no cause for any true reports to be used against you. Phillip Brooks once said: "Keep clear of concealment; keep clear of the need of concealment. It is an awful hour when the first necessity of hiding anything comes. The whole life is dif-ferent henceforth. When there are ques-tions to be feared and eyes to be avoided and subjects which must not be touched, then the bloom of life is gone."

With the settled assurance that your enemies are blowing up fictitious issues and using lying reports against you, stay at your appointed mission. Like Ne-hemiah, do not take your precious mo-ments to

chase the devil's dogs. You could do it the rest of your life and never get the wall completed that God has as-signed you. Just keep at your work and don't let your enemy prod you into re-taliating. The very moment we begin re-acting in kind, we have totally lost the battle and forfeited our spiritual advantage.

Let me try to explain this crucial point, because here is where the enemy usually manages to grab the balance of power. You see, as a general rule every person operates his life on the basis of either acting or reacting. Those who act are the ones who think carefully and make deep, basic plans about how they will order their lives. After deciding ex-actly which principles to follow in mak-ing all decisions, they allow no circum-stance to divert them from following those rational plans and principles.

Those who react, on the other hand, simply live their lives from day to day on the basis of the circumstances created by other people. Most of their decisions are made emotionally in response to the way they are treated by others. They do not really have control of their own lives. Since their lives consist largely of react-ing to what others do to them, in effect, they have consented for those people to determine the course they follow, and even the kind of persons they become.

Dr. Hunter was an English cardiologist who was, himself, a victim of heart disease. In great concern he commented one day to a fellow surgeon, "My life is in the hands of any rascal who chooses to annoy me." He realized that he could have a heart attack if someone made him angry. Sure enough, a short time later some stranger provoked him into a fit of rage and he dropped dead.

Here is a perfect example of living by reaction. Even with his high degree of professional training, Dr. Hunter was controlled by other people. Even the length of his life was under somebody else's control. That was an unusual case. Yet many reactor people allow others around them to determine their eternal destiny, which is even more serious. By responding in kind to the negative actions of others, the reactor is molded into the same kind of person. Thus his salvation is essentially submitted to the decisions and choices of those who mistreat him. What an irony!

Reactors Can Become Actors

Is there hope for reactors to change their dangerous and unreasonable course before they are forced into a mold that they really do not want and would not choose for themselves? How could Dr. Hunter have saved himself from the fate he actually foresaw and predicted? There is only one answer to that question. By submitting personally to the spiritual authority of a totally new life in Christ, Dr. Hunter could have acquired the power to start acting again in the strength of his own surrendered will. God would have bestowed on him the ability to choose a different life pattern that could have excluded anger.

Do you see how this whole thing ties in with whisperers, who are actually agents of Satan seeking to gain control of your life? And without Christ you have absolutely no power to resist the tide of emotional feelings which others bring to bear upon you. You fall into the trap, and without realizing it, begin to yield the reins of control and direction over your life to someone else.

How does divine power make it possible for you to start acting instead of re-acting? By making you willing and able to develop new, basic principles and attitudes toward others. An unconverted person might see the need for new attitudes but would have no power to practice them.

How could new spiritual attitudes save you from the control of those who would malign you with rumors and malicious gossip? Let me answer that question with an illuminating story that will reveal what God is able to do for those who accept His salvation. It's the simple, narrative account of an old Greek philosopher who was taking a walk with his friend. As the two strolled down the street together, an enemy of the philosopher dumped a bucket of water on him from an upstairs window.

The wise old man did not even slack his pace or show any reaction to the outrage. He continued his conversation as though nothing had happened. His friend protested and offered to help him find the culprit and punish him. The philosopher gently rejected his offer and insisted that no one had thrown any water on him! "But I saw it with my own eyes," the friend insisted. "He threw water all over you. See, you are dripping wet!"

"No, you are mistaken," said the philosopher. "He did not throw any water on me; he threw it on the man he thought I was." Did you catch that profound statement? "He didn't throw it on me; he threw it on the man he thought I was." What a spirit! What an attitude! I can't get angry with those who hurt me. They wouldn't do it if they had all the facts-if they really knew me, and understood me. So they are to be pitied because they don't know. They need my prayers, not my wrath or retaliation.

An unconverted man might recognize the beauty and wisdom of that principle, but he would never be able to practice it. That is why Dr. Hunter was helpless to save his own life. Only the Holy Spirit abiding in a man can conform him to the divine principle enunciated by the philosopher.

Every one of us has struggled on both ends of the loose tongue problem. We have given out words that made us feel guilty and ashamed, and we have been the subject of angry tirades and verbal abuse. In either case we have been driven to our knees for assurance and hope. Without the help of Jesus, we have found our minds and bodies yielding to the control of the flesh.

But thank God! Through the power of grace we have seen both words and thoughts brought under the sweet, controlling influence of the Holy Spirit. The One who promised to make us "more than conquerors" and cause us "always to triumph" has delivered our tongues from the bond of iniquity. That which was set on fire of hell is now turned into an instrument of praise for our God.

This Tidbit May Suit You To a "T"

The tongue's terrible tendency to tell tall tales totally tarnishes traditional transcommunication theories. The tempestuous tirades traceable to the tongue testify to the traumatic tactics of this tiny tab of tissue. Thousands that take the time to think, try to tame the tumultuous torrent of the too talkative tongue. Temporarily, the tide turns. Towering tempers turn to tenderness. Then, tragically, the trend tapers. The tongue trips, teeters, then takes a tumble; the temptation to trifling twaddle triumphs.

Take time to tabulate this timeless truth: to train the tongue takes the tremendous talent of trust. Theology teaches that trust thrives through toil. Therefore, throttle the testy tongue! Terminate the trivial topics that tinge the tenor of talk! Trim the trashy, tasteless terms that transgress traditions of truth! Trounce the trite themes that toady to thoughtless tattling!

Theoretically, the tantalizing target of a true, tactful, temperate tongue torments and teases those that tackle the task. To tell the truth, thrilling triumph throngs the tracks of the tough, tenacious thwarter of tawdry talk!

Why the Old Covenant Failed

Joe Crews

Hebrews 8:6

Some time ago I stepped off the platform at the close of an evangelistic message and hurried toward the front door to greet the people. Suddenly my path was blocked by three young men, one of whom addressed me in quite a loud voice. He said, "Brother Joe, we were disappointed with the way you put us back under the Old Covenant tonight by preaching the seventh-day Sabbath. Don't you realize that we are living under the New Covenant now and should be keeping Sunday instead of the Sabbath?"

That young man was voicing the conviction of many thousands of Christians today who sincerely believe that the Ten Commandments constituted the Old Covenant, which disappeared at the cross and, therefore, has no present application to grace-saved Christians. Is it a true premise? If so, we certainly need to be clearly apprised of the doctrine in order to avoid the pitfall of deadly legalism. On the other hand, if the Ten Commandments are still binding, it would be the most tragic mistake to discount even one of those great moral precepts.

No one can deny that there are Old Testament statements which refer to the Ten Commandments as a covenant; however, it will be our purpose here to show that the Ten-Commandment law was *not* the Old Covenant which was abolished.

But before we delve into this fascinating subject, we need to define what a covenant really is. There are many types and forms, but basically a covenant is an agreement between two parties based upon mutual promises. All through the centuries God has dealt with His people on the basis of covenants. He is a reasonable God, and he invites, "Come now, and let us reason together." Isaiah 1:18.

Sometimes God established pacts with individuals like Moses, Abraham, and David, and sometimes with the nation of Israel. The most important covenant of all was set up long before this world came into existence. It was a covenant between the Father and the Son and had to do with the eventuality of sin. Jesus offered Himself there in the vast eternity of the past as the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Revelation 13:8. He agreed to become the atoning sacrifice to redeem man, should Adam and Eve choose to sin.

The terms of that eternal covenant have never been changed or superseded. Although many other covenants have been established through the years, the simple provision of salvation through faith has remained in effect through all ages, for all mankind.

The covenant which has caused the most misunderstanding, though, is designated as "the Old Covenant" by the writer of Hebrews. He also describes the institution of a new covenant which has

some very important advantages over the old. Here is how he describes the two: "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: ... For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:6-13.

This description leaves no room for doubt concerning the fate of the Old Covenant. It was set aside in favor of a new one which had better promises. Naturally, we are interested to know all about that new covenant which will place God's law in the heart and mind. But we also need to understand the nature of the covenant which disappeared. Millions have been taught that it was the Ten-Commandment law. They boast of being delivered from the law and claim to walk in a glorious freedom from the Old Testament covenant of works.

The Old Covenant - Not the Ten Commandments

Is this a biblical position? It is just as important to understand what the Old Covenant was not, as to know what it was. Right now, let us look at three absolute proofs that the covenant which disappeared was not the Ten Commandments. Then we will determine by comparing scripture with scripture just what the Old Covenant was.

First of all, we notice that the Old Covenant had some poor promises in it. The New Covenant, we are told, "was established upon better promises." Verse 6. Tell me, has anyone ever been able to point out any poor promises in the Ten Commandments? Never. On the contrary, Paul declares that they were very good. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Ephesians 6:1-3.

This declaration alone is sufficient to show that the writer of Hebrews was not charging the moral law with any weak promises. The Old Covenant, whatever else it might be, could never be the Ten Commandments.

The second thing wrong with the Old Covenant was that it was faulty. The Bible says, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." Hebrews 8:7. Let me ask you a question: Has any man ever been able to find a fault or a flaw in the handwriting of God? The psalmist declared, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Psalm 19:7. Paul wrote, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Romans 7:12.

Does that sound like something weak and imperfect? No law could be perfect and faulty at the same time. It becomes more and more apparent that the Old Covenant could not have been the Ten Commandments.

Finally, though, we read the most dramatic thing about the Old Covenant - it was to be abolished! "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:13. Now we can ask a serious question that should settle every doubt on this matter. Did the great moral law of Ten Commandments vanish away? Anyone who has read the New Testament must answer, Absolutely not. Paul affirms the exact opposite about the law. He asked, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Romans 3:31.

Does the Bible contradict itself? Can something vanish away and be established at the same time? Did the same writer say opposite things about the same law? Just to be certain that Paul was not saying that the Old Covenant was the law, let us insert the words "Old Covenant" instead of the word "law" into Romans 3:31. "Do we then make void the Old Covenant through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the Old Covenant."

That doesn't sound right at all, does it? We know that the Old Covenant had vanished away and could never be spoken of in this way. Very clearly, then, we can see that the covenant which came to an end could not have been the Ten Commandments.

What Was the Old Covenant?

Having found what the Old Covenant was not, we are now ready to identify it specifically from the Word. To do so we must go back in the Bible to the book of Exodus. Many people have failed to see that there was more than one covenant involved at Mt. Sinai. God called Moses up into the mountain *before* He gave the law and proposed a covenant between Him and His people: "And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; ... if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me ... an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." Exodus 19:3-6.

Notice how God asked Moses to present His offer to the people. Here are all the elements of a true covenant. Conditions and promises are laid down for both sides. If the children of Israel accept God's proposal, a covenant will be established. How did they respond to the divine offer? "And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord." Exodus 19:7, 8.

Just as soon as that answer went back to God, the basis for the Old Covenant was set up. But before it could go into formal operation there had to be a sealing or ratifying of the pact. This ritualistic service involved the sprinkling of the blood of an ox on the people and is described in Exodus 24:4-8: "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children

of Israel which ... sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words."

Again we are reminded that this covenant was not the law itself but was made "concerning all these words." The Ten Commandments were the basis for the agreement. The people promised to keep that law, and God promised to bless them in return. The crucial weakness in the whole arrangement revolved around the way Israel promised. There was no suggestion that they could not fully conform to every requirement of God. Neither was there any application for divine assistance. "We can do it," they insisted. Here is a perfect example of leaning on the flesh and trusting human strength. The words are filled with self-confidence. "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient."

Were they able to keep that promise? In spite of their repeated assurances, they miserably broke their word before Moses could even get off the mountain with the tables of stone. Do we begin to see where the poor promises lay in the Old Covenant?

The book of Hebrews begins to unfold. There God is reported as "finding fault with them." Hebrews 8:8. He said, "Because they continued not in my covenant ... I regarded them not." Verse 9. The blame is placed squarely upon the human side of the mutual pact. Thus, we can see exactly why Paul wrote as he did about this Old Covenant in Hebrews 8. It did gender to bondage, it proved faulty, had poor promises, and vanished away - all because the people failed to obey their part of the agreement. Putting all these things together we can see why a new covenant was desperately needed, which would have better promises.

How were the New Covenant promises better? Because God made them, and they guaranteed successful obedience through His strength alone. "I will put my laws into their mind ... I will be to them a God ... I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Hebrews 8:10-12.

How was the New Covenant ratified? In the same manner that the Old was confirmed - by the shedding of blood. But instead of an ox having to shed its blood, the sinless Son of God would provide the blood of sprinkling: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." Hebrews 13:20, 21.

What a contrast to the weak promises of the flesh made by Israel at Sinai. Instead of the people's "we will do," God's New Covenant promise is to "make you perfect in every good work ... working in you." It is no longer human effort. It is not so much you working, but Him "working in you." And how is this power made available? "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant." Because of what Jesus did on the cross.

The New Covenant Based On Conversion

This brings us to the very heart of the New Covenant operation. Obedience is made possible by the writing of God's law on the heart. Through spiritual regeneration the mind and heart are transformed. Christ actually enters into the life of the believer and imparts His own strength for obedience. By partaking of the divine nature, the weakest human being begins to live the very life of Jesus Christ, manifesting His victory, and crucifying the flesh.

Paul describes that transaction this way: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:3, 4.

The word for righteousness is "dikaima," meaning "just requirement" of the law. In other words, because of Jesus' sinless life in the flesh, the requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us. He overcame sin in the same kind of body we have, so that He could impart that victory to us. He will actually live out His own holy life of separation from sin in our earthly bodies if we will permit Him to do so. This is the New Covenant promise for every believing, trusting child of God. And it is absolutely the only way that anyone can meet the requirements of the law: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

It is most important for us to understand that the New Covenant law written on the heart is exactly the same law that was graven on the stone. Those great spiritual principles reflect the very character of God, and form the basis for His government. The difference is not in the law but in the ministration of the law. Written only upon the tables of stone, they can only condemn and minister death, "because the carnal mind ... is not subject to the law of God." Romans 8:7. Received into the heart which has been spiritualized by the converting grace of Christ, the same law becomes a delight. The beloved John declared, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3. Not only is the law not grievous for the Spirit-filled child of God, but obedience becomes a joyful possibility. The psalmist wrote, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Psalms 40:8.

No Change in the New Covenant After Calvary

Since the New Covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, it obviously could not have gone into effect until after Jesus died on the cross. This crucial fact must not be overlooked. Eternal life or death could hinge upon the proper understanding of this key point. Paul wrote, "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth." Hebrews 9:16, 17. The word "testament" is the same as the word "covenant." Only after a man's last will and testament has been ratified by his death can the provisions be executed. In the same way, Christ's covenant or testament would begin to operate just as soon as He had confirmed the covenant by His death at Calvary.

Another text leaves no question on this issue: "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto." Galatians 3:15. Paul is saying here that after a man's death, his will or covenant cannot be changed. Not one new addition can be made after the death of the testator. The covenant stands forever exactly as it stood

when the testator died. After the death of Christ, no change whatsoever could be made in His provisions to save mankind. The conditions were all sealed and ratified by the shedding of blood. Every requirement had been laid down clearly by the perfect pattern of His sinless life and provision had been made for the writing of His magnified law, by the Holy Spirit, upon the mind of each believer. Under the terms of that New Covenant not one soul would be left to struggle helplessly against the powerful urges of a fallen nature. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Romans 5:20. Eternal promises rooted in the changeless nature of God would provide power to overcome every inherited and cultivated weakness. No wonder the Bible emphasizes the "better promises" of this glorious new agreement!

Now it is easy to understand some of the things Jesus did just before He died. For example, why did He institute the Lord's Supper before His body had been broken? On the Thursday night before His agonizing death on Friday, Jesus met with His disciples in that upper room. Holding the cup in His hands, He said, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matthew 26:28.

Isn't it curious that Christ would say those words before His blood had been shed? He was commanding a memorial for an event which had not even happened yet! Why? Because it had to be introduced before His death in order to come under the New Covenant. Nothing could be added after His death. Now, let me come back to the story I started to tell at the beginning of the book. I had just finished preaching on the subject of the Sabbath in one of my evangelistic crusades. As I stepped off the platform to greet the people as they left, three young men blocked my way in the aisle. One of them addressed me in quite a loud voice - loud enough to cause about fifty people near the front of the auditorium to stop and listen.

"Brother Joe," he said, "we were disappointed tonight with the way you put us back under the Old Covenant. Don't you realize that we are living under the New Covenant now, and should keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath?"

Although most of the congregation were leaving the building, the group near the front gathered closer to hear all that the young men were saying. It was obvious that I would have to take the time to answer this trio's challenging question. As I suspected, they turned out to be young seminarians in training at a local Bible college. Eagerly they held their Bibles in their hands and waited triumphantly for me to answer.

Usually, I do not like to debate controversial matters in a public forum, for fear of stirring combative natures, but there seemed no way to avoid dealing with these ministerial students. Anyway, they had my path completely blocked, and the circle of listeners looked at me expectantly for some explanation.

"Well, it seems as though you have studied the subject of the covenants quite deeply," I suggested.

"Oh, yes," they affirmed, "we know all about the covenants."

"Good," I replied. "You undoubtedly know when the Old Covenant was instituted." One of them spoke up quickly, "It was started at Mt. Sinai."

"And how was it ratified?" I asked. Without a moment's hesitation one of them answered, "By the sprinkling of the blood of an ox."

"Very good," I commented, "and how was the New Covenant ratified?" All three chorused the answer, "By the blood of Jesus on the cross."

I commended the young men for their knowledge of the Scriptures and asked them to read me two verses out of their own Bibles - Hebrews 9:16, 17 and Galatians 3:15. They responded eagerly to the invitation, and read the verses, commenting on each one after reading. "We agree that the New Covenant did not go into effect until after Christ died, and nothing can be added or taken away after He ratified it on the cross," the spokesman for the group asserted. All three nodded their heads emphatically over this point.

I said, "Now you must answer two more questions for me. Here's the first one, and you must think carefully to give me the correct answer: When did Sunday-keeping begin?" There was a moment of shocked silence, and then another, and another. The boys looked at each other, and then down at their feet, and then back at me. I gently prodded them for the answer, "Surely you can tell me the answer to

this question. You have known all the others, and have answered correctly. When and why do you think people began keeping Sunday?"

Finally, one of them said, "We keep Sunday in honor of the resurrection of Jesus." I said, "Then I must ask you my last question. How could Sundaykeeping be a part of the New Covenant? You just stated that nothing could be added after the death of Christ. He died on Friday and was resurrected on Sunday. If Sunday was added after Jesus died, it could never be a part of the New Covenant, could it?"

The three young men shuffled their feet, looked helplessly around, and one of them said, "We'll study into that and talk to you later." Then they fled from that auditorium as fast as they could go. I can assure you, also, that they never returned to talk further about the covenants.

The fact is that Sundaykeeping, even if it had started on the day of the resurrection, would have been three days too late to get into the New Covenant. Both Bible and history prove that Sunday was never observed by the apostolic church. It was added much, much later as a result of the gradual apostasy which developed in the early centuries of the church and which culminated in the pagan accommodation of Constantine in 330 A.D.

Millions of modern church members regard Sunday as a sacred day which memorializes the resurrection of Christ. It is certainly true that Christ arose on the first day of the week, but nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to keep that day holy. Events such as the crucifixion and resurrection should mean much to every Christian, but not one intimation is given in the Bible for observing either Friday or Sunday. The only day ever commanded for weekly worship is the seventh day of the week - the same Sabbath Jesus kept during creation week and the one He will keep with His people throughout all eternity. Genesis 2:1-3; Isaiah 66:22, 23.

The very strongest reason for rejecting Sunday worship is that it was not included in the New Covenant requirements which were ratified by the death of Jesus. If Christ had desired His resurrection to be memorialized by Sundaykeeping, He could have introduced it on that same Thursday night of the Last Supper. Then it would have become a part of the New Covenant, along with the Communion service and foot-washing. Jesus did not hesitate to command the observance of His death, even though it had not taken place yet. Just as easily He could have commanded the observance of His resurrection, which was still future, in order that it might become a New Covenant requirement. *But He did not!* And no one else ever did either, until Paul's prophecy began to be fulfilled about an apostasy following his departure. Acts 20:29, 30. He spoke also of a falling away which would lead to the enthronement of Antichrist. 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. But true it is that no hint of any change of the law is given in the Scriptures. The unchangeable moral law was preserved in both Old and New Covenants as the perfect revelation of God's will.

Ishmael and Isaac Represent Two Covenants

With this background, we are now prepared to examine Galatians 4. Many have been confused over the allegory Paul used to illustrate the Old and New Covenants. Here is the way he wrote about it: "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." Verses 22-25.

Paul portrays Isaac and Ishmael, the two sons of Abraham, as representing the Old and New Covenants. He plainly shows that Hagar's son, Ishmael, symbolizes the Old Covenant, and Sarah's son, Isaac, is a type of the New Covenant. "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. ... So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." Verses 28-31.

This is interesting. How do those sons of those two women represent the two covenants? Actually, they are a perfect illustration according to everything we have learned so far. God had promised Abraham a son by his wife Sarah, but because she was almost 90 years old, neither of them believed such a thing could happen. Sarah knew that her womb was dead and that she was long past the age for bearing children. So she suggested that her husband take Hagar, her handmaid, and have a child by her. It seemed the only way to rescue God from an impossible promise. In time, Abraham yielded to the face-

saving device and had a child by Hagar.

Here is an exact illustration of the Old Covenant principle of "we will do." Abraham tried to work it out in the flesh, according to human effort and planning. The old arrangement failed just as surely as the Old Covenant promises failed, because there was no dependence on divine power. God did not ever recognize Ishmael as the promised seed.

When Isaac was born, it was a miracle. God actually created a new life out of a biologically barren womb. The physical impossibilities yielded to the supernatural, creative power of God. Isaac perfectly represents the principle of the New Covenant relationship based upon regeneration, a new-birth experience, which begets the life of the Son of God in all who believe. The natural, physical womb of Sarah was totally incapable of producing any fruit. In the same way, the natural, carnal body and mind of a sinner cannot bring forth the fruit of obedience. When God used His power to create a new life within Sarah, the impossible happened, and she bore a son. When God uses His power to create new life in the soul, the impossible happens again - a human being becomes spiritual and obedient.

Isaac was not "born after the flesh," but "after the Spirit." Galatians 4:29. Because man is carnal and "weak in the flesh," he has no power to attain to the righteousness of the law. He, too, must be born after the Spirit. Every attempt to obey on the Old-Covenant basis of human effort will produce only children of bondage. The law must be written into the heart by the Holy Spirit and fulfilled by "Christ in you."

This allegory of Hagar and Sarah clears up another very important point of truth. Those who are under the Old Covenant are the commandment breakers, and those under the New Covenant are the commandment keepers. It was only when Abraham disobeyed God by taking Hagar that he fulfilled the principle of the Old Covenant. When he trusted God to give him a son through Sarah, he was being obedient to God's will, and properly represents the New-Covenant Christians. Yet how often do modern interpreters get these facts confused! Like the three young preachers, they accuse law-keepers of being under the Old Covenant. The truth is exactly the opposite. The law is not really kept until it is written on the heart of the transformed believer. Then it becomes the mark of identification - the love symbol - for those who are born of the Spirit. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." 1 John 5:3.

True Circumcision is Not Physical

Have you ever wondered why God gave circumcision to Abraham as a sign of the Old Covenant?

Doesn't that seem to be a rather crude way to represent such an important agreement? Think about it for a moment and it might begin to make a lot of sense. God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision to remind him of how he failed by trusting the flesh. All through the Scriptures, physical circumcision is related to dependence on the flesh. Paul wrote, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Philippians 3:3.

Paul was comparing true circumcision with "that which is called circumcision." The cutting off of the flesh was not true circumcision at all: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Romans 2:28, 29. Notice how Paul turns from the flesh to the Spirit. He says real circumcision happens to the heart, and it exalts what God does, and not man. It is the cutting off of the fleshly nature through conversion. The new birth is the true circumcision experience.

The clearest explanation is found in Paul's epistle to the Colossians: "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Colossians 2:11.

Here the spiritual work of Christ on the heart is called circumcision. It is done without hands, indicating that no human effort could perform this act. It is not cutting off the physical flesh, but cutting off the fleshly nature of sin through the indwelling of Christ. It will be available to all on exactly the same basis: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:29. All who receive Christ become heirs of all the promises made to Abraham. Those experiencing true heart-circumcision constitute the real Jews.

No longer can anyone boast of belonging to the right physical family. There is no more Jew or Gentile, male or female. Acceptance is based upon personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Neither can any man claim special favor for cutting off the physical foreskin of flesh. Those things were done by people who based everything on "we will do." They sought justification and salvation through works of the flesh. God's new plan through Christ is not of works, but of grace through faith.

Does this mean that works are no longer important? Since the law cannot justify, should it be abolished by the believer? The doctrine of the covenants establishes beyond any doubt that the law is just as important under the New as under the Old. Instead of being graven on stone, it is written in the heart. Instead of being fulfilled by us, it is fulfilled by Jesus in us. Instead of keeping the law in order to be saved, we keep it because we are saved. The same works of obedience are there, but they are there for a different reason and from a different motive.

Sometimes, without realizing it, we can begin to trust our traditional round of religious exercises far more than we ought. No merit system must clog the free channels of faith, love, and grace. Obedience in its proper position is important and necessary, but it must always be in that position - following grace and accompanied by love.

In fact, it is possible to put ourselves back under the Old Covenant even today if we begin to trust our works to save us. Just as the saints of old could have received true circumcision by accepting spiritual regeneration, we may fall back under the Old Covenant by trusting the flesh to save us.