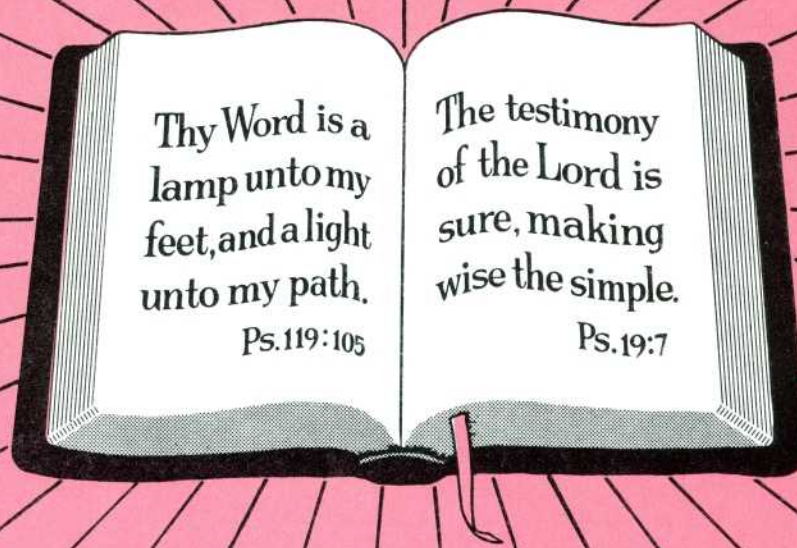


Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

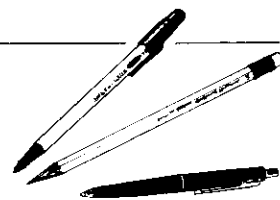


Solomon: the Colossal Failure

Understanding the Bible

Holiness Is Not An Option

Confident or Overconfident?



Do It Heartily!

ATTITUDES seem to be changing. Modern technical knowledge has made work much easier for many, and an affluence has made it possible for thousands to spend lives of indolence. Unknown numbers of people who are capable of caring for themselves spend their lives "on relief," living on the fruits of the toil of others. And too often, the next generation of these people expects the same. There is a lack of motivation to work and be self-supporting. This is not healthy, either from a human point of view or from God's point of view.

But fortunately, there are still many people who believe in work. These people may work from very widely differing motives. Some work to fulfill a long-term goal or ambition; others because they feel they have to in order to make a livelihood, while others expend their effort to contribute to the well-being of society. They enjoy their work.

Three bricklayers were once asked this question: "What are you doing?" The first answered abruptly, "Why can't you see what I'm doing? I'm laying bricks!" The second replied that he was trying to eke out an existence for himself and his family. The third answered proudly, "I am helping to build a great cathedral." To the first man, his work was merely a job. The third saw his work as contributing to a great cause.

This was the thought of the late President Kennedy when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Attitude makes the whole difference in the achievements of work. The apostle Paul recognized this when he wrote, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the

inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24). What greater motivation could a man have in doing something of value than to be doing something that pleases God and thus is preparing him for a lasting place in God's great realm?

The leaders of the early Christian Church felt that temporal work was honourable, for Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess. 3:10). The world does not owe us a living, and we should not expect to get the things we either want or need for nothing. God wants us to *work* for them.

But we should think of life as more than working to make a living, or to occupy time. It should be more than mere existence. All that we do—whether the work be done to meet temporal needs or to accomplish spiritual good—or both—should be motivated by a desire to serve God in the doing, hence we should do it "heartily, as to the Lord."

This is a tremendous task, requiring courage, zeal, dedication and far-sighted vision on our part. But it will add purpose to our living and illumine any drudgery with new light when we realize that our work is counting not only for the moment's good but is preparing for us a place in the eternal world to come.

Isn't this reason enough to do our work heartily as "to the Lord," knowing that "of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ"? The rewards we will receive for our work reach beyond this world, even granting us an abundant entrance "into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:11) if we do our work "heartily as to the Lord."

Isn't this worth the effort?

Megiddo means

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon); "a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (II Cor. 10:4-5).

We believe

—in God the Creator of all things, all men, and all life.

We believe

—in the Bible as containing the genuine revelation of God and His purposes for men, and as being our only source of divine knowledge today.

We believe

—in Christ the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was born of a Virgin, ministered among men, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.

We believe

—in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.

We believe

—in all mankind as providing the nucleus from which a superior, God-honoring people shall be chosen to receive the blessings of immortal life.

We believe

—in ourselves as capable of fulfilling the demands and disciplines given us in the law of God, thus perfecting that high quality of character which God has promised to reward with life everlasting in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

We believe

—in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth will be filled with His glory, His people, and His will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

Bible quotations in this issue:

Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version. Other versions are identified as follows:

NEB—New English Bible

NIV—New International Version

NAS—New American Standard

RSV—Revised Standard Version

TLB—The Living Bible

TEV—Today's English Version

JB—The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition

Phillips—The New Testament in Modern English

Berkeley—The Modern Language New Testament

Weymouth—The New Testament in Modern Speech

Moffatt—The Bible, A New Translation

Williams—The New Testament, A Translation in the Language of the People

Rotherham—The Emphasized Old Testament

The use of selected references from various versions of the Bible does not necessarily imply publisher endorsement of the versions in their entirety.

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Solomon: the Colossal Failure

ON THE cathedral door in Pisa, Italy, is a famous scene cast in three-dimensional bronze. It depicts the day of Judgment. On the left are the damned, quaking with fear as they think of the horrors of hell. On the right are the saved, anticipating with ecstatic joy the bliss of glory. In between is Solomon, rising out of the grave. He seems puzzled, uncertain, troubled. He looks to the left, then to the right. With which group does he belong? The picture does not answer, but the answer is certain: Solomon failed.

While we know that no burning hell awaits the unfaithful nor is heaven the home-to-be of the righteous, the reality of the coming Judgment and the finality of its decisions are facts inescapable. God does not call us into His service and reveal to us His plan and the wonders He holds in store for faithful servants, and then let us take it or leave it at our caprice. We are responsible for our use of these privileges. We will be judged, for "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (II Cor. 5:10). Some, like Paul and Peter, Moses and Daniel, will be accepted and welcomed into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord. Others will be rejected; Solomon will be one of these. We need not be—if we take warning from his mistakes and do not likewise.

Background

So let us think back on the life of Solomon. No man ever had a more promising beginning than Solomon, the third king of the united Kingdom of Israel. His father David was a gifted man, a military genius, an able political organizer, a sensitive and creative poet. Solomon's mother, too, was an extraordinary person, highly intelligent and gifted, what most people would consider successful. What more could a child need to have outstanding prospects of success in this world?

But the parents of Solomon had their weaknesses, too. And Solomon seems to have inherited both the best

and the worst traits of both. In the course of time, the combination of inherited traits, added to his own woeful lack of self-discipline and direction, led to his dramatic personal failure and even to apostasy from the faith.

But we are perhaps getting ahead of our story. Let us go back for a moment to the time when Solomon first entered the official picture. When the proper time came, David called a great convocation of his officials and announced his successor to his throne. The successor was God's own choice. His name: Solomon.

In making Solomon king over all Israel, David acknowledged humbly how the Lord had taken pleasure in him and his family. These are David's words as he first addresses the people:

"Of all my sons, (for the Lord hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel...for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. Moreover, I will establish his kingdom for ever if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day."

David's words were not complete without a thoughtful admonition to all his hearers to obey the Lord their God. His first concern was the spiritual welfare both of the people and of his son. "Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.

"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it" (I Chron. 28:5-10).

The assembly was brought to a close by David offering a prayer of dedication in which he again pleaded in behalf of Solomon: "Give my son Solomon a good heart toward God, so that he will want to obey you in the smallest detail, and will look forward eagerly to finishing the build-

Note: *Solomon: the Colossal Failure* is available as a complete church service on cassette. Price: \$3.00

ing of your temple, for which I have made all these preparations" (v. 19, TLB).

Despite this public pronouncement by King David, Solomon's ascent to the throne was not without serious opposition. David was old and dying. His son Adonijah, the son of Haggith, who had never been disciplined by his father, "not so much as by a single word," decided to take the throne by a coup d'etat. So he organized a conspiracy which included General Joab, Abiathar the high priest, and all the king's sons except Solomon.

Nathan, God's loyal and courageous prophet, heard of the plot and took immediate action to thwart it. Enlisting the help of Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and Zadok the priest, he strategically informed the dying king. David immediately took vigorous and decisive action on behalf of Solomon, who was at once crowned king with appropriate ceremonies. The plot of Adonijah forthrightly collapsed and all of the leading conspirators, including Adonijah himself, were liquidated. This may seem like harsh treatment, but obviously God sanctioned it.

King Solomon

The impression we get of Solomon as he comes to the throne is that of a strong, fearless ruler who knows how to make difficult decisions and act decisively and courageously. His grip upon the kingdom seems secure, for we read that "the national leaders, the army officers, and his own brothers all pledged their allegiance to King Solomon" (v. 24). It was a good beginning.

Soon after his coronation, Solomon had a dream in which God said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

"And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge thy this so great a people?"

The Lord was pleased with Solomon's request for wisdom; hence His reply: "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself,...but has asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment, behold I have done according to thy words: lo I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee

**In the Judgment,
Solomon will be rejected.
We need not be—if we take
warning from his mistakes
and do not likewise.**

before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee....And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days" (I Kings 3:5-14).

Can we fathom the goodness of our God and the marvels of His workings? for God gave Solomon wisdom, plus riches, plus honor, plus fame, plus long life.

What is the lesson here for us? Seek the very best that God can give, and He will add more "extras" than you ever even dreamed could be yours. It is all part of His plan for a hundredfold of blessing.

Among those who heard of Solomon's wisdom was the famed Queen of Sheba. After viewing the splendor of his palaces and the efficiency of his administration she exclaimed: "Everything I heard in my own country about your wisdom and about the wonderful things going on there is all true. I didn't believe it until I came, but now I have seen it for myself! And really! The half has not been told me!" (I Kings 10:6-7, TLB).

The High Moment of Achievement

The greatest of Solomon's achievements was the building of the Temple of God, one of the wonders of the ancient world. Using the blueprints and the vast quantities of material collected by his father, together with resources provided by a prosperous nation and friendly foreign powers, the monumental task was quickly brought to completion.

Then followed the dedication service. At this time, King Solomon seemed still an ardent, loyal servant of the Lord. His prayer on that great occasion is one of the most eloquent and deeply moving prayers in the Word of God. And as Solomon finished praying, the Lord showed His approval of the offering, for the Sacred Record declares that "fire flashed down from heaven and burned up the sacrifices! And the glory of the Lord filled the Temple, so that the priests could not enter" (II Chron. 7:12, TLB).

What might we have thought, had we been present in Jerusalem that day? Would not we have renewed our

hearts to seek the Lord and serve Him wholeheartedly all our days?

Solomon was master of ceremonies that day; he heard the voice of God's angel; he saw the fire descend. How could he ever forget?

...With Warning

Soon after, perhaps that very night, the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time and said, "I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice....And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments; then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house, which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations" (II Chron. 7:13, 17-20).

What stern words of warning to a heart apparently so

sincere! But God knew Solomon's heart, just as He knows yours and mine. As it is truly written, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Only by being "constant" (I Chron. 28:7), by "not turning away," by "following diligently," can we be sure of our success. Does not God know? He does.

Prosperity Galore, But...

Nevertheless, God poured out His blessings while Solomon was faithful. The prosperity and wealth of Solomon were almost unbelievable, even by modern standards. Silver and gold were said to be as plentiful in Jerusalem as rocks on the road. And expensive cedar lumber was used like common sycamore (II Chron. 9:27, TLB). In addition to all he had, Solomon received, we are told, a billion dollars' worth of gold each year from the kings of Arabia, and many other lands paid annual tributes to him (I Kings 10:14). The Queen of Sheba gave the king a gift valued in 1960 at \$3,500,000 of gold, along with huge quantities of spices and precious gems. Frequent reference is made to Solomon's large stables of horses imported from Egypt, and to his thriving international trade with its balance in Israel's favor. Solomon prospered.

But all was not rosy. At the same time that the coffers

Let Us Pray...

Merciful Father, once again we draw nigh Thee in prayer, thanking Thee for all the mercies that flow into our lives, and confessing that too often we have not been worthy of all these mercies. Many times we have done the things we should not have done, and left undone the things we should have done. But may the time past of our lives have sufficed us to try to feign to be what we are not, and from henceforth may our whole aim be, "All of Thee, and none of self."

Help us to take a lesson from the life of a man like King Solomon, who was given such wisdom and abilities above those of the ordinary man, and yet allowed his fleshly tendencies and the pride of his heart to cause him to forget Thee and make shipwreck of his life. Instead of saying NO to himself at the danger point, he tampered with sin, went backward until he felt obliged to admit that he himself was an old and foolish king who would no longer be admonished.

May the history of the backsliders in past days impress us with the weakness of the flesh, and may we so be on

our guard lest we, too, fail by the way, lest we, too, become tolerant of self and so forget to be watchful, lest trusting to our own righteousness we fail in our effort to live the higher life. May we always remember that Thou art a God of knowledge, and by Thee actions and actions only are weighed. And if we trust to our own righteousness and commit iniquity we shall be rejected in the end and, like King Solomon and the nation of Israel, we shall be cast off.

Help us, then, not to have too much confidence in self, not to be too tolerant with the unholy tendencies of our lower nature, but establish for our selves a set margin, a definite line between what is right and what is wrong, and never allow ourselves the freedom to step over that line, even in thought, aware that the thought of foolishness is sin. Remind us that the way to life is strait and narrow, and that the slightest compromise with the flesh will spell our eternal ruin. Then when Thou speakest may we listen; when Thou commandest may we obey, knowing that in the Day of Final Account we shall be judged by what we have done, and that no fixing up or smoothing over will then be possible. The only way we can be assured of success in that Day is to now banish all sin from our lives, becoming clean through and through.

Be with us in this service, and may it bring to us a blessing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

were overflowing, there were signs of trouble ahead. Even in the building of the Temple there was extensive use of forced or slave labor. And the king who had set his heart on the great things of earth now deemed it necessary to conscript labor for such projects as the erecting of magnificent palaces, Fort Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, and the cities of Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer. The economy was progressively developing an insecure base. Taxes were high and getting higher. Solomon had a growing reputation as a hard driving Oriental despot. His ungodliness was becoming more and more apparent.

Then there were his wives. In order to negotiate political and economic treaties with foreign nations which would be favorable to Israel, Solomon arranged marriages with pagan princesses, even taking the daughter of Egypt's Pharaoh. The author of First Kings describes it in these words:

"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of that nation concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father....And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods" (I Kings 11:1-8). What degradation!

Reasons, Reasons...and Recompense

We can be sure that in Solomon's mind it was all justified at the first. Was it not good policy for the nation's security, and was not God backing the nation? Was it not sensible to have the allied support and friendship of neighboring nations? Did not this decrease the likelihood of war and help cut the cost of national defense?

But we—who can so easily see through Solomon's "reasons"—do we not see in ourselves a similar tendency, to justify that which gives us temporal advantage, comfort or convenience, as though God were primarily interested in these? Do we not see in ourselves a warming desire for that which satisfies some earthly longing? And have we not, on occasion, justified such—as though God could not see beyond appearances to read our heart?

God gave Solomon wisdom, plus riches, plus honor, plus fame, plus long life.

God read Solomon's heart, we can be sure, just as He reads your heart and mine. And God was not pleased either with Solomon's outer or inner "reasons" for the disobedience. Why should Solomon transgress His law to protect a kingdom God was protecting? And now Solomon's first interest was no longer in pleasing the Lord God of Israel; now he sought to please his wives. To do this he worshiped *their* gods! Had not the living God twice appeared to Solomon with the specific intent of warning him against this? But Solomon had not listened.

So now the Lord said to him, "Forasmuch as...thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake; but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son" (I Kings 11:11-13).

This was the end of peace for Solomon, for "the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon," even "Hadad the Edomite"; again we read that "God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon, the son of Eliadah,...and he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did: and [God] abhorred Israel" (I Kings 11:14, 23, 25). God was showing His displeasure. Meanwhile an able young Jewish leader, Jeroboam, was gathering strength for an internal opposition movement. This young man was later to be head of the Northern Kingdom after the nation was divided under the weak and foolhardy leadership of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor.

The Bible record gives most of its space to the events of the first half of his 40-year reign. The later years were clouded with growing problems both at home and abroad—problems largely of Solomon's own making. As for Solomon himself, these years were marked by a growing cynicism, disillusionment, and even despair. The book of Ecclesiastes reflects his too-late recognizing of his own folly, as he writes: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." It is the testimony of an old man who had tasted every conceivable physical, sensual, and aesthetic pleasure earth can afford. Solomon lacked nothing; yet, at the close of his life, he lacked everything. The prospect of future joy, the hope born of a life of self-sacrifice and godly service, is sadly and conspicuously lacking from Ecclesiastes. Solomon *knew*, but Solomon did not *do*. What a lesson for us! MM

The Principle of the Moral Margin

MANY efforts have been made to account for the personal shipwreck of Solomon. But one fact seems central and crucial: the lack of a moral margin in his life, a boundary fixed well on the safe side and beyond which he would not allow himself to go. In his earlier years, he seemed to have a clear sense of right and wrong, even of the important distinctions between the good, better and best. His were personal advantages enjoyed by very, very few in the course of history, as he spoke to the Lord and the Lord to him.

But as his power, wealth and popularity increased, so did his spirit of self-confident independence. God, the source of all, faded into the background as Solomon grew more and more tolerant, more and more broad-minded, more and more aware of what mortals thought of him. The clear distinction between the holy, righteous God of Israel and the vile, pagan deities of the heathen nations around became blurred. This was particularly evident as his pagan wives subtly, then more and more directly, influenced his thinking and living. Slowly, ever so slowly he came to accommodate himself to their views. The first result was probably confusion, uncertainty and minor compromise. In the end, it became outright disloyalty and disobedience to the will of God; then, total apostasy. And the day is coming when he shall yet have to face the consequences of his sin. He chose his course of action during his life; but he shall not be able to choose the consequences of that course; they are fixed.

What might have saved him from these consequences? And what will save you and me from moral and

spiritual disaster? The answer lies in our maintaining a definite moral margin, a set spiritual boundary in our thinking and living, with a wide zone of safety to eliminate any possibility of overstepping. Some may think our boundaries too exacting and our safety zone too wide; but who would choose the fate of Solomon?

Boundaries serve a dual purpose: they fix and define a limit or extent of authority; and they form a line of separation. Physical boundaries, such as those between the United States and Canada, are established. In contrast, for years the boundary between Peru and Chile was not drawn; the result was fighting—because the people living in the area were unsure of their loyalties. They had never lived by a plain, firmly drawn line.

Or a boundary may be drawn but not marked, and the resulting problem is the same. The boundary between the states of California and Oregon is established, but it is not marked all the way. It is simply a surveyed line through the wilderness. A hunter with a valid California hunting license might unwittingly and unintentionally wander over into Oregon and be arrested for illegally hunting simply because the boundary was unmarked.

Now let us apply these types of boundaries to the moral realm that concerns us. If there is an area where boundaries are uncertain or not clearly marked in our spiritual lives, what should we do? The all-out Christian policy is to stay so far on the right side that there will be a clear distance between our conduct and anything that is even morally questionable. It is the only safe course; it is the only *right* course.

What makes a certain course of action questionable? We might reason something like this: If in our most spiritual and thoughtful moments, when we are most alive mentally and most in tune with the Word of God, if in such moments as these, after due deliberation, the reading of the Word, prayer and counsel with the most mature and spiritual people that we know, we can sense that something in our lives is questionable, then we must put it resolutely aside. We must be right, observing strictly our moral boundaries. There is strength, there is safety, there is opportunity to be a blessing to others in this policy, and the surety that we are right in the sight of God Almighty.

The call of our Master to discipleship was according to this plan. It demanded a clearcut severance from the old life and all that appertained to it. Jesus spoke in terms that implied the use of drastic measures, if necessary, to keep oneself on the safe side of the moral margin. He spoke of denying ourselves, taking up crosses daily, cutting off hands and feet if need be—anything to insure our complete, wholehearted obedience. We know that Jesus did not mean this in a crudely literal sense, but the implication is clear. The challenge of the apostle Paul to discipleship is no less demanding: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17-18).

True, committed Christians are not those trying to live as near as possible to the borderline of questionable practices and still remain

Christians. Not at all! They are not like the chariot driver who, to demonstrate his skill, drove his wheel just as near as he possibly could to the edge of the precipice. Never! The true, all-out follower of Christ realizes that "that which is open to question is *not* open to indulgence"—at least for those who would keep on the safe side of the moral margin.

But the principle of the moral margin involves far more than avoiding questionable practices. It involves also a solid set of standards well within the safety zone, doing more than mere duty demands, so that there never need be any possibility of stepping over. This is where Solomon failed.

Consciously or unconsciously, in word and action, each of us calculates what we consider to be our duty—how we should behave in our relations with one another; how we should conduct ourselves before the world; what we should talk about; what we should think about; how much time and interest we should devote to direct reading and study of the Word, prayer and the work of our King—and by this standard we tend to judge ourselves and others. If not careful, we may forget to realize that when we think we are safe—well on the right side of the moral margin—we may have miscalculated; we may have overlooked some duty to God or to man, and may be placing ourselves in greater danger than we imagined; this is when God may allow something to happen to shock us to our senses, to teach us a lesson, that we may proceed stronger and more prepared for the life that is our responsibility—and perhaps with a wider safety zone on the right side of the moral margin. We cannot give only our minimum, consistently stay as close as possible to the margin, and expect never to overstep in word or deed or thought. If we figure just enough to "get by," we are sure to find ourselves at some point in the wrong. This is what Jesus meant

when He talked of going the second mile, of giving "the cloak also," and of forgiving to "seventy times seven." He lived by the principle of the moral margin in His own life and enjoined it upon us by both example and precept. Why? Because He knew it is the key to spiritual safety and to the highest and widest usefulness both in this world and in the world to come.

Those who consistently do more than duty demands live more abundantly even now. And those who consistently keep themselves further than necessary within a well established moral margin and comply strictly with God's law have the assurance of living in the world to come. They have character—with a spiritual reserve. They are all-out for God and His Kingdom, and want *nothing* to stand in the way of their success; so they take extra precaution; they give not the bare minimum but a little *more* than duty demands. Are they not surer of success? Are they not surer of an abundant entrance into the ever-lasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

When storms of adversity come, or winds of opposition blow, or the floods of temptation rise, these Christians-plus have a something extra which the situation requires. They are able to stand firm while those with less character reserves or lesser spiritual resources are cracking under the strain, or are being blown about like chaff in the blast.

Why will a fixed moral margin in our lives save us from the spiritual tragedy that was Solomon's? Here are four specific reasons:

First, the moral margin is the secret of dependability. The fogs and mists throng the moral borderlines. The entirely dependable life stays out in the clear—on the right side. The stronger and purer the character, the more imperative this becomes. In direct proportion to the standard of spiritual excellence required, compromise is impossible. And if the standard be a little higher than abso-

lutely necessary, where is the harm? A single leak sinks a great ship. A single moral misstep may ruin the record of a lifetime. Then, too, only that standard which we have built into our lives and which has become a habit with us will be a dependable reserve when severely tested. To do right must be second nature to us. Here is the secret of dependability, strength and safety—and god-likeness.

For this reason, the moral margin is the only sure preparation for life's emergencies. Emergencies will come; no one is immune. In any age and stage of life may come the unexpected temptation, sorrow, trial, or sacrifice, the challenge of a unique service for Christ, and we must be prepared. How? By living at the minimum level of our commitment, squeezing into our lives just as many of the pleasures of the broad way as we can, doing the very least we can get by with in self-discipline and self-control? No! A thousand times no. If we have not trained ourselves in the lesser trials of life to keep well within a set moral margin, with a safety zone to spare, how shall we survive the greater trials?

A second reason for a moral margin is for the sake of our Christian example. As Christians we can afford to be disliked, opposed, or to have our ideas rejected; we can forego popularity, but our character must be aboveboard. And the firmer our moral margin and the wider the zone of safety we maintain, the surer will be our character.

To have others doubt our judgment is one thing; to have them deny our sincerity or moral candor is another. Hence we must keep at least a day's journey from all questionable boundaries. Our honor as men and women of God must be irreproachable. Happy is the one whose character hangs on no perilous edge of doubtful practice.

The final reason for believing in the moral margin is that it is necessary to

keep us spiritually alive. By it we save ourselves from a host of entanglements and encumbrances which could make serious spiritual living all but impossible. There are hundreds and thousands of issues and problems that throng the borderlines. All of these *can* be avoided—thus freeing us for prayer, meditation and sincere spiritual growth which will prepare us for life in the world to come. If our desire for life in God's kingdom is the first concern of our lives, we will keep as far as possible from the borderlines. We need all our mind and all our strength for serving God. We have nothing to waste on anything questionable.

Oh, let us renew our determination to avoid anything that would encumber us, to let go any interest which tends to distract us from our high calling; to keep clear of anything which might hinder us in offering that entire living sacrifice which is holy and acceptable unto our God, that we may be available for His service through all the cycles of eternity. MM

Accept the Challenge: "Be Ye Therefore Perfect"

PERFECTING a character is said to be impossible. The plain simple fact is: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Looking in three other translations (Phillips, Moffatt and Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott), we find they all agree that we are to be perfect as God is perfect.

According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the word translated "perfect" comes from the Greek word *teleious* which means "complete" (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.). Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon agrees, "having reached its end, finished, complete."

All these references agree that Christ meant exactly what He said. We can come to only one conclusion: The world is ignorant of such plain teachings, and even when you show this verse to the "devout Christians," they simply reply, "Oh, it does not mean that. Christ died in our place and our sins are covered." Another favorite is: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and concluding they say, "Jesus did it all for me."

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Yes, the majority of so-called Christians are ignorant of this one fact; and worse,

they like it that way. It is amazing to me that one would prefer ignorance in place of godly wisdom. But they do not want to fight the cravings of the carnal nature. They want to live a carefree life and believe they are all right.

"Be ye therefore perfect" has no suggestion of someone else doing it for you. Why did Jesus give the admonition to "be perfect" if He was to take our place, excusing us from this work? Paul came into the true Christian fold after Christ's crucifixion. He thought Jesus meant what He said, for he reminded the Corinthians that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (II Cor. 10:4). Paul speaks as though we are soldiers at war, that we are waging war and pulling down strongholds. But these strongholds are not enemy forts with their trenches, high walls and military machinery, for Paul says that our weapons are not of this sort, not carnal, but mighty through God.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, a man writing by the inspiration of God, one living after Jesus was crucified, is telling us how to be perfect. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect." Paul believes it is still binding after Jesus' cruel death, for he says that we must pull down those strongholds preventing us from being perfect by "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" (v. 5).

If we cast away vain imaginations such as "We are saved now; Jesus did it all: You can't be saved by works"; if we banish from our mind every high thing, worldly honor, high positions, envy, jealousy and anything else that may stand between us and the knowledge of God; and if we learn to bridle our minds, bringing them into control, being perfectly obedient to Christ, have not we perfected our characters?

But this is a lesson too hard for the carnally minded, a work with too great a challenge. However, there have been a few who accepted that challenge and won. Yes, they won! It is not impossible.

Will we be among those few who win?

—Contributed.

*I heard His call, "Come, follow!"
That was all.*

*My gold grew dim,
My soul went after Him,
That was all.*

*Who would not follow
If they heard Him call?*

— *And Still She Speaks* —

Part Five

The following lines are extracts from sermons, discussions, talks, comments by Rev. Maud Hembree (1853-1935).



"Faith of Our Fathers" is a hymn we often sing, often comment on, but it never grows old. When we say faith of our fathers, we understand it means Abraham, Daniel, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul and Peter, all those instructors, the holy men through whom God spoke. "Faith which the ancient prophets taught"—that is the faith of our fathers.

"May we be true to Thee till death." It is wonderful to be true to that faith. We must be careful. We might believe it and teach it and yet not be true to it. We are not true to that faith of our fathers till we get out every discord, all evil feelings, all hurt feelings, all pride, impatience, everything in opposition to His law. We must realize hurt feelings will keep us from entering the Kingdom. We might feel we would give up our life before we would deny that faith, yet in our daily life we deny it so easily. In our daily life, one act of selfishness mars the whole picture. It takes only one act to mar the whole picture, one act contrary to God's commandments. Just like a grain of poison, it spoils the whole. So God requires us to be true to that faith till death.



If you are not faithful in "the least," how are you ever going to get faithful in "much"? If you do not learn to be just in the least, how are you going to learn to be just in great things? That is why children should be taught not to take one solitary thing that does not belong to them. Little things lead to greater things.



If only we listen and heed the trumpet of the Lord, a trumpet that does not give an uncertain sound, we will save our life.

It is a bad condition to be in to be literally deaf, quite a misfortune; but oh, to be mentally deaf and not take in and take heed to the words of the Almighty is worse. As Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."



If you think you never had any selfishness, any pride, any envy ruling and governing you, you are blind, you do not see yourself. Now examine yourself in the light of truth.

If we are so self-satisfied that we think we are all right, we do not see ourselves and are not growing.



I have told you about the man in Springfield, Ohio, years ago. He loved to tell that he never had any great temptations, he lived a life above reproach and yet, he said, "My wife has such a temper." Of course, he knew we were trying to sound the trumpet of the Lord. It turned out he was only self-deceived. And in his last moments, right at the end of his life, when he realized what he had failed to do, he told Brother Nichols, "If I had only looked at you as I do now, I would not be where I am now." He realized it was too late, the shadow of death hovered over him and his feet stumbled on the dark mountains.

There might be some besetments we have to watch until the last moment; but if we have not been working, it will be too late. Now is the time to forsake our evil ways.



Christ is going to come and bring the blest Millennium. He is going to bring it, we have not a lingering doubt. The only if that comes in is if we will be ready to obtain it. The only thing in the way of our living then is if we get ready, if we do the work.



We must think every moment that we are going to be good trees of the Lord today. When we plant trees, we work around them and prune them so they will bear more fruit. We should have more care over these spiritual trees, watch their growth, see how we are digging about them, pruning off the dead parts so the good can grow.



About the Devil

IF the devil is "Lucifer, son of the morning" fallen from heaven.

THEN WHY does Isaiah 14 say expressly that it is a "proverb against the king of Babylon"? And why does the prophet say further, "They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch....For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord" (Isa. 14:12, 16-19, 22). Is not this clearly a prophecy against a "man," even "the king of Babylon" and not some being cast out of heaven?

IF the devil was once a bright shining angel, fallen from glory.

THEN HOW can any one be certain that a glorified state, once attained, will be eternal? How could Jesus assure His followers that the "righteous [shall] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:35)?

HOW could Daniel say that "they that be wise shall shine...as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3)?

IF the devil exists, and God created all things, as the Bible testifies,

THEN we must believe that God created the devil. Is this justice? Is this mercy? Is this standing by His Word which says plainly, "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another" (Isa. 42:8; 48:11)? If the devil is a being equal in authority with God, has not God shared His glory with another—the devil?

ALSO, how can we believe in a devil who has power equal to that of God when we read, "I am the Lord, and there is none else,...there is no God beside me" (Isa. 45:5-6)?

Self-Denial Week

The week beginning Sunday, February 7, will be the annual week of Self-Denial for the Megiddo Church congregation and all scattered members who choose to observe it with us.

During this week we will limit our choice of foods to three articles at each meal. We will make our selection from simple, plain, common foods, the selection being varied at each meal as desired. We will refrain from all fancy foods, specialties, pastries, condiments, desserts, etc.

What is the purpose of this denial? It is to show that spirit is master over flesh, to prove to ourselves that we can say "no" to ourselves and mean it. If we cannot control physical appetites, how shall we ever obey the command to deny ourselves "all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world"? (Tit. 2:12).

Our week of self-denial should never be thought of as an end in itself, something simply to be kept to do our duty, but as part of a privilege shared daily by every follower of Jesus who answers the call, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). We learn to say "no" on the lower level that we may someday have the opportunity of saying "yes" on the higher.

The End of Procrastination

Around the corner, I have a friend,
To visit him, I oft intend,
Yet days go by and weeks rush on,
And before I know it, a year is gone.
And I never see my old friend's face,
For life is a swift and terrible race;
He knows I like him just as well
As in the days when I rang his bell
And he rang mine. We were younger then,
And now we are busy, tired men—
Tired with playing a foolish game,
Tired of trying to make a name.

"Tomorrow, say, I will call on Jim,
Just to let him know I'm thinking of him."
But tomorrow comes—and tomorrow goes,
And the distance between us grows, and grows;
Around the corner, yet miles away.
"Here's a message, Sir." Jim died today!
And that's what we get—and deserve—in the end,
Around the corner, a vanished friend.

—Selected.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God."

APOSTASY: Departing from the Faith

THE GREAT apostasy from true religion which occurred during the years following the ministry of Christ was not something that happened quickly. Rather, it came about gradually over a space of several centuries. Paul testified to its beginning during his lifetime. The apostle John also saw it in his day, for he warned his hearers to "Try the spirits [teachers] whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). False teachers speeded the apostasy. John's warning against "antichrists" indicates apostate teachers: "As ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists;...They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us" (I John 2:18-19). Already in his time there were many turning against the true faith.

This happened while there were yet living witnesses to Jesus' miracles, disciples who had followed Him in His ministry and could testify to the facts of His life, His death and His resurrection. How could men doubt and turn from the faith He founded with the memory of Him and His ministry still vivid in their minds? Jesus was gone, and in His absence it was easy to doubt. It has always been easier to believe in that which can be seen than in that which cannot. Then too, it has ever been man's tendency to seek an easier way to salvation. We read that before His crucifixion "many went back" when they learned that there was no easy way. Desiring their own way, they succumbed to their doubts; and doubt is always on the side of ease. The path of least resistance has always been the more popular—and populous.

There were also outside pressures that helped foster apostasy within the Church. When we look at the world in which the young Christian Church was forced to forge its way we can better understand the apostasy. From the beginning the young churches found themselves in a hostile environment. In Jerusalem it was the Jewish sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Phar-

isees, being the ruling class, feared lest they lose their high places in the Sanhedrin. They opposed the new faith at every opportunity. The Sadducees, seeing the growth of the belief in the resurrection (which they opposed), cast the apostles into prison, fearing "how far the thing might spread." This hostility is evident throughout the Acts of the Apostles.

In the cities of the provinces of the Roman Empire, the churches were but small groups in the midst of worldly communities. Heathenism flourished. Pagans outnumbered Christians more than a hundred to one. Athens, where Paul went to preach, was a city filled with statues of Greek gods and goddesses. The city had been named for one of these goddesses, Athena. Of Athens the historian says, "It was easier to find a god than a man."

Athens had been the home of the most noted of the Greek philosophers and their wisdom (so-called) was taught in the schools. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and Epicurus were well-known names in this cosmopolitan and wealthy city. Small wonder that Paul made few converts here.

Ephesus was little better outside the church. It, too, had immense wealth and was especially renowned for its temple erected in honor of the Greek goddess Diana, whose worship dominated the life of the city. Only a bold man could stand in the shadow of that edifice and proclaim the falsity of all that it stood for. But Paul was such a man. He came to Ephesus to preach the gospel, and there he established a church—a church so devoted that its elders wept when he bid them his last farewell. Yet even among the people of Ephesus Paul saw the seeds of apostasy already sown and sprouting.

Corinth, the capital city of Achaia, was a Roman colony and also a wealthy city of commerce. Here travelers transacted business by day and patronized its many night clubs by night. It is said that the public marketplace housed 33 taverns. The city was called a "city of drunkards." In such soil, paganism flourished. Even at the time, Corinthian morals were a byword. Philosophers controlled the schools. Any and every subject was debatable—there were no absolutes. Greek philosophy was the boast of Corinth.

Can we imagine a Christian church in such a setting? Paul had a flourishing church here, yet we need not be surprised that in his absence paganism crept in and apostasy soon followed.

II. THE TRANSITION FROM TRUTH TO ERROR

In spite of fierce opposition, the young Christian Church thrived in the period immediately following Jesus' ascension and the giving of Holy Spirit power. Thousands were added to the church, convinced by the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in the miracles performed by the apostles. In these early days the Church had no formal organization or governing body. Ecclesias met at convenient locations, sometimes in private homes and sometimes outdoors. Such was the meeting by the riverside at Philippi which led to the conversion of Lydia.

Each church was independent with its own bishops and elders. The apostles themselves were head over all. There was no assembly of bishops to adopt and hand out new doctrines. The Bible was the rule book; no other rule was needed. All were held together by a common bond of love for God and concern and love for each other. Any disagreements arising were dealt with when the apostles made periodic visits.

But this simple arrangement could not last. According to the historian Mosheim, by the second century a "confederation of churches" had been formed. Instead of the churches operating independently, "this liberty and independence was by degrees relinquished, and it became the practice for all the minor churches within a province to join in one large association, and to hold as it were, conventions at set times." The process appears to have begun in Greece, but it soon spread throughout the Roman Empire until this "form of government became general throughout the whole church, so that the Christian community resembled one large commonwealth." The conventions of delegates were termed *synods* by the Greeks and *councils* by the Latins, and the laws which they enacted were given the name *canons*.

The second century saw many other changes in the Church. Apostasy was rearing her ugly head. The Church was moving further and faster from the simple teachings of the Master. The historian informs us that the bishops, who in the beginning had been only ministers of the representative churches, increased their authority. Their "humility was exchanged for a loftier tone" and they "took upon themselves to assert that they were the legitimate successors of the apostles themselves." Whereas they "had seen themselves as equal in the beginning," that equality disappeared and

"preference was given to bishops of the chief cities of the provinces." It was then that they began to hold councils to adopt rules for the church.

Later in the second century it was decided that a "supreme power should be lodged in the hand of some one individual bishop;...preeminence being given to the bishops of Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria, the principal cities of Asia, Europe and Africa, and that the bishop of Rome, the noblest and most opulent city in the world, should take precedence among these principal bishops,...and also assume the primacy of the whole Christian Church throughout the world." It was from this small beginning that the Power of Darkness came to hold sway over all the churches. The apostasy was spreading, though it was by no means complete.

The historian records that there were churches that "declined to take a part of the grand Christian confederation which was gradually entered into by the rest, and were, for a long time, inflexibly tenacious of their own just liberty and independence...and refused to acknowledge the authority of those who were appointed to preside over the general interests of the whole body."

According to the historian Mosheim, what came to be known as the "Church Hierarchy" started from a very small beginning and attained its position of power only by tacit approval of the apostatizing churches. It sprang "from nothing more than a plan adopted by the Greek churches of moulding their ecclesiastical government after the model of their national civil government." There was no original intent to have a titular head (or pope) whose word would be held infallible and equal to that of our Lord, and whose power would be able to defy all efforts to overthrow it.

A. Causes of the Apostasy

Following his conversion, the apostle Paul gave his entire life to missionary work for the Christian Church. Many were those he convinced, yet he knew that not all would continue in the faith. The opposition he encountered was a harbinger of things to come. "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers" (Acts 24:14), he said in his defense before Felix. To Paul it was true religion. To some others it was heresy.

From his prison cell in Rome, Paul addressed this prophecy to Timothy: "The time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their own fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires. They will no longer listen to the Truth, but will wander off after man-made fictions" (II Tim. 4:3-4, Phillips). Human nature is fickle, and Paul's words were ful-

filled. The Jews could not stop the spread of Christianity, though they imprisoned the leaders. But the movement did grind to a halt—when God allowed it. The time did come when they would “not tolerate wholesome teaching.” This time was the apostasy.

There were many reasons for this.

1) The end of Holy Spirit power. Probably no one factor influenced the decline of faith more than the withdrawing of Holy Spirit power. This power had been the means of convincing thousands. Who could resist the words of one who had the power to tell a cripple to rise up and walk? But with the withdrawing of the Holy Spirit power and the death of the last apostle, such miracles were no longer possible. Without miracles, the telling and re-telling of past miracles lost their luster. It was not long until there were no living witnesses to miracles nor anyone who had known Jesus personally. Doubt soon turned to unbelief and apostasy set in.

2) Mingling with the nations. Moses had forbidden the children of Israel to mix with the surrounding nations—for good reason. Well he knew that if they mixed and intermarried they would adopt the ungodly ways of the nations around them and lose their love for the true God.

After the death of the apostles, the young Christian Churches began to mix more and more with the people outside the church. Paganism was rampant in the provinces of the Roman Empire. Many new converts were more concerned with affairs outside the church than within it. Some who had been educated in Greek philosophy brought with them ideas that were foreign to true Christianity. The new ideas often proved more popular than the old—and right—ways, and many turned away from the church.

3) Greek philosophy. Without doubt, philosophy was the greatest single cause of the apostasy. The Greeks were the most educated people of the period in which the early Christian Church was established. For them, philosophy was a way of life. (We will discuss this topic later in our study.)

4) Broadening the way. Not least among the causes of the apostasy was man's natural tendency to try to find an easy way to salvation, thus broadening out the “narrow” way defined by Jesus. During the centuries after Christ the church adopted so many of the ways of the world that it quickly lost its identity. The worldly attitude of “eat, drink and be merry” replaced the command to “come out from among them, and be ye separate.” Man's naturally rebellious attitude toward authority was as evident in that age as in ours. If they thought the rules of the church too inhibiting, they changed them!

5) Persecution. Opposition arose almost immedi-

ately with the preaching of the apostles after Pentecost. Seeing the spread of the new faith, the Jews were jealous. In an effort to discourage or halt the movement, they frequently imprisoned, scourged and beat the apostles. But some 150 years later persecution became much more severe. Many of the Christians suffered cruel deaths rather than deny their faith. Many others defected from the church, preferring life to martyrdom, reasoning that they would rather deny the faith and live than fall into the hands of the cruel Romans.

6) Gnosticism, a thriving religious movement of the early centuries that originated with the Greeks, lured away many. Gnosticism was a fantasy religion, similar to Eastern religions of our day. The Gnostics claimed that salvation came through man's knowledge of himself, that such perfect understanding could be reached as to place man on a higher plane. Being closely allied with philosophy, it became very popular during the early centuries and gained a large following among the Christians. But one could not be a Gnostic and a Christian, hence to join the Gnostics was to apostatize.

The false teachers against whom the apostle John warned were no doubt Gnostics, those whom he identified as “antichrists.” Any opposer to Christ is an “antichrist,” and he said there were “many.” Peter also encountered them. He wrote of the “false teachers among you, who...bring in damnable heresies”; of them he said, “many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (II Pet. 2:1-2). Many did follow their “pernicious ways” and departed from the faith, fulfilling his prophecy.

7) Jewish tradition. Even though the apostle Paul expended so much effort explaining the end of the Mosaic law, many of the Jews still clung to the traditions of their fathers. Long before Jesus had denounced the Pharisees for holding to the tradition of their fathers, yet they persisted. While the apostles lived, ritualism was kept out of the Christian Church. But soon after the death of the last apostle, the first schism in the church appeared. Ritualism was the issue. According to Mosheim's history, “Certain Jews could not be induced to renounce their attachment to the Law of Moses,” holding that “ceremonial law promulgated by Moses was to be of perpetual duration and that the observance of it was consequently necessary to salvation and that its ordinances ought to be complied with even by the Gentiles who had been converted to Christianity.”

Mosheim indicates that the matter was resolved by allowing these Jews to conform to the Mosaic ritual while still maintaining their membership in the Christian Church—another evidence of the apostasy.

B. Christianity vs. Philosophy

Philosophy was a problem for the Christian Church from its infancy. It was not something new. The best known of the philosophers lived more than four centuries before Christ. The names of Philo, Aristotle, Plato and Socrates meant more to the Greeks than the names of Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Philosophers controlled the schools, so all the educated class were exposed to the works of the philosophers, not the prophets of God.

Paul had warned Timothy and Titus against the subtle influence of philosophy: "Avoid empty and worldly chatter; those who indulge in it will stray further and further into godless courses, and the infection of their teaching will spread like a gangrene.... Have nothing to do with foolish and ignorant speculations" (II Tim. 2:16, 23, NEB). And again he wrote, "This is what you are to teach and preach. If anyone is teaching otherwise, and will not give his mind to wholesome precepts—I mean those of our Lord Jesus Christ—and to good religious teaching, I call him a pompous ignoramus. He is morbidly keen on mere verbal questions and quibbles, which give rise to jealousy, quarreling, slander, base suspicions, and endless wrangles; all typical of men who have let their reasoning powers become atrophied and have lost grip of the truth" (I Tim. 6:3-5, NEB). The church was not compatible with philosophy.

His warning to Titus concerned choosing elders for the church who would hold to the true doctrines of Christ. An elder must "adhere to the true doctrine, so that he may be well able both to move his hearers with wholesome teaching and to confute objectors," for, said Paul, "there are all too many, especially among Jewish converts, who are out of all control; they talk wildly and lead men's minds astray....teaching things they should not....myths and commandments of merely human origin, the work of men who turn their backs upon the truth" (Tit. 1:9-14, NEB). No doubt Paul's reference was to philosophy.

We can be sure that Timothy and Titus and other teachers instructed by Paul heeded the admonition and held to the true doctrine. But when these teachers were succeeded by others of a generation that had known none of the apostles, philosophy soon crept in. Philosophy was popular, and as Paul said, the Christian religion was a "sect...everywhere spoken against." Christian teachers were being trained in the school at Alexandria, and this school, like all schools of the time, was dominated by the philosophers. According to the historian Mosheim, "philosophic speculation spread throughout the whole church, supplanting that holy simplicity which had characterized Christianity during the first age."

Again quoting the historian, "the taste for the cultivation of philosophy and human learning during the first century was kept under and not permitted to blend itself with religion, but in the second century it spread with the utmost rapidity throughout a large part of the church as a result of the many Greek philosophers who had been induced to embrace Christianity."

The Christian teachers with a bent toward philosophy reasoned that if the philosophers could be brought to embrace Christianity, the popularity of the Church would be greatly enhanced, for philosophy was popular. With this as an excuse, writes Mosheim, "they not only adopted the study of philosophy themselves, but became loud in their recommendation of it to others, declaring that the differences between Christianity and philosophy were but trifling."

When this passion for philosophising had taken hold of the church, the historian states further that "the holy and beautiful simplicity of early times very quickly disappeared and was followed by a most disastrous alteration in the whole system of Christian discipline. This very important and deeply to be regretted change began in the second century."

"One of the earliest evils that flowed from this attachment to philosophy," writes Mosheim, "was the violence to which it gave rise in the interpretation of the Scriptures. The Christians had held [to this time] that the words, laws, facts, and doctrines recorded in the Sacred Volume were complete, but no sooner did this passion for philosophising take possession of their minds, than they began with wonderful subtlety to press the Scriptures into their service in support of all such principles and maxims as appeared to them consonant to reason, at the same time perverting and twisting every part of those divine oracles which opposed itself to the philosophical notions."

"Those most proficient in the pernicious practice were the teachers who first turned the attention of the Christians towards philosophy," he writes. The teachers were not being original, but were following the writings of Philo, the Greek philosopher which they studied and "whose empty wisdom they were unhappily led to admire and to imitate."

As a result of the success of their efforts in bringing the philosophers into the church, philosophic interpretation soon infiltrated the Christian doctrine. The Christians had converted the philosophers, and in turn, the philosophers converted the Christians. As Paul had prophesied, the time had come when they would not "endure sound doctrine." Yet not all followed their pernicious ways; the issue of philosophy divided the church; but it was to take several centuries before the apostasy was complete. MM

Holiness Is Not an Option!

by A. W. Tozer*

**"...as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy"
(1 Peter 1:15-16).**

YOU cannot study the Bible diligently and earnestly without being struck by an obvious fact—the whole matter of personal holiness is highly important to God!

Neither do you have to give long study to the attitudes of modern Christian believers to discern that by and large they consider the expression of true Christian holiness to be just a matter of personal option: "I have looked it over and considered it, but I don't buy it!"

I have always liked the word *exhort* better than *command* so I remind you that Peter has given every Christian a forceful exhortation to holiness of life and conversation. He clearly bases this exhortation on two great facts—first, the character of God, and second, the command of God.

His argument comes out so simply that we sophisticates stumble over it—God's children ought to be holy because God Himself is holy! We so easily overlook the fact that Peter was an apostle and he is here confronting us with the force of an apostolic injunction, completely in line with the Old Testament truth concerning the person and character of God and also in line with what the Lord Jesus had taught and revealed to His disciples and followers.

Personally, I am of the opinion that we who claim to be Christians do not have the privilege of ignoring such injunctions. Morally we dare not ignore this commandment, "Be ye holy."

Because it is a word from an apostle, we must face up to the fact that we will have to deal with it in some way, and not ignore it—as some do.

Certainly no one has provided us with an option in this matter. Who has ever given us the right or the privilege to look into the Bible and say, "I am willing to consider this matter and if I like it, I will buy it"—using the language of the day.

There is something basically wrong with our Christianity and our spirituality if we can carelessly presume that if we do not like a Biblical teaching and choose not to "buy" it, there is no harm done.

Commandments which we have received from our Lord or from His apostles cannot be overlooked or ignored by earnest and committed Christians. God has never instructed us that we should weigh His desires for us and His commandments to us in the balances of our own judgment and then decide what we want to do about them.

A professing Christian may say, "I have found a place of real Christian freedom; these things just don't apply to me."

Of course you can walk out on it! God has given every one of us the power to make our own choices. I

am not saying that we are forced to bow our necks to this yoke and we do not have to apply it to ourselves. It is true that if we do not like it, we can turn our backs on it.

The record in the New Testament is plain on this point—many people followed Jesus for awhile and then walked away from Him.

One day Jesus said to His disciples: "Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, there is no life in you." Many looked at one another and then walked away from Him.

Jesus turned to those remaining and said, "Will you also go away?"

Peter gave the answer which is still my answer today: "Lord, if we wanted to go away, where would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life."

Those were wise words, indeed, words born of love and devotion.

So, we are not forced to obey in the Christian life, but we are forced to make a choice at many points in our spiritual maturity.

We have that power within us to reject God's instructions—but where else shall we go? If we refuse His words, which way will we turn? If we turn away from the authority of God's Word, to whose authority do we yield? Our mistake is that we generally turn to some other human—a man with breath in his nostrils (most likely ourselves!)—instead of turning to God.

I am old-fashioned about the Word of God, and its authority. I am committed to believe that if we ignore it

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or consider this commandment optional, we jeopardize our future and earn for ourselves severe judgment to come.

Now, brethren, I have said that the matter of holiness is highly important to God. I have personally counted in an exhaustive concordance and found that the word *holiness* occurs 650 times in the Bible. I have not counted words with a similar meaning in English, such as *sanctify* and *purify*, so the count would jump nearer to a thousand if we counted these other words with the same meaning.

This word *holy* is used to describe the character of angels, the nature of the realm where God dwells, and the character of God. It is written that angels are holy, and those angels who gaze down upon the scenes of mankind are called the watchers and the holy ones.

It is said that heaven is a holy place where no unclean thing can enter. God Himself is described by the adjective *holy*—the Holy Father, Holy Lord, and Holy Lord God Almighty. These words are used of God throughout the Bible, showing that the highest adjective that can be ascribed to God, the highest attribute that can be ascribed to God is that of holiness. Even the angels in heaven partake of the holiness of God.

We note in the Bible, too, that the absence of holiness is given as a reason for not seeing God. I am aware of some of the grotesque interpretations which have been given to the text, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). But this text does have a meaning, and it ought to disturb us until we have discovered what it means and how we may meet its conditions.

What does this word *holiness* really mean? Is it a negative kind of piety from which so many people have shied away?

No, of course not! Holiness in the Bible means moral wholeness—a positive quality which actually in-

cludes kindness, mercy, purity, moral blamelessness, and godliness. It is always to be thought of in a positive, white intensity of degree.

Whenever it is written that God is holy, it means that God is kind, merciful, pure and blameless in a white, holy intensity of degree. When used of men, it is still the positive intensity of the degree of holiness—positive, not negative.

This is why true Bible holiness is positive. A holy man can be trusted. A holy man can be tested. People who try to live by a negative standard, find that their piety does not stand up in times of difficult testing.

Genuine holiness can be put into the place of testing without fear. Whenever there is a breakdown of holiness, that is proof that there never was any real degree of holiness in the first place.

Personally, I truly have been affected in my heart by reading of the humble men and women of God in Scripture. I have learned from them that the word and idea of holiness as originally used in the Hebrew did not have first of all the moral connotation. It did not mean that God first of all was pure, for that was taken for granted!

The original root of the word *holy* was of something beyond, something strange and mysterious and awe-inspiring. When we consider the holiness of God we talk about something heavenly, full of awe, mysterious and fear-inspiring. Now, this is supreme when it relates to God, but it is also marked in men of God and deepens as men become more and more like God.

It is a sense of awareness of the other world, a mysterious quality and difference that has come to rest upon some—that is holiness. Now if a man should have that sense and not be morally right in God's evaluation, that is *not* holiness.

I have seen serious, honest persons turn away from the whole idea of holiness because of those who have

claimed to have it and then lived selfish and conceited lives.

But, brethren, we are still under the holy authority of the apostolic command. Men of God have reminded us in the Word that God does ask us and expect us to be holy men and women of God, because we are the children of God, who is holy. Holiness is the positive answer for those who truly hunger and thirst after righteousness.

I lament that the genuine quality of holiness has all but forsaken the earth in our day. Theologians long ago referred to it as a surplus of something that is more than righteous. But it is as though it is marked with a brightness glowing with a mysterious fire.

This latter quality is that which has all but forsaken the earth, and I think the reason is very obvious. We are men who have reduced God to our own terms. In the context of the Christian church, we are not told to "gossip" the gospel and "sell" Jesus to people!

We still talk about righteousness, but we are lacking in that bright quality which is beyond description.

If we are what we ought to be in Christ, if the whole sum of our lives beginning with the inner life is becoming more Godlike and Christlike, I believe something of that divine and mysterious quality and Presence will be upon us.

Do we understand what a gracious thing it is to be able to say of a man, a brother in the Lord, "He is truly a man of God"? He doesn't have to tell us that, but he lives quietly and confidently day by day with the sense of this awe-inspiring Presence.

So, Peter reminds us that it is the Lord who has said: "Be ye holy as I am holy, and because I am holy."

First, bring your life into line morally so that God can make it holy; then bring your spiritual life into line that God may approve it.

Oh, that we might yearn for the
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Your Conscience—Your Guide?

MANY people are confused about conscience. They honestly want to do right. But how can they always know what is right? Should that inner voice of conscience be heeded?

Virtually everyone in our culture is aware of conscience and acknowledges that having it is part of being human. We know, too, the effects of conscience; that it can ruin our appetites and give us sleepless nights. In extreme cases it has even caused persons to take their life. Business and government offices sometimes have special funds because conscience-stricken people send in money anonymously to atone for some kind of cheating they have done.

Despite an awareness and respect for conscience, there are still many misconceptions about it. Conscience is sometimes appealed to as the rationale for outrageous behavior. Again it is said that we should always be true to conscience, for our conscience is of God—it is always right.

Conscience can be good. Conscience can be misleading. It all depends on how it is trained. The problem is that too many of us do not give enough conscious effort to its proper training.

Properly trained, conscience can be reliable and helpful. This sense of spiritual discernment is mentioned more than 30 times in the New Testament, mostly in the letters of Paul. Reading his thoughts, you come away with an impression that conscience ought to be regarded as worthy of training and life. We ought to share that conviction. And in still other passages the directing of an inner trained impulse is implied. We are commanded to "approve things that are excellent" (Phil. 1:10)—which we must be trained to recognize. We are to have that growing love that abounds "in knowledge and in all judgment" (Phil. 1:9). We are to be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9-10). These are commands for the properly trained conscience—which may be safely followed.

At the same time, Paul talks about consciences that have been defiled. This means that under certain circumstances, conscience is *not* an adequate moral guide. Just because we do not feel guilty does not automatically mean we have done right. The challenge is to know *when* the voice of conscience can be safely heeded.

A certain sense of conscience operates in both the Christian and the unbeliever. In the unbeliever, the feel-

ings of conscience are dictated by society, friends, or personal feelings. With Christian training, conviction and dedication there comes a spiritual knowledge, a sensitizing of conscience so that we are able to discern between good and evil. The proper use of the conscience, therefore, is possible only when it is trained in godliness. When a man or woman decides to turn his or her life around and serve God, the entire mind and conscience must be re you use it properly, the more effective it becomes. It is very important that we keep "in shape" with our consciences. We do that by training our conscience to correspond with the teachings of the Word of God, and by heeding our trained conscience when it directs us accordingly.

As surely as we resist the direction of our properly instructed conscience, we shall find it harder to heed another time.

An enlightened spiritual conscience can be a tremendous asset. It can help us to apply the principles of Scripture so we can behave as God wants us to. The Bible does not give moral instruction to cover every possible event. We need consciences controlled and trained by His Word to "fill in the gaps," "senses exercised" to discern the right choices to make in those gray areas.

The reliability of conscience is up to us as individuals. If we keep it in tune with the divine revelation and respond promptly to its urgings, it will serve us faithfully and keep us from many a slip.

As Christians it is our responsibility to train our conscience properly, by the Word of God, and then allow it to lead us in the right way. Only then is it a safe guide.

MM

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Confident or Overconfident?

WHAT A striking difference in definition between these two words; and what a startling contrast between the individuals possessing one or the other of these characteristics! Nearly everyone admires the quiet, self-assured, confident person, one who knows what he wants and where he is going and who can support his professions with the appropriate actions. The same certainly cannot be said of the presumptuous individual who swaggers his way through life, arrogantly proclaiming his great prowess but sadly lacking the ability to support his claims.

Now, where do these characteristics fit into our lives? Is there any danger that we might become overconfident, too sure of what we think we know or can do? Most assuredly there is! Overconfidence is a trait belonging to nearly everyone in some degree, and we are no exception. In fact, there are numerous instances recorded in our Guidebook of those who had this type of problem.

Take, for example, an impetuous Peter. Boldly he informed Jesus: "I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death." Such confidence! But it was overconfidence, for when the acid test came, he failed miserably.

Remember King Saul's grievous error in taking upon himself the sacred duty that belonged to Samuel and offering the burnt sacrifice, instead of waiting for the Prophet's arrival. And what was the result? Samuel told him that the kingdom would be taken from him. No son of his would sit upon his throne. What a price to pay for a few moments of overconfidence!

Then, too, we have the sad account of King Solomon. We all know what happened to that promising young sovereign who at the beginning of his reign confessed, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in." Can we imagine the King he *might have been*? But he allowed himself to become so egotistical and overconfident that in later years he admitted to being "an old and foolish king who would no more be admonished."

Extreme cases these? Not necessarily. We may be quick to condemn Peter for his denial of Jesus; but haven't we, in some measure, been guilty of the same? Haven't there been times when we, too, flaunted our strengths and abilities, only to find in a moment of testing that we hadn't the strength that we *thought* we had? At

times like these, how exceedingly thankful we should be for another opportunity, another challenge, another test in which to prove that our confidence is grounded in fact.

It is easy to overestimate our strength. While it is equally wrong to sell ourselves short, God knows that we need time to grow and develop our spiritual muscles, and he tempers our testing accordingly. It is only when we volunteer that for which we are not prepared that we err.

But the question is, how do we go about building the inner strength that will give us the quietness and confidence of which the prophet Isaiah wrote: "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15)? How can we develop a proper measure of confidence that is solidly grounded in fact and faith, a confidence which can see us successfully through any temptation?

The answer lies in a diligent seeking for that wisdom which is far more precious than rubies and which, once found, will form a solid groundwork for confidence. It is this wisdom — applied — which enabled the apostle Paul to exclaim, "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." Securely anchored to the solid rock of divine truth, and with the bright and shining light of Jesus' perfect life before him, this noble apostle had a confidence fully justified, a confidence that he could and he would attain the same high standard of Jesus. This same confidence can be ours, if we follow his example.

Now we all know that this high standard and the confidence that we can attain it is not the result of a single night's effort. No indeed! It will require constant, deeply devoted study and serious application to become conversant with the deep things of the Eternal and link our lives to His will for us. With this in mind we can better understand the prime requisite to successful Christian confidence: a realization of our utter dependence upon God. There is no room for self-importance in this confidence; no inflated egos nor any confidence in the flesh. It is a quiet confidence that is possible only as all our thoughts and actions become God-directed.

What, then, shall be our course of action when confronted by temptation or severe testing? Shall we be guilty of harboring an overconfident attitude that we consider ourselves strong enough to cope with any situation alone? No! A thousand times, no! All self-confidence is overconfidence. The real confidence which is the cen-

ter of real strength comes from humbling ourselves before God and willingly admitting that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23), that "the way of man is not in himself." We need all the help we can get to enable us to rightly judge between right and wrong, to see ourselves—with all our strengths and weaknesses—as God sees us. And don't ever forget, "the Lord seeth not as man seeth." His ways and thoughts are not naturally ours. But, glorious thought, we can change. We, like the apostle Paul, can acquire the inner strength that will give us eventually the confidence to exclaim, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course."

We have all heard the adage that "half the battle lies in trying." These words carry a special application for us as potential life-seekers. We have accepted the challenge of a lifetime, a challenge which demands every mite of strength we can muster. If such be the case, and we are sure that it is, how dare we attempt to make it on our own? How dare we approach God with any self-confidence born of our too headstrong natures? How dare we allow the slightest feeling of overconfidence to rule in us? Isn't it high time that we found our confidence, our courage, yes, our very staying power in God and His written Word, and let go any inclination to follow the dictates of our own willful and naturally sinful nature? Any time we try to justify our own overconfident inclinations, aren't we in essence claiming that we know more than God?

But, praise be to God, we can find a strong, heavenly confidence which tells us we can succeed in our Christian enterprise. It is a confidence that will have its reward in the peace of an upright life even now as we yield ourselves more and more to our heavenly Father's leading and which will, in the end, assure us of life forevermore. What more could we ask?

It remains with us to choose which confidence we will have as our companion and helper: the big "I" or the confidence that finds its source in the Almighty God and His wisdom?

God grant that we may choose wisely; it is later than we think. MM

As I look around and see the wickedness, it makes me long for the time when the Mighty Potentate shall rule in righteousness; when the earth will no more groan under the tyranny of evil; when nothing but blessing will flow to all mankind. If it were a promise that some man had manufactured, it would come to naught; but seeing it is from the great and mighty God, we know it is sure. It seems too good for us poor mortals.—L.T.N.

Holiness Is Not an Option

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knowledge and Presence of God in our lives from moment to moment, so that without human cultivation and without toilsome seeking there would come upon us this sweet and radiant fragrance...

Now that I have said that, I predict that some will ask me, "You don't go by your feelings, do you, Mr. Tozer?"

Well, I do not dismiss the matter of feeling and you can quote me on that if it is worth it!... There are qualities in Godlikeness that can never be fully explained to the intellect and can only be known by the heart, the innermost being. That is why I say I believe in feeling. I believe in what the old writers called religious affection—and we have so little of it because we have not laid the groundwork for it. The groundwork is *repentance* and *obedience* and *separation* and *holy living*!

I am confident that whenever this groundwork is laid, there will come to us this sense of the otherworldly Presence of God, and it will be wonderfully real.

I have at times heard an expression in our prayers, "Oh, God, draw feelingly near!"

I don't think that is too far off—in spite of those who can only draw back and sit in judgment.

"Oh, God, come feelingly near!" God drew feelingly near to Moses in the bush and on the mount. He came feelingly near to the church at Pentecost, and He came feelingly near to that Corinthian church when the unbelievers went away awe-struck to report that "God is really in their midst!"

I am willing to confess in humility that we need this in our day.

His Lamp

His lamp am I,
To shine where He shall say;
And lamps are not for sunny rooms,
Nor for the light of day;
But for dark places of the earth,
Where shame and wrong and crime have birth,
Or for the murky twilight gray,
Where wandering sheep have gone astray,
Or where the lamp of faith grows dim,
And souls are groping after Him.
And as sometimes a flame we find,
Clear-shining through the night,
So dark we cannot see the lamp—
But only see the light—
So may I shine—His truth the flame,
That men may glorify His name.

—Selected.

Meditating on the Word



Thinking to Act

"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments"
(Psalm 119:59-60).

IN THESE words the Psalmist acknowledges the importance of ruling our thought-life. The first step toward a godly life is to think godly, to ponder our ways and compare them with God's standard.

David did this. His pondering his ways brought the desired results: he *turned* his feet to run in the way of God's commandments. He made haste and delayed not to do His heavenly Father's will.

David looked to the end of the matter. His thoughts were not scattered and roving at random, for he cried, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed."

By following this course of action, by *thinking* and then turning, he avoided the perils of those who fail to think or who think imperfectly. Imperfect thoughts never produce a perfect character, for they are not fixed on that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is the stimulus to every faithful one.

In any attempt to put our finger on the chief cause of human mistakes, miseries and failures, it would be well to first examine the realm of thought life and the possibility of imperfect thinking. Yes, how much is there of faulty, slipshod thinking! We need to be reeducated in our thinking habits. It is a natural tendency to leave off thinking at the point where effort begins. The result is nothing more than wishful thinking, instead of reasoning all matters through to their proper conclusion. Thinking that produces decisive, godly action involves thinking the entire length of the line, from end to end; thinking from outside in and from inside out. This kind of thinking includes hindsight, foresight, and insight. Hindsight profits by the experiences of the past. Foresight looks not only to the immediate and desirable alternates, but goes forward with the full sweep of constructive, progressive thought. It feeds day by day upon those thoughts that

make for spiritual growth, and reaches out persistently after the better things that only God can offer. It keeps aspiring, whether life be easy or hard.

If we would pattern our thinking after the Psalmist's and turn our feet accordingly, there are a few questions we should ask ourselves: "What reason have I for accepting this or rejecting that? Shall I be glad or sorry if I adopt this course of action? What am I really aiming at and working toward?" These questions asked seriously and carefully will cause us to make haste to keep God's commandments.

When we find ourselves becoming impatient, or even irritable, if we would think the affair through we would realize that impatience and irritability never do us any good; they do not improve the character or give peace of mind. We should think also of the unwholesome effect our irritability may have upon those with whom we are associated.

Again, we may automatically stop our thinking with the envious or bitter feeling, when we should carry through to the pernicious effects of this evil, which the Wise Man warns us is the "rotteness of the bones." Who of us would deliberately bring such a condition upon ourselves! How easily it may be avoided, if only we would think on our ways and turn our feet.

Or it may be pride that comes in; and our imperfect thinking dwells on our hurt feelings instead of pressing on to higher, nobler outlooks. Too easily our thinking gets caught in self-pity, when we ought to be pondering how we can wrest a victory from defeat. Remember, "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Every resentment we encourage, every ill mood we welcome, every smug conceit, every unjust estimate, is a product of our imperfect thinking. The struggle with this

obstinate human nature of ours is hard; but if we persevere with a fixed purpose, the vision of that purpose will have a transforming power upon us.

When David uttered those words, "I thought on my ways," he was exercising that insight which gives heed to the true values of life. It has breadth of outlook, clearness of perception and is absolutely honest toward all. It holds before the mind a picture of the individual we want to be and seizes every opportunity to remake us into that image.

Our natural thoughts arise from a jumble of instincts, impulses, and ambitions; and only careful, complete thinking is capable of bringing these miscellaneous tendencies into perfect inward harmony. We easily get into ruts of selfishness and pride, and this must be watched. Thought patterns are a matter of training, just as is every other ability we possess. Thoughts and motives that are good must be picked out just as consciously and deliberately as any other choice articles we treasure.

We are not responsible for what is put before our minds in the course of a day, but it is a part of every man's business to determine what shall stay in his mind. The drifter allows himself to give lodgment to any thought that may chance to enter; whereas the man or woman who is determined to work for the building up of self deliberately chooses what he will let himself think and what kind of feelings he will harbor. This takes work, plenty of it. No easy task is it to think on our ways and turn our feet unto His testimonies, to make haste and delay not to keep His commandments. Our minds will respond very grudgingly at first; but if we persist, gradually we shall acquire the knack of thinking all things through to their proper conclusion of obedience.

Any thinking less than this will hamper our spiritual development. It will cause us to look upon our trials as unprofitable intruders and not the vital elements of our re-making that they are.

The secret thoughts that we live with can weaken or strengthen our moral fiber. They are what determine the outcome when we meet face to face with an unfavorable circumstance. And they ultimately determine the character that we present to the Lord.

The reward of radiant, abundant, immortal life which faithful men and women shall receive at the Day of the Lord will be the direct result of "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments." MM

Avoid making decisions and not acting on them. Inaction quickly becomes a habit, a habit that is founded on fear and seriously weakens the will.

So What Do You Know?

The Test of Ages

1. How old was Joseph when he stood before Pharaoh and interpreted his dream?
2. How old was Isaac when he died?
3. Moses was ____ years old when he fled from Egypt into Midian, ____ years old when the angel appeared to him in the burning bush, and ____ years old when he died.
4. How old was Jacob when he died?
5. Jairus' daughter, whom Jesus raised from the dead, was about ____ years.
6. Jesus was ____ years old when he stayed behind in the temple.
7. How old was Aaron when he died on Mt. Hor?
8. How old was Jesus when He was baptized by John?
9. How old was Caleb when he asked Joshua for the mountain God had promised him?
10. Abram was ____ years old when his name was changed to Abraham, and Sarai was ____ old when God changed her name to Sarah.
11. Noah was ____ years old when he and his family left the ark.
12. Jacob was ____ years old when he and his family moved to Egypt.
13. How old was David when he became King?
14. Abram was ____ years old when God called him from Haran to go into Canaan.
15. How old was Sarah when she died?
16. Mephibosheth was ____ years old when his father Jonathan was killed.
17. Isaac was ____ years old when he married Rebekah.
18. Joash was ____ when his father Ahaziah was killed, and he was ____ when he was made king of Judah.
19. How old was Joseph when he died?
20. How old was David when he made Solomon king in his stead?
21. How long did Joshua live?
22. Enoch was ____ years old when God translated him.
23. The lame man whom Peter and John healed at the Gate Beautiful was about ____ years old.
24. Ishmael was ____ when Isaac was born.
25. Moses was how old when he was taken from the Nile River?

(Answers on page 27)

Inquiries and Answers

• No Man Has Ascended to Heaven Except Christ?

"John 3:13 reads, 'And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.' What is Jesus saying in this statement? Is He saying that He (Christ, the Son of man) is in heaven and on earth at the same time?"

To understand this passage, we need to recognize that the term Christ is used with three different meanings in the New Testament. First, there is Christ the man who was born of the virgin Mary and was the Son of God. He had never been in heaven, nor did He come down from heaven. Second, there is the body of Christ, the true Church, the body of believers, called "Christ." As in Romans 12:4-5, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ." (See also Eph. 4:12-16.)

Third, there is the Spiritual Christ, the Word, the gospel of God which the literal Christ made alive in His daily life. This is the Christ that we must eat and drink, His words, His teachings, His principles, His saving gospel. This is the Christ that is in us, and we in Him. As Jesus Himself said, this is "the spirit that quickeneth." The "flesh profiteth nothing." It is the words He spoke that avail: "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). This is the Christ or Son of man that came down from heaven and that was yet in heaven at the same time Christ was talking to Nicodemus on earth. This passage should not be used to prove that Christ pre-existed in heaven before He was born of the virgin Mary.

"How can you harmonize the statement that 'Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven' (II Kings 2:11) with Jesus' words that 'No man hath ascended up to heaven' (John 3:13)?"

Perhaps one hundred years ago or more, when man thought that the earth was the center of the universe, this could appear to be a direct contradiction. If you asked a person 50 years ago if the sun and the moon were a part

of heaven they would have answered Yes. Yet today no intelligent person would deny that men have walked on the moon. But this does not suggest that they have gone to the dwelling place of God. We must keep in mind that the universe is so vast that we cannot even conceive of its extent. The following is a quotation from "Our Universe" by Roy A. Grant, published by National Geographic Society: "No matter which direction we look in space we see the same thing—countless billions of galaxies. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, is a disc-shaped collection of about 200 billion stars."

Can mortal man have any idea of the vastness of the universe? How can anyone say that there is only one real heaven? Bible proof for this is decidedly lacking. On the contrary we read the following:

Job 9:8-9, "Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south."

Psalms 8:1, 3, "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained...."

Psalms 115:16, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's."

Amos 9:6, "It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven."

When the Scriptural writers used the words "heaven" and "heavens," they were using terms that man could understand at least to a limited extent. And they were very likely referring to any part of the creation which is not earth. We do not know where God dwells, nor could we take it in if it were explained to us. The universe is far beyond our comprehension.

There is no doubt that Christ was taken to His Father's throne, which we can identify only as heaven. But we do not think for a moment that Elijah and Enoch were taken to the same place or the same heaven. We do not have the slightest idea where they are now or what they are doing, but it is not hard to believe that they are living on another world, some planet in the immensity of space where mortal life is sustained. We do not believe that they died. We believe the Biblical record which says

that they were taken from this earth without dying, and that they are living somewhere in God's great universe.

• **Elijah and Enoch Had 'Heaven' Handed Them?**

"In Acts 2:29, 34 we read that even David hasn't ascended to heaven yet. If David was a man after God's own heart and he isn't in heaven yet, what makes you think any other man except Jesus is?"

Only Jesus has gone to the realm where God has His throne. "Whither I go, ye cannot come," Jesus told His disciples (John 13:33). Jesus is our high priest, and He alone could enter the most holy place, even heaven. No other man can enter there. We do not believe that either Elijah or Enoch went to the place where Christ went.

"If we are taught that Christ has pre-eminence in all things, what makes you think He would have had to die such a horrendous death in order to be resurrected, while Enoch and Elijah would have had heaven handed to them on a silver platter?"

Christ was our perfect example. He is the only man of our race who never transgressed after He knew God's law. We have all transgressed many times after knowing the law. Christ has, as you say, pre-eminence over all other creatures on this earth. He was born to be the king of this earth for ever and ever, but He had to "learn...obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9). He did not choose to go through the ordeal of a crucifixion, but submission to it was His last act of obedience to His Father. He said, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

And, of course, His resurrection was proof positive to all that followed in His steps that they also could be resurrected. Thus He became the complete pattern and perfect example to all who follow Him.

Christ's death also served another purpose to those who would follow Him. Some of His followers were soon to suffer cruel deaths, and they needed some assurance to buttress their faith.

We should also realize that Christ suffered in hope of what lay just ahead. If you were sure that in 40 days you would be taken to God's heavenly throne and be made immortal, never to die anymore and become king of this earth, could you not suffer a few hours of agony as Christ did? Actually, Christ did not suffer more than many of His followers did; perhaps not as much as some.

Your statement that Elijah and Enoch had "heaven handed to them on a silver platter" needs modification, for at the present time Christ "only hath immortality" (I

Tim. 6:16). Enoch and Elijah have not yet been made immortal. They must still appear before the Judgment seat of Christ. God is fair, and promises to reward every man according to his works. What Enoch and Elijah did and just how their lives have been spent since they were taken from this earth we do not know. But if God has a work for these men to do, He has the power to prolong their lives to any extent He wished. Just because we do not know how He does this is no evidence that He cannot do it.

Announcing....

Abib Is Coming!

This year the members and friends of the Megiddo Church will welcome the beginning of another sacred year on the evening of March 25, Bible time being measured from "evening to evening" (Lev. 23:32). The ancient Hebrew pattern, according to the law God gave to Moses, was to begin the New Year with the month "Abib," which is the month beginning with the first new moon following the spring equinox (March 20 this year). This new moon occurs this year on March 25.

The day has double significance as we commemorate the beginning of another sacred year and also as we set aside the time to remember and honor our great coming King.

Distant members and friends, plan now to join us at this sacred season.

New Year services and programs will be held on March 25 and 26. The anniversary of the Lord's Supper will be on April 6, the Resurrection on April 9, and Pentecost will fall 50 days later on May 28.

READ for Your LIFE!

**HISTORY OF THE MEGIDDO MISSION
THE COMING OF JESUS AND ELIJAH
WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE SAVED?
GOD'S SPIRITUAL CREATION
THE KINGDOM OF GOD
THE GREAT APOSTASY
HELL AND THE DEVIL
AFTER DEATH, WHAT?
TRINITY OR UNITY?
THE HOLY SPIRIT
THE ATONEMENT
THE SABBATH
ALL for \$3.00, Postpaid**



Letters

Looking Ahead

It is so wonderful that we live in a place and time that we are so privileged to exchange greetings of such joyous hope.

In times when death seems very possible, we should all the more rejoice that we have hope in Christ. This hope can give us strength and courage unimaginable as we have seen portrayed in many Bible accounts, such as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego facing a fiery furnace, Daniel facing a den of hungry lions and Jesus facing a crucifixion.

Even in our own lives, we are comforted in the promises of God, of a heavenly Kingdom on earth: no pain, no sorrow, no death, no evil of any sort; just joy, wonderful beautiful joy! A government headed and administrated by those whom we love, with Christ as head. All those worldly annoyances, hardships persecutions and losses just don't seem to matter so much anymore, having our hearts set on greater and everlasting things. Even the thought of death itself seems to have lost much of its impact. We can bear our persecutions, if we remain in the true faith, with rejoicing and praises.

It won't be much longer until Jesus Himself will be joining us, or rather, we joining Him. Then all we have worked for, dreamed about, and hoped for can be reality, if we continue to strive to make every day count toward being more like Him in character.

It seems that I can almost see the sky aglow and hear a heavenly choir!

Conyers, Georgia

G.P.

In the Last Days

There can be no doubt that we are in the last days; the miserable state of the world is a fact; evil men have waxed worse and worse until all civilization is threatened. Statesmen grope in vain for a solution, but it is not a matter that they can solve. We await the coming of our future King; *He* is the only one that can bring peace and goodwill, and that time is drawing ever nearer. May we not be found wanting in that Great Day.

Swansea, South Wales

M.S.

Longing

Some day we will not be writing to one another to inquire about our health, for when we reach that immortal state, we will have perfect health forevermore. How we should long for that day to come!

As the Bible said it would be in the last days, so it is today. Perilous times are upon us. There is moral decay, the crime rate is increasing at an alarming rate, and there is violence and the threat of war from every quarter of the globe. And, amid all this, the masses of the people seem to have no objective in life except the pursuit of pleasure. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening along with political corruption. Add to this sexual impurity, marital infidelity, alcoholism and drugs, and what we have today is a world ripe for destruction.

But, as appalling as all this is, we can actually rejoice because these things are a signal that our Lord is coming soon. He told us, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). He said further, "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (v. 31). As we see the condition of the world, we know that soon Elijah is going to appear, and quickly thereafter Jesus Himself will arrive to begin cleaning up this mess.

The important thing for us is to make sure we are using all our energy to get ready for that auspicious day. In Luke 21, Jesus gives a special warning to His people, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. . . Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Yes, let us beware lest we become too entangled in the everyday cares of life. Let us be content with the necessities of life and not be worrying about how we are going to make a living.

I have had my back to the wall, so to speak, a number of times and things have always worked out for my good. I have found that worry and preoccupation with the affairs of this life are needless and accomplish nothing.

Cleveland, Tennessee

S.K.

Interested

The other day I came across a copy of MEGIDDO MESSAGE in our local library. You state some interesting facts of the Bible.

Tempe, Arizona

C.W.

Very Thankful

We should be very thankful for this wonderful liberty to walk in this wonderful light of God's Word freely without any opposition from worldly powers as in other countries which strongly oppose God's Word. But we are assured that our Heavenly Father will not allow evil to continue always. Someday all will have to be done to His glory. Therefore, it is our most important duty to please our Father in all that we do, that we may be worthy to be a part of that New World where no evil of any kind will be allowed.

We are trying to impress more strongly upon our minds to always seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, for our eternal welfare. Doing the will of our Heavenly Father will be a great blessing, a hundredfold in this present life plus eternal rewards above all we can now ask for or even imagine.

Vernon, British Columbia

Z.S.

OBITUARY

Harry Feil

On December 28, 1981, funeral services were conducted for Brother Harry Feil in his home town of Hilton, New York, assistant pastor Newton H. Payne officiating. Brother Feil had been acquainted with the Megiddo Church for a number of years and attended whenever health and circumstances permitted.

He is survived by two sisters, Mrs. Bertha Bauch and Mrs. Nellie Strussenberg; three sons, Donald of Webster, New York, Norman of Florida, and Gordon of Almond, New York; also one daughter, Mrs. Ethelyn Brooks of Hilton, with whom he made his home and who tried to make his declining years as pleasant as possible. He also leaves thirteen grandchildren and many friends and neighbors.

So What Do You Know?

(from page 25)

Answers:

1. 30 years (Gen. 41:46); 2. 180 years (Gen. 35:28); 3. 40 years, 80 years, and 120 years; 4. 147 years (Gen. 47:28); 5. 12 (Luke 8:42); 6. 12 (Luke 2:42); 7. 123 years (Num. 33:39); 8. 30 years (Luke 3:23); 9. 85 years (Josh. 14:10-12); 10. 99 and 89 (Gen. 17:1, 5, 17); 11. 601 years (Gen. 8:13, 16); 12. 130 (Gen. 47:9); 13. 30 years (II Sam. 5:4); 14. 75 (Gen. 12:4); 15. 127 years (Gen. 23:1); 16. 5 (II Sam. 4:4); 17. 40 (Gen. 25:20); 18. 1 and 7 (II Chron. 24:1; 22:11-12); 19. 110 years (Gen. 50:22); 20. 70 years (Gen. 50:22); 21. 110 years (Joshua 24:29); 22. 365 (Gen. 5:23); 23. 40 (Acts 4:22); 24. 14 (Gen. 16:16; Gen. 21:5); 25. 3 months (Ex. 2:2).

Finally, Brethren

Being Aware

A WAKENESS and awareness are closely related. But being aware may have even more meaning than being awake. It is possible to be awake in a physical sense, yet not aware. The same is true in our spiritual lives.

Awareness is vital to the development of spiritual maturity. It includes that alive, alert sensitivity to issues of right and wrong, which is so essential to making the kind of choices which enable us to live acceptably before God today and tomorrow and the tomorrow after tomorrow.

Awareness guides our choices. It keeps us looking beyond empty profession and gives us a keen sensitivity to the way we really are. It helps us to see clearly our attitudes, values, and goals, and makes the alternatives real and viable. We become instinctively conscious of what we believe, how we feel, where we are, and where we are going.

Each of us is strongly influenced by our past experience and our present environment. This is especially true if we merely float along without awareness. We tend to conform to the way things were yesterday and the pressures of today. Our choices are automatically made for us as we choose without really thinking.

But when we become spiritually aware, we act from a more intelligent base. We have the resources to make decisions and choices that do not repeat the past. Our awareness gives us the advantage of being able to evaluate the results of our past choices in an eternal perspective, thereby giving us the opportunity to correct past deficiencies and increase future productivity.

But awareness not only deals with making choices; it affects our total perception of time and eternity. It enables us to see our present trials for what they are—the slight troubles of the passing moment which will soon result in solid glory past all comparison. Awareness shows us God's world as it is going to be, and the present as a necessary preparation for that New World.

Being sleepily uninvolved may be more comfortable; being continually watching and aware may be tedious and tiring; but when the New Age dawns we shall be more than glad that we made the effort and kept ourselves awake and aware.

MM

My Goal

*I wonder—
Which is really me:
The person that I am at times,
Or the one I strive to be?*

*I want to be more humble,
More forgiving and more kind;
I want an all-enduring heart,
An understanding mind.*

*I want to solve my problems
With a conscience pure and clear—
For then I'll know a peace of soul
Untouched by strife or fear.*

*Let nothing gross or mean or small
Be part of my endeavor;
Oh, let the real me seek the goal
Of godliness—forever!*