

WINTER 2014 • VOLUME 101, No. 4

Megiddo Message



INTEGRITY is keeping the **LAW**
even when no one is looking.

Who Wants Advice?

Who wants advice? Nobody? I don't believe it, because I know how valuable advice has been to me. The big problem is, most of us don't want anyone to know that we want it. That would mean admitting someone knows something I don't!

What is your attitude toward taking advice? I do not mean cutting remarks but well-intended, beneficial, constructive advice. I may not always agree with it, but I have to acknowledge that the other person has reasons for thinking as he does and I might benefit from listening. Who am I to say that I am always right, or that I always know the answer?

The trouble is that when I ask for advice, I don't always like what I get. Perhaps someone hesitates to advise me because he knows it will be hard for me to take. But the advice I don't like may be just as valuable as the advice I like. What is my attitude toward this individual? Do I count him an enemy? Never! That would be like turning on my best friend. We are wise to remember, *"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice"* (Prov. 12:15 NIV).

This is not to say that all advice is good or even useful. Sometimes its value is limited by the fact that the one giving the advice does not know the whole situation. But this does not upset me, because I know that person is sincerely trying to be helpful.

By far the largest obstacle in benefiting from advice is not the attitude of the giver but my attitude as receiver. If I am humble and teachable in spirit, I can benefit. If I already "know it all," the advice will fall on deaf ears and I will have lost a valuable opportunity—simply by keeping my own mind closed and thinking I already have all the wisdom I need. Such an attitude is fatal when we are serving God, who knows how desperately we need guidance. Did not the Prophet say, *"it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps"*? (Jer. 10:23). God wants those who are ready to listen and change their ways for His.

Did you ever hear advice that challenged you—because you had to grow to carry it through? This is the time to be even more grateful, because another has pointed out an area where I need growth. This is where I need to be long in patience and kindness. Who am I to be demanding another, when I myself have needed so much help?

Taking advice may also save me from a serious mistake or misjudgment. Maybe I did not ask for the advice, or maybe the advisor was not fully informed, but I am foolish if I close my ears to it.

What is the right spirit in which to take advice? Two words are enough: humbly grateful. After all, is the advisor against me, or on my side? If we go through life thinking everyone who does not agree with us is against us, where will this lead? Only to self-destruction, and the end will be disaster.

If I feel someone is against me because he is saying something I don't like to hear, I am only hurting myself!

Taking disagreement in a kindly spirit is a Christian grace we all need to add. We cannot expect everyone to always agree. But if there is a Christian principle involved, we must tread carefully, lest we find ourselves rejecting a message from heaven.

Are you ready for some advice? Take it! ♦

*God wants
those who are
ready to listen
and change
their ways
for His.*

Front cover:
"Winter blossoms" on
Cherry Tree in yard
at Megiddo Church,
Rochester, NY

WE BELIEVE...

- ★ **in God, the Creator** and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we *"live, and move, and have our being."*
- ★ **in the Bible** as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ★ **in Jesus Christ**, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- ★ **in the Holy Spirit**, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ★ **in life as the gift of God**, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in humankind** as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in ourselves** as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- ★ **in the promise of God**, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

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 (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

INTEGRITY



THE PRICELESS VIRTUE

What you are in the sight of God is what you truly are.

Did you ever notice the value Jesus placed on integrity? In His parable of the Sower, He looked across the various types of soil (human hearts) where the seed of the Kingdom might grow. What did Jesus consider the very best kind of soil for growing the good seed of the Word of God? It was the *"honest and good heart."*

We live in a society that has largely abandoned moral standards and Christian principles. Unkept campaign promises, false advertising, exaggerated tax exemptions, employee theft, mistrust and unfaithfulness between couples—dishonesty has become a way of life. Even in the average church, ethical teaching from the Word of God has been all but silenced.

But God still wants His people to be people of integrity. He wants them to maintain a commitment to His standards, no matter what the cost. Is consistent obedience to God—integrity—attainable in this world of sin and self-interest?

The answer is Yes!

The sacred Scriptures are filled with examples of godly men who modeled integrity during times of severe testing. We today, even in the 21st century, can learn from them. We today can model integrity just as they did.

In this section we will look at:

- ◆ Christian integrity defined
- ◆ Christian integrity applied
- ◆ What standard for integrity?
- ◆ How far Christian integrity?
- ◆ Truth in telling
- ◆ Bible examples of integrity
- ◆ Truth in one's religious beliefs

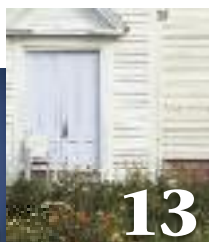
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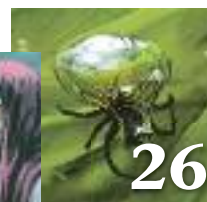
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Megiddo Message

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Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; **DBL**—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; **EDNT**—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; **GES**—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; **HAL**—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; **LSJ**—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; **LN**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains; **SHG**—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. **THAYER**—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

HONEST BEFORE GOD

Integrity seems to be a rare commodity in our world today. In business, in sports, in government, in society, the accepted philosophy very often is “whatever works.”

Take, for example, the report of a marathon race for persons over forty. When the results of the race were challenged, video cameras were installed along the path of the race, and it was discovered that twenty-three of the participants took shortcuts of up to ten miles.

A lack of moral integrity apparently characterizes our society from top to bottom. Consider the following facts, published in *The Federalist*: “Based on records prior to the summer break, 29 members of Congress have been accused of spousal abuse, 7 have been arrested for fraud, 19 have been accused of writing bad checks, 117 have bankrupted at least two businesses, 3 have been arrested for assault, 71 have credit reports so bad they can’t qualify for a credit card, 14 have been arrested on drug-related charges, 8 have been arrested for shoplifting, 21 are current defendants in lawsuits, and in 1998 alone, 84 were stopped for drunk driving, but released after they claimed Congressional immunity.”

A modern cliché expresses the too popular belief: “It ain’t cheating unless you get caught.”

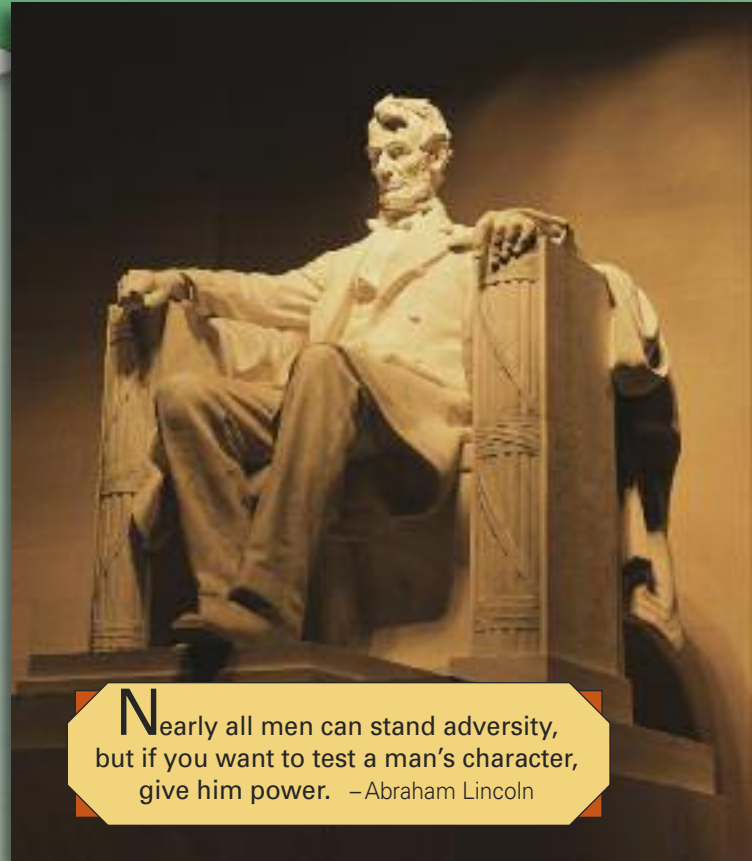
INTEGRITY DEFINED...

What is integrity? The word comes from the Latin *intege*, meaning “untouched, unbroken, undefiled, uncontaminated.” Webster gives three definitions to integrity: 1) an unimpaired condition; 2) firm adherence to a code of moral or artistic values; 3) the quality or state of being complete or undivided. But the standard must be defined. The assumption is that one’s conscience is the standard, whatever it be.

The synonyms of integrity are also impressive. “A lofty group, including honor, honesty, genuineness, loyalty, righteousness, candor, trustworthiness, principle, veracity, purity, perfection.” It is curious that so many of the words describing the opposite of integrity begin with the letter “d”: devious, deceitful, dissembling, double-talk, double-minded, duplicity, dishonesty.

CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY DEFINED...

Christian integrity is much more than a commitment to live by one’s conscience. It is a commitment ultimate-



Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power. —Abraham Lincoln

WHICH TIRE WAS IT?

One sunny day, four high school boys couldn’t resist the temptation to skip classes.

The next morning they explained to one teacher that they had missed her class because their car had a flat tire. To their relief, she smiled as she said, “Well, you missed a quiz yesterday.” Then she added, “It’s not too late. Take your seats, and get out a pencil and paper. I have just one question for you to answer. It’s worth 50 points.” When they were ready she simply asked, “Which tire was flat?”

Suddenly the fun of skipping school was gone.

Too often the fruit of deceit has a bitter after-taste.



THE **CATCH** OF A LIFETIME

He was 11 years old and went fishing every chance he got from a dock at his family's cabin on an island in the middle of a New Hampshire lake.

On the day before the bass season opened, he and his father were fishing early in the evening, catching sunfish and perch with worms. Then he tied on a small silver lure and practiced casting. The lure struck the water and caused thin silver ripples as the moon rose over the lake.

When suddenly his pole doubled over, he knew something huge was on the other end. His father watched with admiration as the boy skillfully worked the fish alongside the dock.

Finally, he very gingerly lifted the exhausted fish from the water. It was the largest one he had ever seen, but it was a bass.

The boy and his father looked at the handsome fish, gills playing back and forth in the moonlight. The father lit a match and looked at his watch. It was 10 p.m. —two hours before the season opened. He looked at the fish, then at the boy.

"You'll have to put it back, Son," he said.

"Dad!" cried the boy.

"There will be another fish," said his father.

"Not as big as this one," cried the boy.

He looked around the lake. No other fishermen or boats were around in the moonlight. He looked again at his father.

Even though no one had seen them, nor could anyone ever know what time he caught the fish, the boy could tell by the clarity of his father's voice that the decision was not negotiable. He slowly worked the hook out of the lip of the huge bass and lowered it into the black water.

The creature swished its powerful body and disappeared. The boy suspected that never again would he see such a great fish.

That was over 30 years ago. Today, the boy is a successful architect in New York City. His father's cabin is still there on the island in the middle of the lake. He takes his own son and daughters fishing from the same dock. He was right. He has never again caught such a magnificent fish as the one he landed that night long ago. But he does see that same fish—again and again—every time he comes up against a question of ethics.

For, as his father taught him, ethics are simply matters of right and wrong. It is only the practice of ethics that is difficult. Do we do right when no one is looking? Do we refuse to cut corners to get the design in on time? Or refuse to trade stocks based on information that we aren't supposed to have?

We are not here to take unfair advantage but to do what is right.

—Author Unknown

ly to live by the standard of the God of heaven, the God of the Bible. The benefit is not merely the approval of family, or friends, or society but the highest blessings of the Omnipotent One, "even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3).

CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY APPLIED

If you were to ask the average person if they are honest, they might be insulted. "Of course I'm honest!" might be the instinctive response, felt if not expressed. But when we realize we are accountable to God, we may want to think further. What level of integrity is God looking for? What does it mean to apply integrity to our lives?

□ God says, "*Speak the truth.*" "*Do not lie*" (Eph. 4:15; Col. 3:9).

That seems clear. In other words, do not say anything that isn't true.

Where does this take us? If we apply this command, we will be strictly honest with the IRS on our income taxes. We will be strictly honest when taking exams, and we will always pay our just debts. But what if we stretch the facts just a little to draw more attention or to make the story more exciting? What about exaggerating or coloring the facts just a bit to enhance the effect on our listeners? Exaggerations are not, strictly speaking, "the truth." Colored or enhanced stories are not the "truth."

□ God says, "*Do not judge according to appearances, but with righteous judgment*" (John 7:24). "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*" (Deut. 5:20).

What is "righteous judgment"? Righteous means "approved of or acceptable to God" (*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*). It is judgment by God's standard of right. As Christians we cannot set our own standard; that is God's prerogative, and it is spelled out in the Bible. We are responsible to God, and must be honest before God. So the issue becomes: How does my standard compare with God's Word?

Do we make every effort to be one hundred percent fair and square in our judgments? When there is a question, do we give the other person the benefit of the doubt? Is our viewpoint affected by prejudice—or sympathy? Are we careful not to accuse or condemn until we have solid evidence?

Are we just as diligent to report something that condemns us as something that makes us "look good"? Are we honest to the point that when we must tell something about ourselves our first

thought is to be totally truthful, without considering how it will affect others' opinion of us? "*Righteous judgment*" includes all of this.

The man who has won millions at the cost of his conscience is a failure. —B.C. Forbes

❑ God says, **"Do not steal"** (Mark 10:19).

It is not likely that we live by robbing banks or stealing cars. But if we had an opportunity to take something that did not belong to us, something we really wanted, and we were absolutely sure no one would ever know, would we give in to the temptation?

Do we use on-the-job time for our personal business? Unless we are given permission, isn't this stealing time from our employer? How about spending time talking when we should be working? Or charging personal expenses on the company charge card without authorization? Or taking office supplies for our personal use? It is only another form of stealing.

❑ God says, **"Do to others what you would have them do to you"** (Matt. 7:12 NIV).

If we live by this "rule" of Jesus', we must not take unfair advantage of anyone. What if we sell a used car that we know has intermittent problems? Do we say nothing, and hope the new owner pays us and drives away before the problem recurs? Is that integrity?

Suppose we are selling fruit. Do we carefully arrange the basket so that the best fruit is on top—and a few defective ones are well covered? Do we ever give less than *"good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over"* (Luke 6:38)?

If we are buying, do we press the seller to a lower and still lower price, without considering what is fair value?

If we are an employer, do we pay our employee the bare minimum he or she will accept, when we could afford to do more? Or do we continually ask the employee for extra work without offering additional pay?

Yes, these are secular matters. But our obligations to our fellowmen are obligations to God. If we cannot be honest with them, how can we be honest before God?

When we come to evaluating our own heart and character before God, we are safest if we judge ourselves with rigor and have leniency for others. Why? Because I am

When there is a lack of honor in government, the morals of the whole people are poisoned.

...There is no such thing as a no-man's land between honesty and dishonesty. Our strength lies in spiritual concepts. It lies in public sensitiveness to evil....

Our greatest danger is not from invasion by foreign armies. Our dangers are that we may commit suicide from within by complaisance with evil, or by public tolerance of scandalous behavior...."

—Herbert Hoover

31st President of the USA

<http://www.appleseeds.org/hover1.htm>



No amount of ability is of the slightest avail without honor. —Henry Ward Beecher

THE AGE OF SCANDAL

The present time seems to be an age of scandal.

People are free to formulate their own standards of honesty, which change depending upon their circumstances.

Consider the following statistics:*

- ♦ employee theft is approaching \$1 billion a week
- ♦ an estimated 20% of the gross national product is unreported to the government
- ♦ the "little white lie" is acceptable
- ♦ it is considered all right to distort the truth to "save face"

Add to the above the report from a non-partisan study that members of the US Congress and their aides took some 23,000 free "fact finding trips" worth nearly \$50 million between January 2000 and June 2005. The trips, mostly to popular resort areas, were paid for by corporations, trade associations, and special interest groups.

Is it a new lifestyle? The book of Judges records a time when a nation was dominated by this same dishonest style of living. *"In those days ... all the people did what was right in their own eyes"* (Judges 17:6).

What came of it? The consequences were disastrous.

* source (unverified): www.christ-first.org



Do not join a crowd that intends to do evil.

—Exodus 23:2

You never have to hide if you have nothing to hide.

THE LIE THAT COST THEM THEIR LIVES

"You have not lied to men but to God." —Acts 5:4

There was a man named Ananias who, with this wife Sapphira had sold a piece of property, but with her full knowledge, reserved part of the price for himself. He brought the remainder to put at the apostles' disposal. But Peter said to him, "Ananias, why has Satan so filled your mind that you could cheat the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the price of the land? Before the land was sold it was yours, and after the sale the disposal of the



price you received was entirely in your hands, wasn't it? Then whatever made you think of such a thing as this? You have not lied to men, but to God!"

As soon as Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died. All who were within earshot were appalled at this incident. The young men got to their feet and after wrapping up his body carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later it happened that his wife came in not knowing what had taken place. Peter spoke directly to her, "Tell me, did you sell your land for so much?" "Yes," she replied, "that was it."

Then Peter said to her, "How could you two have agreed to put the Spirit of the Lord to such a test? Listen, you can hear the footsteps of the men who have just buried your husband coming back through the door, and they will carry you out as well!"

Immediately she collapsed at Peter's feet and died. When the young men came into the room they found her a dead woman, and they carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband. At this happening a deep sense of awe swept over the whole Church and indeed all those who heard about it. —Acts 5:1-11, J.B. Phillips translation

Ananias and Sapphira planned their lie. They wanted to appear to be giving all when they in fact kept part of the money for themselves. To Peter and the other believers they would appear generous.

However, the apostle Peter, gifted with Holy Spirit power, could read what was in their hearts. He was also able to execute the judgment of God. For it was a serious offense. "You have not lied to men," he said, "but to God" (v.4).

The young church at Jerusalem was extremely vulnerable. This new communal arrangement was unique. Unchecked hypocrisy and deception would have undermined the community of believers. But God's swift, severe judgment helped all to maintain a healthy respect for the truth and for God's power in the church.

We live in a highly competitive world, and sometimes we may be strongly tempted to shade the truth to get ahead. A lie may give momentary benefit. People lie in business, and get big contracts. People lie to their employers, and get promoted. Politicians lie to the public and get elected. But does this mean liars win?

In the long view, they lose. "He who speaks lies shall perish" (Prov. 19:9). "All liars" will be outside the eternal city (Rev. 21:8, 27).

closest to myself and know myself best. Also, I am most responsible for myself—my own eternal life is at stake.

We are always in great danger of being too agreeable with ourselves. We need more of the humble caution of Job: "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse" (Job 9:20).

WHAT STANDARD FOR INTEGRITY?

Why the concern for integrity? Have people of God found it a "natural" result of faith in God? Or is it a quality they worked to develop because they wanted to look good to their peers? Or did they develop it because they wanted to please God?

There is only one answer: They developed it because God has commanded it, and they wanted to please God—because they wanted the eternal life God is offering. All through the Bible, those who spoke for God declared the same standard of integrity, and it is a standard that does not change with time or circumstance.

If we begin searching the Scriptures, we find that God wants His people to serve Him "in truth with all [our] heart" (1 Sam. 12:24). Joshua appealed to the people to "fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth" (Josh. 24:14). The Psalmist said, "The LORD is high unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth" (Ps. 145:18). How can one be "pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8) and be lacking in integrity? How can one be honest before God without being absolutely fair and honest with one's associates? It is impossible.

Let's look at the terms used in Scripture to convey God's standard of integrity. They are words like "undefiled," "blameless," "holy," "pure," "upright," "true," "righteous," "clean." Which of these allows any compromising, any of those "d" words—dishonesty, disguise, deceit, duplicity? The apostle John appealed to his brethren to become pure "even as he [Christ] is pure" (1 John 3:3). Jesus promised salvation to those who overcome as He Himself overcame (Rev. 3:21), to the same level of moral attainment.

Hear the apostle Paul encouraging his brethren to grow up in Christ by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Again, "Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25). Again, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9).

Would an Almighty God ask something He knew was beyond the reach of His children?

Would He command a standard too high to reach? Never! He knows our weakness, our frailty, our limitations; (Psalm 103:10,14) He has promised that no test will be beyond our strength to endure, with His help (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Bible describes those who are admitted to the eternal City in terms of their high, moral attainments. The city gates are shut to “*dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters*”—and—“*whoever loves and practices a lie*” (Rev. 22:15)—black lie, white lie, any lie.

This shows how seriously God looks at our integrity. Of all the disappointments or sorrows we could imagine, to be found outside the eternal City would be the worst.

If our integrity matters to God to the extent that it determines our fitness for His eternal blessings, should it not also matter to us?

HOW FAR CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY?

The Christian commitment is a commitment to total integrity because he wants above all to be right with God. It is a commitment that affects every area of one's life. The Christian will strive to be truthful at home with his family. He will strive to be truthful in what he believes and teaches. He will strive to be truthful in what he tells others and what he tells himself.

Integrity is transparent goodness, even when no one will know. It is keeping our word, being true to our promises and following through with our commitments, even when they may seem to work against us. It is written of the faithful ones who stand with Christ, that “*in their mouth was found no deceit*”—no falsehood. There was nothing covered because they had nothing to hide (Rev. 14:5).

Integrity is being true in obeying the laws to which one is subject, even if the result is personal hurt or disadvantage. If the law of the land says “no,” the Christian must say “no” also (Rom. 13:1–2), unless that law violates his higher allegiance to a command of God. If the law of God says “no,” the Christian must say “no” also (Rom 14:22).

Integrity is the firm conviction that right is right, and wrong is never right. And it is the same whether there are a hundred judges to testify against us, or whether we are the only one who knows.

Integrity is letting the fish go (see page 6)—even though no one will ever know, and even though it is a bigger, better fish than we could ever hope to see again—because it would be violating a law to keep it.

Christian integrity is a commitment without regard to personal consequences, advantages or disadvantages. At the highest level of attainment, the person committed to living by God's standard of integrity will lose face, rather than lose integrity; will sacrifice money, before he will falsify the facts. He will give up his job before he will please his heavenly Employer. He will fail an exam

ABOUT INTEGRITY

No sector of our society remains sacred any longer. Not the Oval Office of the White House, the Pentagon, Capitol Hill, NASA, Wall Street, the sports arena, the halls of academe, the medical or legal professions—or even the whole world of religion. With psychology and our liberalized mindset, there has been a disappearance of sin and an absence of ethics. Absolutes of right and wrong have been replaced with a foggy gray mixture of uncertainty and laxity. Look deep enough in any of our closets, and skeletons begin to rattle. Few men or women can withstand the laser-like probes of today's media examiners.

What is missing? Integrity!

—Dr. Charles R. Swindoll



I have never believed there was one code of morality for a public, and another for a private man.

—Thomas Jefferson, 1809

PRAYER:

Holy Father, we thank You for calling us to integrity. We thank You for those who stood unwavering for You, even in the face of personal suffering or sacrifice. We admire the integrity of those who, whatever the test, would not compromise.

We realize that we are not naturally people of integrity. Our first instinct is to defend ourselves and our image, even at the cost of truthfulness. On the other hand, we see the noble standard our Lord set, and the examples You have provided. Looking at their lives helps us to build our own convictions. As we observe their strength, help us to have the humility to acknowledge where we have been false, and look in our own lives for opportunities to grow in integrity. Give us the courage and determination to act with open, straightforward integrity and a good conscience before You and all.

Father, we ask Your forgiveness each time we repent and turn from our wrong, that we may one Day stand approved with all the pure and true and be granted a place in Your heavenly Kingdom on earth.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

EXAMPLES OF INTEGRITY

The Scriptures do not leave us wondering about the meaning of integrity. They use many biographical sketches to show us this priceless virtue in flesh and blood.



THE PROPHET SAMUEL

The noble prophet Samuel, last among Israel's judges, judged Israel with an integrity that was above reproach. In his farewell speech after acceding to their demand for a king, he challenged them: *"I am old and grayheaded, and look ... I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received any bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore it to you."* And they said, *"You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken*

anything from any man's hand." Then he said to them, *"The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand."* And they answered, *"He is witness"* (1 Sam. 12:2-5).

Where is the civil servant today who could claim Samuel's level of integrity?

rather than stoop to cheating. He will be evil spoken of, before he will cover up the truth. He will lose friends before he will compromise his values; he will lose even his life before he will dishonor or deny the cause of the God to whom he is committed.

Such a standard of integrity is contrary to nature.

Naturally we are self-seeking and self-preserving. Integrity, like every other Christian virtue, is a growth, one step at a time, until finally we arrive at *"the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13).

When David was striving for this standard, hear his heartfelt prayer:

"Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression" (Ps. 19:12-13).

Secret fault or presumptuous sin—both would bar the door to the eternal city. David longed to be free of both. When he sinned, he was willing to acknowledge it, repent and seek God's forgiveness (see Psalm 51). He wanted only to be right, and this was the heart quality that won God's commendation.

TRUTH IN TELLING

Honesty is often associated with words, for speaking the truth is one very important part of honesty. If we are not honest in our words—100 percent truthful in what we tell one another—how can we expect God to view us as honest?

"Do not lie to one another" (Col. 3:9) means just that, no more and no less. A lie is an intentional altering of what we believe to be fact. We may misjudge a situation, but a misjudgment is not a lie. Or we may misinterpret, or misunderstand; but we must not misrepresent.

If we are committed to integrity, we will be truthful without regard to how the truth



KING DAVID

The Almighty God knows our frame—He does not expect a whole lifetime without slips. But He does demand an honest heart, a heart that can face a wrong, acknowledge it, and turn and do right. This is where the character of David was outstanding. Perhaps none sinned more dreadfully. But none ever faced it more honestly and repented more totally than King David, and God forgave completely. David had the integrity of heart to rise above his weaknesses. With the help of God, we, too, can cultivate this same inner integrity.

Hear David's prayer as he was dedicating materials for a magnificent temple for His God, a tem-

ple Solomon his son would build: *"Who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You"* (1 Chron. 29:14).

Asaph, David's choir director, described God's choice of David and the character of his heart. *"He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people.... And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them"* (Ps. 78:70-72 NIV).

may affect us or anyone else, if only it is the truth. Strict honesty allows for no “fixing up” of what we tell. Prudence, kindness or wisdom may advise us not to tell all we know, but we must not falsify the facts; we must not knowingly deceive.

Truth needs no coloring, shading, covering, shrinking or stretching. Once it is altered, it is no longer “the truth.” Like pure water, once anything is added to it, it is no longer pure.

If we are 100% truthful, our telling will be the same whether others can verify the facts or whether they cannot; and whether others will accuse or whether they will commend.

Most distorting of the facts is done to give a false impression, to save face, cover a mistake, promote one’s agenda. We cannot do any of this and honor God. Even in unimportant details we must do our best to be factual. For *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much”* (Luke 16:10 NIV).

Instinctively we fear the judgments of others. But is there anything to fear on the human level? Is not our one fear that of falling short of inheriting the promises of God, the promise of being heirs of God and *“joint heirs with Christ”*? (Rom. 8:13–17).

We are here to learn the lessons we need to live eternally, to prepare for life in the world to come. We are children in school, training for a future role. We cannot expect the curriculum to be always easy or to our liking. We must expect discipline, suffering and chastening. But what will it matter, if only we can pass the test and advance to higher levels?

Another area requiring the utmost in honesty is being honest in how we view ourselves. For it is easy to justify what we should condemn—and *would* condemn if it were in another. But when the offender is self, we are naturally more concerned about what looks good, feels good, or sounds good than about the facts. The words of the apostle Paul, though spoken in a different situation, strike like an arrow to the mark: *“Blessed is the person whose principles do not condemn his practice”* (Rom. 14:22 NJB). If we tell ourselves



THE PROPHET DANIEL

Daniel the prophet maintained solid integrity under extreme stress. Very aged and appointed to high position, Daniel had many enemies, who did their best to criticize and blame. But even Daniel’s enemies had to admit that his character could not be faulted. We read, *“They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and*

neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men concluded, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God’” (Dan. 6:4–5 NIV). These jealous men succeeded in persuading the king to sign a law that would incriminate Daniel, but Daniel did not flinch.

When *“Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before”* (Dan. 6:10 NIV). He did it, even in the face of death—what awesome integrity!



NEHEMIAH AND HANANI

There were difficult times ahead for the returned Israelites. They found numerous problems and many enemies. Now, after 90 years, Jerusalem’s walls still lay in ruins and her gates were still burned. Worst of all was the rampant corruption, intrigue, and bribery—even among top religious officials, the priests. Their situation looked hopeless. However, there were a few loyal Jews among the returned Israelite exiles. One of

these was a man named Hanani, a brother of Nehemiah. Hanani made the long trip back to Persia to find help. His trip was successful. In time their prayers were answered. Nehemiah received permission from the king of Persia to leave his enviable position as king’s cupbearer and go to Jerusalem. He also was given royal assistance.

Nehemiah was a rare man of God. His integrity was to be tested over and over again, but he would not flinch. In a short time the walls and gates of Jerusalem were rebuilt. Then Nehemiah and Ezra went about making necessary reforms. Nehemiah gave Hanani charge of the city, not because he was his brother but *“...because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do”* (Neh. 7:2 NIV).

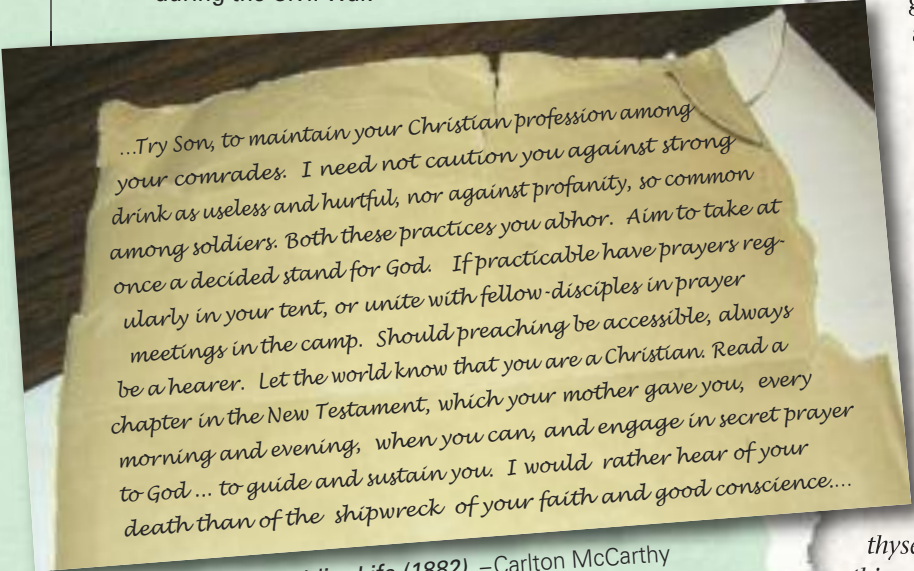
INTEGRITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

It seems our culture today views saying, "I was wrong," or "I need help," as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, those persons who acknowledge their sins or problems are taking steps toward true strength.

Integrity and responsibility go together. People of integrity take responsibility rather than ignoring the consequences or blaming others for their wrong behavior. A person of integrity is not afraid to say, "I was wrong," and "Will you forgive me?" He or she has the courage to say, "I need help. I can't make it alone."

MAINTAINING INTEGRITY

This excerpt from a letter dated July 17, 1861, is from a father to his only son, an infantry soldier during the Civil War.



...Try Son, to maintain your Christian profession among your comrades. I need not caution you against strong drink as useless and hurtful, nor against profanity, so common among soldiers. Both these practices you abhor. Aim to take at once a decided stand for God. If practicable have prayers regularly in your tent, or unite with fellow-disciples in prayer meetings in the camp. Should preaching be accessible, always be a hearer. Let the world know that you are a Christian. Read a chapter in the New Testament, which your mother gave you, every morning and evening, when you can, and engage in secret prayer to God ... to guide and sustain you. I would rather hear of your death than of the shipwreck of your faith and good conscience....

From *Soldier Life* (1882) –Carlton McCarthy

Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking. – J.C. Watts-

we were not upset when we were, or that we were honest when we were not, we harm ourselves. For what we do not acknowledge we will not correct. How much better to take the attitude of the Psalmist and pray, "*Do not incline my heart to any evil thing*" (Ps. 141:4)—and mean it.

TRUTH IN ONE'S RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

One of the most critical areas of integrity is in our beliefs. If we believe or trust in error, if we believe a lie or any teaching that is not true, it will sooner or later disappoint us, no matter how sincerely we may believe it. Sincerity cannot change a lie into truth.

What makes the difference between error and truth? It is the source and foundation of that belief. Is it another man's opinion, or does it have the authority of our Creator behind it? For example, if we believe we will go to heaven when we die, when the Bible says "*the meek shall inherit the earth*" (Matt. 5:5) and "*the righteous shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever*" (Ps. 37:29), we are believing a lie, because neither we nor anyone else on earth can make it happen. Even if fifty million people believe it most sincerely, and are looking forward to seeing their loved ones in heaven, if the Word of God does not support it, they are believing a lie and will be disappointed.

Have we heard that if we are truly diligent in obeying God, our business will prosper, our children will grow up to be good citizens, and we will be happy and successful? Again, if this is not the true teaching of the Word of God, we are believing a lie, and are sure to be disappointed. Did not Jesus say, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*"? (John 16:33).

Having correct beliefs becomes even more critical when we realize that we will act/live according to our beliefs. Having the wrong beliefs may result in our losing out on the eternal inheritance we could have won.

Aren't the religious teachers at fault, and not the innocent people they lead? What did Jesus say? "*If the blind lead the blind,*" the blind leaders will fall into the ditch? No, "*both*" end in the ditch (Matt. 15:14).

God holds us responsible for what we believe, hence the command, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God*" (2 Tim. 2:15). And, "*Test all things, hold fast what is good*" (1 Thess. 5:21). Not, take what appeals to you, or what is comfortable, or what is in line with your own thoughts.

Very early in life our founder, the Rev. L. T. Nichols, took a firm stand for integrity. He wanted no part of falsehood, even if it was seemingly as innocent as the Santa Claus myth. If it was not built on facts, why espouse it? His whole life became a commitment to integrity in belief. His criteria was not, what is the com-

mon idea? or, what do the professors of religion teach? But once convinced that the Scriptures were God inspired and inerrant as originally written, L. T. Nichols' one determination and longing was to be able to read every one of his beliefs in the unerring Word of God.

If our standard for our beliefs is the Word of God, we too will want to test what we believe by that Word. Then we will want to live consistent with those beliefs, however unpopular they may be. Here is a high test of courage as well as integrity.

In this aspect of integrity, as in every other, Jesus is the perfect model. Even His enemies observed His loyalty to truth when He was teaching. Wanting desperately to criticize, they had to admit, *"Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth"* (Mark 12:14 NIV). Jesus' character was unimpeachable. They knew He was not pandering to any carnal instincts. Integrity for Him meant speaking only what His Father directed, no matter what His audience wanted to hear.

A commitment to integrity in our beliefs is in reality part of one's commitment to obey God. *"He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully"* (Jer. 23:28). Faithfully! That is the Christian challenge today. To speak and live faithfully is our whole Christian effort, because each of us wants to hear our Master say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your lord"* (Matt. 25:21).

HONESTY AND "ME"

The whole subject of integrity comes down to one question, What is my life goal, and how does my integrity affect my success?

If we have taken the Word of God for our standard of integrity and eternal life in Christ's kingdom as our goal, being honest will affect every part of our lives. Instinctively we like what tickles our ego, enhances our



AGE IS NOT INNOCENCE

An elderly couple who were childhood sweethearts had married and settled down in their old neighborhood and were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. To remember the day, John and Sally walk down the street, up the hill and across the field to their old school, now a tumble-down shed badly in need of repair, still stands. They enter, and as they hold hands they find the old desk they had shared and where John had carved the words, "I love you, Sally."

As they are walking home, a bag of money falls out of an armored car, practically at their feet. Sally quickly picks it up. They don't know what to do with the money so they take it home. There, she counts the money, and it's

\$50,000. John says, "We've got to give the money back." Sally says, "Finders keepers, losers weepers." And she puts the money back in the bag and hides it up in their attic.

The next day, two FBI agents going door-to-door through the neighborhood looking for the money show up at John and Sally's house.

"Pardon us," says one of the agents, "but did either of you find any money that fell out of an armored car yesterday?"

Sally says, "No."

John says, "She's lying. She hid it up in the attic."

Sally says, "Don't believe him, he's getting senile."

But the agents sit John down and begin to question him. "Tell us the story from the beginning," says one of the agents. "Where did you find the bag? What were you doing?"

The old man begins: "Well, when Sally and I were walking home from school yesterday..." he pauses.

The FBI agents look at each other. "That's enough," says one of them. And they leave.

Did John and Sally get away with it? Not in God's view. Remember, *"the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good"* (Prov. 15:3).

—Author Unknown



There are too many people who think that the only thing that's right is to get by, and the only thing that's wrong is to get caught. — J.C. Watts-

INTEGRITY UNDER PRESSURE

One test of people's character is what they do in hard times—under pressure. Do they compromise their integrity using excuses for their wrong choices? Or do they have the courage and determination to do the right thing no matter what they come up against?



REMEMBER WATERGATE

Really? No one wants to remember Watergate. Even the associated names are black with guilt, names like Richard Nixon, Liddy and Dean, Mitchell and Magruder, Ehrlichman and Haldeman. Better to forget that embarrassing page in our nation's history. We've long since left it behind and moved on. Why even talk about it?

I want to talk about it because there is a lesson to be remembered, a big lesson. Watergate was a showdown for integrity. Integrity was on trial, and integrity lost.

History is a wise teacher, if we will listen. A psychiatrist named Leo Rangell, M. D., wrote a book he appropriately named *"The Mind of Watergate."* In it he talked about what he called "the compromise of integrity." Included is a telling transcript of a verbal investigation between Senator Howard Baker and young Herbert L. Porter. Here is a portion of it.

Baker: "Did you ever have any qualms about what you were doing? Did you ever think of saying, 'I do not think this is quite right'? Did you ever think of that?"

Porter: "Yes, I did."

Baker: "What did you do about it?"

Porter: "I did not do anything."

Baker: "Why didn't you?"

Porter: "In all honesty, probably because of the fear of the group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player."

Young Porter was willing to compromise his integrity for fear of being looked down upon by his peers. His fear of group pressure was greater than his fear of doing wrong. His integrity was on trial, and integrity lost.

It makes me wonder what I might have done in the same situation. All of us are born with this desire to look good to those who know us—our fellow workers, our companions, our associates in whatever circle. Having a good name among the team players can easily get in the way of having a good name before God.

At this distance we can see how easily the whole Watergate affair could have been avoided if only—if only a few men and women had had the courage to speak up and say, "This thing isn't right, I'm not going to go there"—and stuck to it. But then I wonder. Hindsight is always 20/20. Had we been there facing the pressures, the fears, the uncertainties, the intimidation of that moment, how well would we have stood?

Watergate has many counterparts in our lives today. There are always temptations to compromise our integrity—on the job, in a business deal, in a department store, on the highway. They are small, but in each we have the opportunity to follow the crowd and be liked, or to act biblically and open ourselves to libel, even rejection.

Watergate still has lessons to teach us. It tells us that knowing what is right is not enough. We must also do it.

self-image, and promises us momentary "success." If our goal is getting ahead in this world, the level of integrity that "works" would satisfy most.

But the dedicated Christian is not satisfied with that level, because they are not satisfied with that goal—not when God has promised eternal satisfactions and eternal rewards. When we exchange our goals here for the goals God has set before us, and we exchange our thoughts for God's, nothing in all the world matters so much as being and doing right before God.

In this perspective, integrity becomes priceless, even if it costs us some temporary embarrassment; even if it costs us a monetary loss in this world; even if it means failing the exam or losing the promotion; even if it means giving up our life rather than deny our faith. This was Jesus' principle. Do you realize His crucifixion was a direct consequence of His commitment to integrity? He would die before He would deny His kingship that He was born to be King (John 18:36–37). His loyalty to God stood above all things.

True religion is a commitment to absolutes. Nothing shady, nothing questionable, nothing contaminated, nothing even slightly defiled—this is the image of the character God is seeking. A character that will not bend, an integrity that will not compromise, an honesty that is open and unvarying whatever the situation, whatever the temptation, personal gain or loss—here is the character God is seeking. This is the quality that made Jesus *"holy, harmless, undefiled"* (Heb. 7:26).

It is said of the saints in Revelation that they *"loved not their lives unto the death"* (Rev. 12:11). Their commitment to integrity was more precious than life itself.

If you are a Christian, your integrity will be tested. When the test comes, recognize it and say, My integrity is on trial. Shall I compromise, and retain a better impression with men, or shall I stand the test, and receive God's honor?

It is a decision we are called to make every day. What will you decide?

Choose integrity! Choose life! ♦

Abib Is Coming!

Abib Means...

"spring or sprouting month" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon). God commanded Moses to *"observe the month Abib"* (see Deut. 16:1; Ex. 12:2; 13:4) as a memorial of the Israelites' departure from Egypt.

Abib (or Nisan) 1, the first day of Sacred New Year,

begins this year on Saturday evening, April 18, and continues through Sunday, April 19, Bible time being measured from evening to evening (Lev. 23:32). It was the pattern of the Hebrew People to begin the new year with the first occurrence of the new moon (this year on April 18) after the Spring Equinox (this year on March 20). Abib First is the first day of the sacred New Year, and the day on which we observe the anniversary of our Savior's birth.

Abib 13, the anniversary of the night Jesus partook of the Last Supper with His disciples before He suffered,

falls this year on Thursday evening, April 30. At this time we partake of the emblems in obedience to Jesus' command, *"This do in remembrance of me"* (1 Cor. 11:24-25). By this sacred rite we symbolize the renewing of our covenant relationship with God, the bread representing the knowledge of the law of God, and the juice representing the application of that knowledge to our daily lives.

Abib 15, the anniversary of the Resurrection of Christ,

occurs this year on the morning of Sunday, May 3. In ancient Israel, this was the day of the offering of the first sheaf of the harvest to the Lord. On this morning, Christ the firstfruits from death rose triumphant over death. On this morning, even *"very early in the morning,"* devout women wanting to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, made their way to the tomb (Mark 16:2). Finding it empty, they heard those immortal words from the angel that still thrill and inspire us today: *"He is not here, he is risen! Come, see the place where the Lord lay"* (Matt. 28:6)....

Pentecost, fifty days after the offering of the first sheaf,

when Jesus sent the power of the Holy Spirit on His disciples, falls this year on June 21. ♦



CAN TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD WALK TOGETHER?

(A morality play)

"Our responsibility is ... to stand for the truth at all times."
—2 Cor. 13:8 NLT

CHARACTERS:

Falsehood (*young man prosperously and finely dressed in black suit and cape*)
Truth (*young woman wearing clean white gown but obviously worn*)
Manager (*dressed in business suit*)
Waitress (*white cap & apron with pockets for order pad, pencil*)
Narrator

Truth is a rarity in our world today. Truth is integrity, and integrity is "consistency and sincerity, with no deception or pretense"—think about it: "**no** deception or pretense."

That means that with truth, there is no discrepancy between what a person **appears to be** on the **outside**, and what he **really is inside**.

For the Christian truthfulness is more than not telling black lies. It is:

- living what we say we believe, i.e. not being a hypocrite
- keeping our word, even when it hurts
- being completely truthful in the things we say to our family, our friends, and in business
- being honest with our money

At some time or another, we all will be tempted to distort the truth, perhaps to "save face," or to get our way. Or perhaps a white lie may serve us well to get ahead. But is that course going to take us where we want to go?

Built around a folktale from Greece, this skit points out that the honest soul not only loves the truth but hates falsehood. Truth would rather endure the pain of the hardships caused by being honest than the pain of being deceitful.

Narrator: *Once upon a time Truth and Falsehood met each other on the road.*

Truth: Good afternoon, Falsehood.

Falsehood: Good afternoon. And Truth, *how* are you doing these days?

Truth: (*sighs*) Not very well at all, I'm afraid. Times are tough for my kind, you know.

Falsehood: (*looking at Truth's threadbare clothes*) Yes, I can see that. (*with an arrogant air*) You look like you haven't had a **decent meal** in quite some time.

Truth: (*very discouraged*) To be honest, I haven't. No one seems to want to employ me nowadays. (*shrugs shoulders*) Seems—well, wherever I go, most people ignore me or mock me. It's getting discouraging, I can tell you. (*big sigh*) I'm beginning to ask myself why I put up with it.

Falsehood: (*with confidence and arrogance*) And why do you? (*beckons slyly*) Come with me, Truth, and I'll show you how to get along. There's no reason in the world why you can't **stuff** yourself with as much as you **want to eat**, (*put shoulders back proudly and pats stomach*) like me, and **dress in the finest clothes**, (*put shoulders back proudly and displays clothes*) like me. (*points finger threateningly at Truth*) But Truth, you must promise not to say a word against me while we're together. Do you understand?

Truth: (*a little scared but desperate*) Y—yes. I promise. (*pause*) I'm so hungry.

Falsehood: (*very triumphantly*) Come along then. I know **just** where to go.

(*they exit*)

Narrator: *So Truth promises to go along with Falsehood for a while, not because she likes his company so much, but because she is so hungry she thinks she will soon faint if she doesn't get something into her stomach. They walk down the road until they come to a city, and Falsehood at once leads the way to the very best table in the very best restaurant.*

(*Curtain opens. They are seated at restaurant table*)

Falsehood: (*calls very loudly*) Waitress, bring us **your choicest meats**, your **sweetest sweets**, your **finest drinks**!

Waitress: (*scurries back and forth bringing in tray after tray of food and drink—very doting*) You'll love this....Is everything all right?

Narrator: *And they ate and drank all afternoon. Falsehood is jovial and carefree, while Truth eats quietly. Finally, when they could hold no more—*

Falsehood: *(sitting back—pats stomach and looks very satisfied. Suddenly bangs fist on the table and calls angrily) Where is the manager? Who manages this place?*

Manager: *(comes running—stammers) I—I—I am the manager. What's the problem?*

Falsehood: *(snaps) What kind of place is this? I gave the waitress a gold piece nearly an hour ago, and she still hasn't brought me my change.*

Manager: *(summons waitress sharply) Debbie Diligence, what is this I hear?*

Waitress: *(shocked and bewildered) I don't know. Please, Mr. Manager, I—I've—I've never seen even a penny out of the gentleman.*

Falsehood: *(shouts so everyone in the place turns and looks) What? I can't believe this place! Innocent, law-abiding citizens come in to eat, and you rob them of their hard-earned money! You're a pack of thieves and liars! You may have fooled me once, but you'll never see me again! Here! (throws a gold piece at the manager) Now this time bring me my change!*



Narrator: *The manager takes Debbie Diligence aside, calls her a scoundrel and fires her. She protests that she never collected a cent from the man, but the manager refuses to believe her. Debbie Diligence begs for mercy, but angrily the manager turns and leaves her crying.*

Waitress: *(cries out desperately) Oh, Truth, where have you hidden yourself? (sighs) Have you now deserted even us hard-working souls?*

Truth: *(distressed—in stage whisper) Oh, no, No! I'm here, but my tongue is shackled (sadly) O that my judgment had not given way to my hunger, then I could now speak out against Falsehood.*

(Waitress turns sadly and exits. Falsehood and Truth stand up to leave)

Narrator: *As soon as they are on the street—*

Falsehood: *(gives a hearty laugh and slaps Truth on the back) You see, Truth, how the world works? (boasts) I managed it all quite well, don't you think?*

Truth: *(slips from his side—turns and answers disdainfully) Falsehood, I'd rather starve than live as you do! And don't you forget, Falsehood, that Truth will triumph in the end.*

(they exit in opposite directions)

Narrator: *And so Truth and Falsehood went their separate ways and never traveled together again.*

Truth and Falsehood can never walk together on the same road because they are not going in the same direction. Their goals are opposite. Falsehood is self promoting, dark, devious. He is the old sinful nature that distorts the truth to look good. "Enjoy life! Get all you can!" is his motto. Falsehood may get ahead in this life; he may look like success now, but his end is eternal death.

Truth on the other hand travels toward the light. Her goal is eternal life. Now Truth may be mocked, unpopular and put down, but in the end she will triumph! For our God is a God of truth, and He demands that His people be people of truth!

Because truth **will** triumph in the end! ♦

(The End)

Adapted from: <http://www.christ-first.org/Notes/Psalm%20101.htm>



Manager: *(fearful, refuses the gold piece) Oh, no! No! (waves hand) I won't take it. I'll get you your change right away. (rushes to get change, returns very quickly with it. Falsehood looks very pleased with himself and Truth looks shocked) Here, Sir, here is the change from your first gold piece. (bows and puts hands together) And—and I beg you, please do overlook this unfortunate mistake. (Waitress looks on distressed, worried and bewildered)*

THE DIPLOMACY DEATHTRAP

Remember the childhood rhyme, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me”? Even if it seemed useful as a shield against someone who was firing words like bullets, we all knew it wasn’t true.

Words can hurt. Words do hurt. They have even started wars. This is why the science of diplomacy developed, that art of using language skillfully to avoid offense. Diplomacy has a good side. Who can tell how many arguments have been avoided, or how many problems solved by someone who said the right thing at the right time in the right way. Being diplomatic can be a kindness, saving unnecessary pain, embarrassment and hurt. More than once the apostle Paul used words carefully to disarm the opposition (see Acts 23).

But diplomacy is not all positive. Sometimes diplomacy carries a flavor of untruth that is intentionally covering the facts and/or disregarding unwanted consequences. Diplomacy can even be a deathtrap.

POLITICAL DIPLOMACY

Consider the person (whom we call a “diplomat”) who hopes to gain favor by covering the facts with smooth words. It is not a new art. The politicians (false prophets) in ancient Israel and Judah were skilled at it. Just when God’s prophets had partially succeeded in getting through to a complacent, sinful people that would reap the fruit of their doings if they didn’t repent, there were ready counter-voices. “Don’t worry,” they consoled. “Lighten up! Life will go on. Everything is going to be all right” (free paraphrase of Jer. 23:17).

The people liked it! They actually preferred false consolation to unpleasant facts. Who wants to hear about consequences for their sins? “They [the people] tell the seers, ‘Don’t see any more visions!’ They say to [God’s] prophets, ‘Don’t tell us the truth! Say things that will make us feel good; see only good things for us!’” (Isa. 30:10 NCV). In other words, tell us what we want to hear, then everyone will be happy!

So the Divine message was not communicat-

ed, and the needed corrections were not made, because the people preferred feel-good diplomacy above truth.

Fast forward a few decades, to the inevitable consequences. The predicted disaster arrived, the disaster that could have been avoided. Thousands suffered. Thousands were taken captive. Thousands died, just as the prophets of God had foretold. Diplomacy had proved to be a deathtrap.

Another time God called the politicians “*prophets of the deceit of their own heart*,” who used “*lying words*” (Jer. 23:16, 26; 7:4)—i.e., diplomacy.

In recent years, our society has taken diplomacy to a new level with the concept of “politically correct.” Though one purpose of this language is to avoid offending those of diverse ethnic backgrounds, the most common interpretation seems to be to avoid any language or action that might condemn or offend, especially with regard to morals (or the lack thereof). To be politically correct one must refrain from any statement that might be perceived as judgmental (e.g., “wrong” or “right”). If the facts are negative, the statement should be phrased in such a way that the one to whom it is directed receives it without pain. (Maybe they won’t even get the point.)

What are we thinking? Where does this go? Are we trying to change the laws of the universe? Have we convinced ourselves that God no longer has any authority because we have removed His name from the public arena and taken the 10 Commandments from an Alabama courthouse and He has not cut us down? Are we thinking we can rewrite Scripture to say, “Sow what you want, reap what you want”? (see Gal. 6:7).

The morally blurring effect of “politically correct” is far-reaching. In a few years “politically correct” has already brought sweeping changes in our society. It has had a part in removing the social stigma from many types of conduct formerly unacceptable—one should not feel rejected because of irresponsible or deviant moral behavior.

How does this play out in real life?

- ❑ Don't condemn the father of four who frequents the local bar and abuses his wife—he is a “victim” of social disorders.
- ❑ Don't judge the young mother who leaves home to “find herself”—she has a right to self-fulfillment.
- ❑ Don't censure sex and violence in movies and videos—the public has a “right” to make their own choices.
- ❑ Is the young man unable to pay his rent month after month because he is spending too much on having a “good time”? He should not be evicted or disgraced. In fact, maybe there is even some program to assist him.
- ❑ Has a child been caught shoplifting? He should be counseled, not embarrassed or punished, lest his self-esteem be damaged.
- ❑ Did a government official die from AIDS? His promiscuous lifestyle must not be mentioned. He has a right to any sexual orientation he chooses.
- ❑ Don't be too hard on three teenage girls who put on hoods and devised a unique way to rob a bank—and succeeded. People should understand that they were only “little girls playing a game.” (This actually happened).

What have we done? “Politically correct” has changed the label on the bottle of arsenic. So now, instead of reading “POISON” it says something like: “Essence of Peppermint.” What just happened? The poison only became more dangerous.

PARENTAL DIPLOMACY

Parents are also threatened by the diplomacy trap. I am the strongest advocate of giving the youth encouragement and support. A child should be assured that he or she is loved, and that the parent really cares. Parents do not properly love their children if they do not give them the proper balance of reward, encouragement and discipline. But does a parent help a child by an enthusiastic, “Great job! You did very well!” when both the parent and the child know the effort was mediocre and far less than he or she was capable of? It may be diplomacy, and may build the child's self-esteem, but where is the motivation to improve if the current performance is all “great” and “good”?

Take the above example a step further. Your child, now a pre-teen, wants freedom—no restrictions. You know he is immature, fearless and vulnerable. What should you do? You want him to be happy, so you speak mildly about the dangers of too much freedom. Don't alarm him! Don't tell him homosexuality is wrong. Don't associate it with AIDS. Teach him all the options—better yet, let him learn from his peers at school, or from the media about life and lifestyles so he can make his own choices. Let the teens have their fun, their friends, their music, their idleness, their TV, their computer games and the internet unrestricted—they are only young once. And they may as well get

used to the “real” world—it's all out there waiting for them!

Is this thinking reasonable or responsible? Will it work? Is it even sensible? Consider the following hypothetical example:

A road winds through a very scenic part of the country, but a severe storm has eroded the foundation under a portion of the pavement, creating a serious driving hazard. An unwary motorist could easily run off the road and be plunged into a deep gorge below. What should be done about the problem? Only a small section of the highway is affected, and through the 40 plus miles leading to it, everything looks very normal; no one would suspect the problem. So don't put up any guardrails that will inhibit travelers. Don't put up any alarming signs at the entrance to the road that read “Caution! Danger Ahead” or “Proceed at Your own Peril.” Above all, don't close the road. It is unfair to block innocent travelers, because some will be able to get through safely. Warnings will only make it hard for them to enjoy the ride. They will learn best from their own experience, anyway.

Isn't this just as sensible as saying, Don't inhibit the young people with a lot of “do's” and “don'ts”? Tell them that they are the liberated generation, that now nothing is really “wrong” anymore. It is only a matter of preference; one likes apple pie, another prefers chocolate. Don't suggest that some lifestyles could have serious consequences ahead. Be tolerant. Be diplomatic. Be politically correct.

By not teaching our young people the consequences of living in a non-real world; by not teaching responsibility; by not helping them learn how to care for the home and family; by using alternative language to talk about alcoholism and homosexuality (the politically correct “you can't help it” language); by allowing them full access to smoking, alcohol, or violent TV or video games; by not giving them the facts, are we not lying to those we are supposed to help? Are we not trying—in vain—to overrule the God who says, “*Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant*” (Gal. 6:7 NLT)?

CHRISTIAN DIPLOMACY

Diplomacy becomes most hazardous for the committed Christian, because here the consequences are eternal. If people are “too kind” to warn me when I crossed the line, how will I learn? If people choose to walk around my might-get-hurt feelings and tell me only what “feels good,” how can I grow in godliness? How can I even faintly hope to attain to the standard of Christ?

The reality is: “*God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil*” (Eccl. 12:14). Do I want to wait for God's final judgment on my life to find out where I fell short? Absolutely not! I want to know *now*, while I can change. If my so-called friends are too diplomatic, too politically correct to call right “right” and wrong “wrong,” they are my enemies, not my friends. I get no benefit from those who are so tolerant or so diplomatic that I miss the point.

My best friend is one who brings me up short when I sidestep my duty, who says plainly but kindly, "You should not have said that." My best friend is the person who, when I am tempted to be self-satisfied, says, "You can do better than that." My best friend is one who, seeing me in danger of transgressing, says, "Watch out!"

There is a reason the Bible says, "*Reproofs of instruction are the way of life*" (Prov. 6:23), because none of us knows how to "*guide his own steps*" (Jer. 10:23 NJB). If I must grope my own way through life alone, I am doomed to fail.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Whether diplomacy is at the political, parental, or personal (Christian) level, the bottom line is integrity. If diplomacy adheres to the facts and considers the best interests of the parties involved, it is an instrument for good. But diplomacy is a detriment when:

- ❑ it conceals the truth that should be known
- ❑ it keeps one from learning from others' experience
- ❑ it obscures moral boundaries or removes social restraints on misconduct
- ❑ it conceals the consequences of bad choices

Why? Because covering the facts does not change the consequences.

Diplomacy says, Speak the truth if it is non-offending, non-irritating, non-disturbing, non-incriminating. God says, Speak the truth—Period. No sin is too small to be of consequence, or too large to acknowledge. But the first step is to recognize it. The second is to acknowledge it, and the third is to make a 180° turn.

God is not politically correct. "*He sees guilt and he marks it*" (Job 11:11 Moffatt). With Him, "*a false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish*" (Prov. 19:9)—even if he or she is only being politically correct.

You can try to minimize the hurt of what God calls sinful conduct with alternative language. You can call a skunk anything you want. But it is still a skunk, as you will surely find out if you get too near.

What is the better way? Call a skunk a skunk. Call poison exactly that. Call a sin a sin, and recognize that the end of sin is death, eternal death (Jas. 1:13–15).

The only alternative is to follow the Biblical directive, which is to "*confess and forsake*" it and receive God's mercy (Prov. 28:13).

Anything less is a deathtrap. ♦

TONGUES-SPEAKING TODAY:

TRUE OR FALSE? CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

at (1 Cor. 12:31 NEB). And even of these Paul said, "*Yet show I unto you a more excellent way,*" or "*the best way of all*" (NEB).

He continues his thought in chapter 13. "*I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I am without love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal*" (13:1 NEB). If I could speak with the voice of an angel, says Paul, it would amount to no more than a big noise if I had no love; I would be but a hypocrite if I professed to speak in tongues and did not keep the commandments of God. Without this genuine, practical love of God, Paul was telling them that their tongues, their faith or their charitable gifts added up to exactly nothing!

But these gifts were all temporary.

Tongues of ecstasy, gifts of prophecy and super-human knowledge would end when they had fulfilled their purpose, when the written Word of God was completed; but love would never come to an end, said Paul (1 Cor. 13: 8, 13).

The apostles were given these special gifts to convince their hearers that they were indeed authorized by the God of heaven; that they were not imposters witnessing for themselves. That is why Paul and Barnabas spoke "*boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands*" (Acts 14:3). Only by such demonstrations of the power of God could they gain a hearing for their message. "*God added his testimony by signs, by miracles, by manifold works of power, and by distributing the gifts of the Holy Spirit*" (Heb. 2:4 NEB). The miracle

of tongues-speaking was one of these signs and gifts, but there is nothing to indicate that all future believers would be given these gifts by the Holy Spirit. They were for that special age and that age only.

That is why Paul said (1 Cor. 13:8), "*Whether there be tongues, they shall cease.*" And they did cease. Today we have no need of these miraculous gifts. We have the complete Bible, the Word of God, to confirm our faith in its message. And we have the promise that these gifts will be restored "*when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord: and he shall send Jesus Christ,...whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things*" (Acts 3:19–21). Until that time we must rely on the written "*sure word of prophecy*" (2 Pet. 1:19). ♦



WHO?

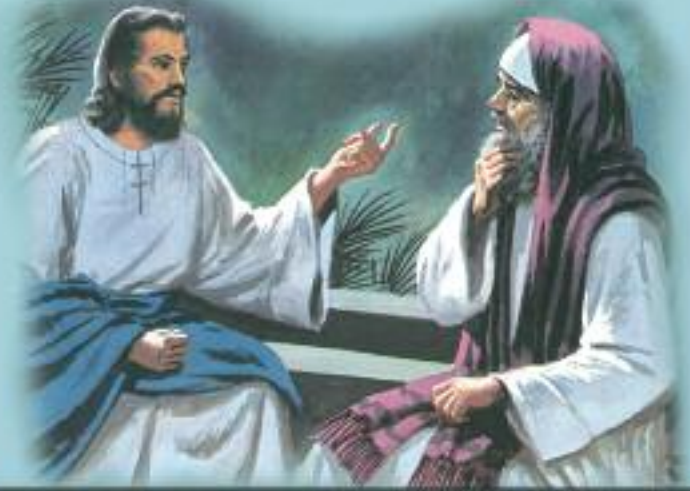
1. Who succeeded Elijah?
2. Who succeeded Herod the Great as ruler of Judaea?
3. Who (with his assistants) *"read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading"*?
4. Who was the first king of Israel, and whose son was he?
5. Who was greatly blessed by keeping the ark in his house three months?
6. Who used the metaphor of an axe laid at the roots of trees?
7. Who was the Jewish ruler that visited Jesus by night?
8. Who was Mephibosheth?
9. Who was the Roman governor of Palestine before whom Paul was first tried? And the second governor?

WHERE WAS (WERE)

1. David and Jonathan's last meeting-place?
2. Ezekiel when he saw visions of God?
3. The Israelites when they hung their harps on willow trees?
4. Jesus when a woman anointed Him with the precious spikenard?
5. The golden candlestick to be found in the Tabernacle?
6. Elisha's place of residence?
7. *"The flaming sword which turned every way"*?
8. Paul when he saw *"the Macedonian vision"*?
9. Elijah when he conducted his great contest with the Baal priests?
10. Joash during the first six years of his life?

ABOUT MOSES

1. The child found by Pharaoh's daughter in the ark of bulrushes was thereafter nursed by _____.
2. The name Moses means _____.
3. Moses fled from Egypt because _____.
4. Zipporah was the _____.
5. When Moses first saw the burning bush, he _____.
6. God told Moses that when the Israelites finally succeeded in leaving Egypt they would _____.
7. Moses' father and mother were related as _____.
8. Moses smote the rock at _____.
9. Moses' hands were held up by _____ during the battle with Amalek.
10. Moses' father-in-law helped him by _____.
11. The Ten Commandments were written on _____.
12. Moses broke the Ten Commandments because _____.
13. Moses made the people _____ the molten calf, and _____.
14. The cloudy pillar that descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle was _____.



ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS BELOW

WHO

1. Elisha (2 Kings 2:11-15)
2. Archelaus (Matt. 2:22)
3. Ezra (Neh. 8:5-9)
4. Saul, son of Kish (1 Sam. 9:1-2; 10:1)
5. Obed-edom (1 Chron. 13:14)
6. John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1, 10)
7. Nicodemus (John 3:1-2)
8. The son of Jonathan, lame in both feet, whom David cherished for his father's sake (2 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 9:6-7)
9. The first was Felix (Acts 24:1-3, 10, 27); and the second was Festus (Acts 25:1-12)

WHERE WAS (WERE)

1. Wilderness of Ziph (1 Samuel 23:13-18; 31:2)

2. In captivity residing on the banks of the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1:1)
3. In Babylon (Ps. 137:1-2)
4. In the home of Simon the leper (Matt. 26:6-7; Mark 14:3-4)
5. Opposite the table of shewbread in the Holy Place (Ex. 40:22-24)
6. Dothan (2 Kings 6:12-13)
7. At the east of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24)
8. In Troas (Acts 16:8-10)
9. On Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:19-24)
10. Hidden in the temple (2 Kings 11:1-3)

ABOUT MOSES

1. The infant's mother (Ex. 2:7-9)
2. Drawn out of the water (Ex. 2:10)

3. He had killed an Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-15)
4. Wife of Moses (Ex. 2:21-22)
5. Took a closer look (Ex. 3:2-3)
6. Spoil the Egyptians (Ex. 3:21-22)
7. Nephew and aunt (Ex. 6:20)
8. Horeb (Ex. 17:6)
9. Aaron and Hur (Ex. 17:11-13)
10. Decentralizing his authority (Ex. 18:13-26)
11. Two stones, each written on both sides (Ex. 32:15-16)
12. He saw the Israelites worshipping a molten calf (Ex. 32:1-19)
13. Grind to powder and put in water and drink (Ex. 32:20)
14. An angel who spoke to Moses (Ex. 33:9-11; 14:19)

TONGUES-SPEAKING TODAY: TRUE OR FALSE?

"Recently while we were waiting at a local laundromat, a family of two young men and their mother stopped in to use the pay phone. While the son was on the phone, I entered into a conversation with the mother about salvation and religion. The family were from the north and had for one reason or another escaped to Arkansas. She expressed her desire to live right and that for this purpose she had become affiliated with a local Pentecostal church. She said that the son who was on the telephone was being pushed by their congregation to talk in unknown tongues during their church services."

"After much church member coercion, he let out a string of German, (he knew the language) at which the congregation shouted and rejoiced because he had finally received the Holy Spirit and was talking in unknown tongues! She said the preacher then slapped him on the forehead to enhance his trance."

Is speaking in tongues today heavenly or human? A manifestation of Divine power through the Holy Spirit, or merely the expression of human emotion?

The earliest instance of tongues speaking in the Bible is recorded in the Book of Acts. Perhaps better described as a miracle of understanding, this gift made it possible for persons of seventeen different languages to understand one Galilean speaker—each “heard” the speaker in his own native tongue! Speaking in tongues was also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit known among the early believers, which Paul discusses in some detail in First Corinthians (chapters 12 and 14). But the gift Paul discusses appears to have been somewhat different from that seen on the day of Pentecost, being more of a power of ecstatic speech used to glorify God rather than to instruct.

Outside of Acts 2, we have only two recorded

instances where the gift of tongues was actually used in the Book of Acts. One was the time when Peter was preaching to Cornelius and those who were with him about God’s message of salvation to all who work righteousness (Acts 10:34–35, 44–46). The second occasion was at Ephesus, when some followers of John the Baptist belatedly heard the message of Christ and received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–6). These Biblical records were definite evidence of Divine power.

People have long been fascinated by the very human art of nonsensical babbling. Primitive peoples often possessed a strong belief in spirits, and religions antedating Christianity by thousands of years had some sort of tongues-speaking associated with their worship. “Messages” were received from the spirit world in an unknown tongue, which pagan priests “translated” into the native tongue of the people—a lucrative business. Traces of the art appear also in Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek and other ancient sources, telling of ecstatic sounds from the lips of worshipers.

Some Pentecostal churches in our country today believe the converted believer can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as did the apostles, and that speaking in tongues is evidence that the baptism has been received. Some “seek the baptism” through revival-type meetings.

Some who defend tongues-speaking as evidence of the Holy Spirit today believe that their power is a renewal of the Pentecostal experience described in Acts 2, and is also in agreement with the practice of the church of Corinth as recorded by Paul in First Corinthians 14. Is this true? To know, we need to look closely at both passages.

Glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, is a Greek compound of two words: glossa, meaning “tongue,” and lalia, meaning “talk” or “speech.” We read that on the day of Pentecost, the disciples “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). But we should note that this speaking in tongues was very different from any manifestation that is claimed today. For these “other tongues” were not unknown tongues but foreign, known languages. They did not have to be translated to be under-

stood by the multitude. Twice it is recorded that the people heard the preaching of the disciples *"in their own languages"* (Acts 2:8, 11). The *"tongues"* at Pentecost were intelligible speech in a variety of languages, and served a definite purpose—people of seventeen languages were able to understand the words of the apostles without the aid of translators or interpreters.

Paul's discussion in First Corinthians concerns tongues that may be of a different nature. The KJV consistently inserts the word *"unknown"* before *"tongues"* (1 Cor. 14:4, 13–14, 19, 27). The rendering in the New English Bible is perhaps more fitting, as *"language of ecstasy"* (v. 2) or ecstatic *"utterance."* The GNT calls it *"strange tongues."* Apparently this gift of *"tongues"* was an utterance not intelligible and not intended to be understood by the congregation as the tongues-speaking on the day of Pentecost had been. This is evident from the fact that legitimate use of the gift required the presence of an *"interpreter."* And *"interpretation of tongues"* was a separate gift (1 Cor. 12:10).

In reading the book of 1 Corinthians, we see that Paul had several serious issues with the church in Corinth. There was strife among them; some were living immorally, some were worshiping idols. There were divisions among them; some denied the resurrection of Christ, others were over-emphasizing the gift of tongues. From the stress laid on the tongues subject by Paul, it would appear that this was a serious issue among them.

Knowing a little about Corinth gives us some insight into why this Church had so many issues. Corinth was noted for its cosmopolitan population. It was also noted for its paganism. The Greek oracle of Apollo (the Greek god of prophecy) was located nearby, and both Greeks and Romans sought answers to their questions from the priests who officiated there. The answers were given in other tongues, which the priests translated

for the people. No doubt the Christians often came in close contact with the pagan tongues-speaking; and, not to be outdone by the pagans, they valued their gift of tongues and practiced it to the utmost.

Paul in 1 Corinthians tried to de-emphasize the gift of tongues. He places the gift last in two separate lists of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28).

In chapter 14, Paul discusses the gift of *tongues speaking* by comparing it with another gift, that of *prophecy* or *teaching*, which he believes to be far superior. Throughout the discussion, Paul sets little value on the gift of tongues. He includes a number of points in his comparison:

1. The use of the two gifts

The one who speaks with tongues speaks a language of ecstasy (1 Cor. 14:2, 4 NEB); and he does not address himself to men; nobody understands him; he speaks *"in the Spirit,"* and consoles himself.

He who *"prophesies"* preaches the word of God. He speaks to instruct and build up, to encourage and console (1 Cor. 14:3–5 NEB).

Paul's conclusion: Minimize speaking in tongues because it benefits only the speaker, therefore is of no use to the congregation.

2. Spiritual benefits

Prophesying, or teaching, results in imparting knowledge of spiritual things, some specific teaching about the Christian life (1 Cor. 14:6).

Tongues do not supply any spiritual need of the congregation.

3. Intelligibility

Sound spoken with no precise meaning is spoken *"into the air"*; in other words, it is wasting one's breath. It is to be compared to playing a musical instrument without producing any tune (1 Cor. 14:6–9).

Because tongues cannot be understood without an interpreter, the gift is inferior to that of prophesying (teaching).

4. Benefit in communicating

Paul says: *"But if the sounds of the speaker's voice mean nothing to me, I am a foreigner to him, and he is a foreigner to me"* (1 Cor. 14:11 Phillips).

The simple fact that tongues do not produce any communication between members of the Church is a serious limitation.

5. Benefit in one's personal life

Here is one of Paul's most damaging arguments against the manner in which the Corinthians used their gift of tongues. Even praying in tongues was not beneficial because it did not engage the mind. *"If I use such language in my prayer, the spirit in me prays, but my intellect lies fallow"* (14:14 NEB).

How could God honor worship that was based on emotion and did not give to God the powers of one's conscious mind?

6. Benefit to the world

Paul shows that the gift of tongues, besides being of no direct spiritual benefit to the believers, does no good to those outside the Church. The non-believer can't even add his amen to it. At this junction Paul underscores his point with a plainly figurative overstatement: Better five intelligible words than 10,000 in the language of ecstasy. This illustrates the apostle's strong conviction that the gift of tongues had little benefit to offer compared to that of conscious, sincere, intelligible worship (1 Cor. 14:19).

7. Tongues and spiritual maturity

Do tongues signify a Christian's maturity? Paul's answer is no. *"Do not be childish, my friends! Be as innocent of evil as babes, but at least be grown-up in your thinking"* (1 Cor. 14:20 NEB)—a stern rebuke for a church that considered itself privileged on account of this gift. He says in effect, *"You are childish and immature!"*

Tongues-speaking was the lowest of the gifts, not even mentioned among the *"higher gifts"* that should be aimed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Waiting, Waiting

Be dressed for service and well prepared, as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks.

There will be special favor for those who are ready and waiting for his return. I tell you, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat!"

—Luke 12:35–37 NLT

*We are waiting, yes, we're waiting with our candles burning bright,
In the darkness of the midnight, grateful for the heav'nly Light;
'Tis the light of holy teaching from God's chosen men of old;
'Tis the light of holy living, clean and upright, pure as gold.*

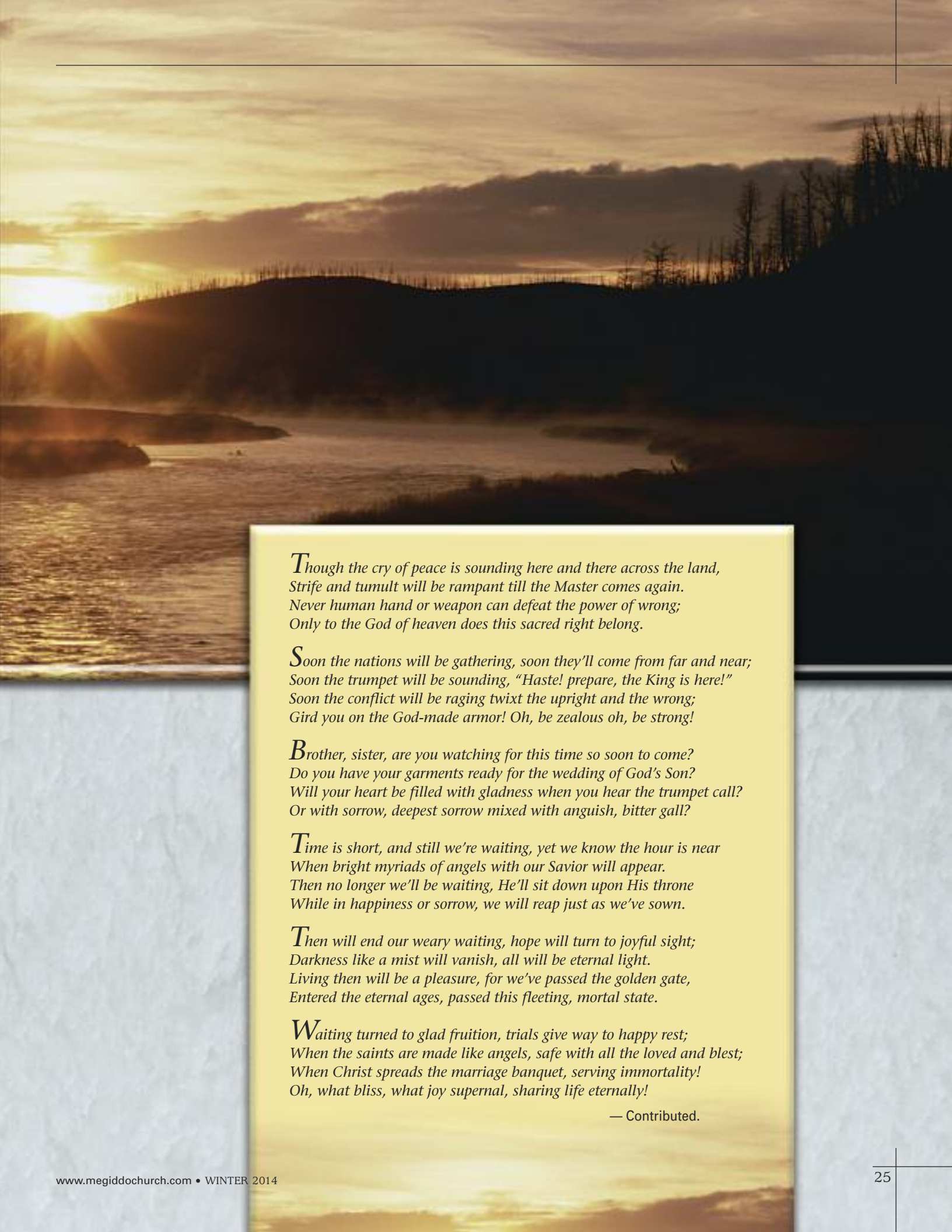
*We are waiting, yes, still waiting for the grand auspicious Day,
When the Mighty, Great Creator by His power will hold sway;
Over all He'll take dominion, unto Him all nations bow;
He the Mighty God of heaven: Keep, oh! keep with Him your vow.*

*We are waiting, we are anxious: words of hope our ears have heard,
And we see the signs fulfilling, as recorded in His Word.
Soon He'll fill this world with glory—not the glory of earth's fame,
But with goodness, justice, mercy, honor, truth that will remain.*

*We are waiting, yes, we're waiting for the herald and the King,
And the blasting of the trumpet that will make the heavens ring.
Hosts of angels swift arriving, all the dead in Christ shall wake.
With the living saints united, they will watch the morning break.*

*We are waiting, we are anxious, Christ the blessed Lord to view!
What a glorious day to hope for, when the earth is made o'er new!
Not one care to pain the sad heart, not one trouble to perplex,
Not one anxious thought to weary; not a single hurt to vex.*

*We are waiting for His advent while the earth yet groans with strife,
War and pestilence and famine, hate and violence all rife.
But the saints remain unshaken, trusting God to be their tower,
Who can keep them from all danger, sheltered safely every hour.*



*Though the cry of peace is sounding here and there across the land,
Strife and tumult will be rampant till the Master comes again.
Never human hand or weapon can defeat the power of wrong;
Only to the God of heaven does this sacred right belong.*

*Soon the nations will be gathering, soon they'll come from far and near;
Soon the trumpet will be sounding, "Haste! prepare, the King is here!"
Soon the conflict will be raging twixt the upright and the wrong;
Gird you on the God-made armor! Oh, be zealous oh, be strong!*

*Brother, sister, are you watching for this time so soon to come?
Do you have your garments ready for the wedding of God's Son?
Will your heart be filled with gladness when you hear the trumpet call?
Or with sorrow, deepest sorrow mixed with anguish, bitter gall?*

*Time is short, and still we're waiting, yet we know the hour is near
When bright myriads of angels with our Savior will appear.
Then no longer we'll be waiting, He'll sit down upon His throne
While in happiness or sorrow, we will reap just as we've sown.*

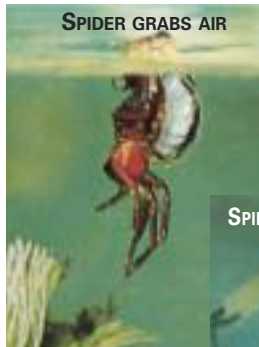
*Then will end our weary waiting, hope will turn to joyful sight;
Darkness like a mist will vanish, all will be eternal light.
Living then will be a pleasure, for we've passed the golden gate,
Entered the eternal ages, passed this fleeting, mortal state.*

*Waiting turned to glad fruition, trials give way to happy rest;
When the saints are made like angels, safe with all the loved and blest;
When Christ spreads the marriage banquet, serving immortality!
Oh, what bliss, what joy supernal, sharing life eternally!*

— Contributed.

AN UNDERWATER WONDER!

Argyroneta aquatica (diving spider)



SPIDER GRABS AIR

Spider grabbing air from the surface with his hind legs to add to its bell



SPIDER CARRIES AIR TO BELL

The plants add to the oxygen in the bell and also use some of the carbon dioxide the spider produces.



AIR AROUND ABDOMEN

The silvery appearance of the spider's abdomen comes from the bubbles surrounding the spider. The spider uses the hairs on its abdomen to trap air bubbles.

Water spiders have a unique way of breathing. These spiders breathe through small openings located under their abdomen. The openings are connected to their lung-like organ.



SPIDER EATS IN ITS BELL



SPIDER INSIDE ITS BELL

This bell is the nest in which the spider takes shelter when it is under the water.

When winter approaches, the spider takes precautions to protect itself against freezing. Going deeper toward the bottom of the pond, it weaves a dome-shaped web among underwater plants and gathers enough air from the surface of the water to last a few weeks.



SPIDER OUTSIDE ITS BELL

You aren't likely to see much of me, because I spend most of my life under water. Besides, I'm very small, only about 10mm (less than half an inch). But I think I'm pretty special, thanks to my very wonderful Designer. Let me tell you a little about myself.

What makes me so special? Aren't there a lot of creatures that live under water? You are right, but most have a mechanism such as gills to take air from the water. I breathe air, just like you do, and I doubt that you have built many underwater houses. You think I'm not supposed to live underwater? Well, my Creator designed me this way.

Let me explain. I'll begin with my house. I live in a very comfortable, well-ventilated underwater house. Do I shop for my house? No, I build my own, every inch of it. I even make my own materials. And I provide my own special ventilating system.

I begin by spinning a web and attaching it firmly to the stems of some plants that grow in the shallow waters near the edge of a pond. That's standard stuff for a spider, only mine is under the surface of the water. Then I keep spinning, until I have a little sheet of thick silk. I attach the corners of the sheet to my web and to the stems and leaves of the water plants in such a way that it forms a canopy, or bubble, just below the surface of the water. There I have it—my very own under water “diving bell,” just right for me and my family to live in.

My next task is to get ventilation into my home because, after all, I do breathe air.

How do I ventilate my house? Here I have to say my Creator was thinking before I came along. He designed me with very special long, fine hairs on my back legs that are able

to attach air to my body. Sound impossible? I simply go to the surface of the water and “catch” air on the hairs on my legs and abdomen. Then I return to my house and use my legs to release the air into my diving bell. I do this again and again, until my diving bell is filled with air.

To refresh the supply of oxygen during winter months when the surface of the pond freezes, I rely largely on the plants that hold my bubble in place—that's why I fastened my bubble to them. They are leafy plants, and the leaves release oxygen right into my home—and I give them carbon dioxide that they need! Unique, isn't it? I thank my wonderful Designer!

Now just a word about how I get my food. My diving bell is my home and also my secret watchtower. I keep a close watch, and when an unfortunate pond creature swims by, if it's an insect, or a tadpole, or a little fish, I sprint out and grab it! Instantly I kill it with my poisonous bite, drag it into my bell, and enjoy the feast!

I could tell you a whole lot more about what my Designer did for me, but you need to learn about Him yourself. ♦

Sources:

For scientific data in this article we are indebted to: <http://www.animal-fact.com/article1013.htm>
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THE MISSING SWEATER



Mom, I can't find my lavender sweater, wailed Sheri.

"When was the last time you wore it?" asked Mother.

Sheri wrinkled her brow. "Last Sunday, I think."

"Maybe you left it at church," suggested Mother. "Call the office and ask if anyone turned it in." Sheri called,

but the sweater wasn't there.

"That was my favorite sweater," moaned Sheri.

"We'll keep looking for it," Mother said. "It will probably show up. But you need to go now—there's the school bus."

Several times that week, Sheri searched in vain for her sweater. She wanted to wear it to the cookout at Shirley's house on Friday evening, but with a sigh, she chose something else. Arriving at Shirley's house, Sheri quickly ran toward the voices coming from the back patio. She stopped suddenly and stared in amazement at Marie, one of the girls in her class. Drawing Shirley close, she whispered, "Marie's wearing *my* sweater! She must have picked it up at Sunday school."

"Are you sure?" Shirley whispered back.

"Of course! She couldn't afford a sweater like that!" hissed Sheri.

As the girls were talking with Marie later, Shirley said, "That's a pretty sweater, Marie. Where did you get it?"

Marie blushed and lowered her head. "My mother bought it at a garage sale," she told them.

"I don't believe it," muttered Sheri. She was angry and told several girls that Marie had stolen her sweater. Somehow, the cookout wasn't much fun for her after that.

When Sheri reached home, her grandmother met her at the door. Sheri gave her grandmother a quick hug as Mother said, "You'll be glad to see what Grandma brought you." Mother handed Sheri her lavender sweater.

"B-b-but where did you find this?" Sheri stammered.

"You left it at my house last Sunday," Grandma told her.

A sick feeling came over Sheri and tears welled up in her eyes. "I've made a terrible mistake," she muttered under her breath. "I'll tell you about it, but first I have to make some phone calls." ♦

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Have you ever falsely accused someone? Hasty conclusions are often wrong, so next time you're tempted to accuse someone, wait! God says Christians should be slow to speak. Hurting others with false accusations is a poor testimony. If you have done that, be sure to apologize, both to the one you've accused and to anyone else you may have told about it.

THE BOY AND THE GRASSHOPPER

Ted was a cruel boy. One day he found a lively grasshopper and amused himself by tormenting it in all sorts of ways. He laughed when one leg broke off and the poor grasshopper couldn't jump anymore. Suddenly the grasshopper began to grow. It grew and grew and grew, until it became a large and terrible creature—much bigger than Ted. Then the grasshopper began to treat Ted as Ted had treated it. It made Ted jump and jump, until he was so tired he could jump no more. The grasshopper tortured him in other ways and was about to step on him when Ted awoke—and found it was only a horrid dream. ♦



Jesus' command, "Do to others as you would have them to do to you" (Luke 6:31 NIV) goes for animals, also.

OBITUARY

"The dead in Christ shall rise" - 1 Thessalonians 4:16



MARIE ESTHER SUTTON

On November 8, 2014, we met to pay our last respects to our Friend and Sister, Marie Esther Sutton, an active and loved member of our Church family for more than 60 years.

Born in 1923 to George Mathias and Bessie Ransom in Birmingham, Iowa, she was married to David Sutton in 1946, and together they attended meetings of the local Megiddo ecclesia in Iowa. But Sister Marie was not satisfied to remain in Iowa, and the following year they made the decision to relocate to Rochester, where they shared life together at the Church until her husband's passing in 2011.

Sister Marie is survived by her sister, Barbara Crum, of Bondurant, Iowa; her brother Roy Mathias, of Ottumwa, Iowa; and her brother Clifford Mathias and his wife Donna Mathias, both of our Rochester Congregation, who did everything possible to help her after the passing of her husband. She is also survived by a number of cousins, nephews and nieces.

Sister Marie was diligent, hard-working, good-hearted, and fully dedicated to the ministry of the Church. Both she and her husband had a natural love of the out-of-doors, and spent time in the country at every opportunity—at their camp in the woods in the Bristol Hills, in the Adirondacks, in the garden, or just driving through the countryside looking for the best asparagus, or the earliest strawberries or peaches to share with the group.

A special interest that Sister Marie and her husband enjoyed together was their photography. The purpose was to take pictures that could be used in the Megiddo Message. They found great pleasure in traveling about looking for suitable settings, and numerous printed Message covers are photographs they took. In the early 1990's they made a trip

to West Bank, British Columbia to visit Ed and Lorna Shayler. Brother Shayler was more than happy to act as tour guide to places of interest, and the result was a portfolio of photos of majestic mountains and lakes in the Canadian Rockies.

Sister Marie was an active member of the Maranatha Society, and was always available to help with programs, picnics, skits and costumes for religious plays. She enjoyed music, and played violin in the Church orchestra. And when the decision was to have a band instead of an orchestra, she learned the clarinet to be able to take part. Later she took up baritone horn, which she truly enjoyed.

One thing Sister Marie really enjoyed, and even in her time of very limited activity, was singing. When still young, she and four other young sisters in the church started what they called the Jewel Quintette, which she accompanied with her guitar. The quintette contributed to the church programs for more than 40 years. From her earliest years at the Church right through to her forced retirement she rarely missed a rehearsal.

Her day-time work was with the home and garden until, about 1960, she was asked to join her husband in the Megiddo Church Printing Department. The need was for someone to operate the Linotype, a machine that used hot lead to form type for printing on a letterpress. For the greater part





of the next 20 years she did all the church's typesetting for the Megiddo Message and other church publications. When in 1980 letterpress gave way to offset printing, she was ready to learn the Compugraphic phototypesetter. About 14 years later she learned yet another new skill, setting up the Message in a layout program on a Macintosh computer.

Sister Marie stayed active in every way possible until failing health forced her to stop. But even then she was always interested in the work and contributed in spirit when her body could not. During the last 2 years she has been almost totally confined, being unable to walk or care for herself. But she was blessed with very kind caregivers, who found it a pleasure to help her, and for whom she was always grateful. I think we all admired her consistently pleasant and buoyant spirit in situations that most of us would consider intolerable. Asked how she was, her usual reply was, "Pretty good!" even though you knew all wasn't good. Her caregivers will all testify that she did not complain.

Sister Marie took her religion seriously and allowed it to change her, as the song says, "from the inside out." And that is what our life is for, to develop that new nature in Christ—more kind, more patient, more humble, more forgiving, more Christ-like. That is why God gives us life, to build the character He is seeking.

Her book is closed, and her record rests in the hands of Him who will reward each one for all that they have done.

She wanted to live until Elijah comes to announce the coming of Jesus Christ. It was not God's will. But the Bible hope is bright and sure. She shared the expectancy Job felt as he wrote by the pen of inspiration: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. The thought overwhelms me!" (Job 19:23-27 NIV & NLT). ♦

Strength in Unity

The story is told of a people in Central Europe called Scythians. Little is known of their customs and manners. It is claimed, however, that a father left his children a valuable inheritance if he left them in peace and union with one another.

One of their kings, finding himself near his end, sent for all his sons, and giving each a bundle of sticks tied fast together desired each to break them. One son after the other tried with all his might to break the bundle but could not. Then the father showed his sons that it could be done easily by simply untying the bundle and breaking one stick at a time. "This," he told his children, "should be a lesson to you. If you do not cease your quarreling you will be like these individual sticks, easily broken. But if you all work together in union, nothing can come against you."

We can obtain a good spiritual lesson from this little narrative. As individuals, we have the privilege of becoming associated in the great work of preparing for life eternal. We are bound together with a threefold cord of truth, which holds all of God's children in union. As long as we keep securely tied in this bundle, we cannot be broken. When we belong to the bundle, we are not dependent alone upon our own strength—which individually is very small—but we have the added support of those around us. Relax the effort and slip out of the bundle, and the enemy can break our small stick with little effort.

Do we realize the effort it takes to keep securely tied into this bundle? Or, conversely, how easy it is to slip from it?

For many of us it is natural to think what we should have said or done after we have committed the act or spoken the word. But if not keeping our mind exercised and our thoughts and emotions under control before we act, we have already slipped. Our friends judge us by what we say and how we act, not by how we feel, or think we feel. And what is more important, God will judge us by our actions and words. "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" said Jesus (Matt. 12:37).

History provides ample evidence that individuals working alone seldom accomplish any undertaking of great magnitude. While behind every great endeavor there is always one person who is guiding and directing. Without the help of countless individuals all doing their part, all working

together as a harmonious team, the project would most certainly fail. An army might be staffed with an excellent staff of officers, have the finest equipment, and yet without the obedience and loyalty of the individual soldiers it would be totally ineffective as a fighting unit.

One of the reasons for the phenomenal growth of this country is the capacity of its great industrial organizations to produce efficiently and in quantity. Working together, they are able to accomplish what many individuals or even smaller organizations working alone could never achieve.

There is strength in unity. That is why the apostle Paul urged his brethren to be all of "same mind," and "all speak the same things," with "no divisions" among them. (2 Cor. 1:10).

B. C., Iowa



Have a Survival Strategy?

In recent times much has been said about an end time scenario. People from the medical, science and ecclesiastical communities have speculated on how to survive various calamities. Many who have experienced the fury of natural disasters, often described as of "Biblical" proportions have actually turned to the Holy Bible for answers and the hope of some kind of deliverance from their dire circumstances. Tragically, too many turn to the Bible and to prayer only as a last resort.

Not understanding the Bible in the first place, governments have built vast survival complexes underground. Those of the general population with the resources to do so are engaged in the construction of their own means of surviving the "end times," from bunkers to fortified buildings. None, however, will prevail against the fury of the judgments of God.

Spiritual preparedness is the only effective survival strategy that will carry us through the day of the Lord's appearing (Mal. 3:1-3).

What can we do? We can keep our spiritual lamps trimmed and burning if we heed the instruction: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15). Through prayer and thanksgiving we can live in peace and not fear when we keep our eyes on the prize and look eagerly for the coming of our King, Jesus Christ (Isa. 26:3).

W. B., Ontario, Canada

Why Is a River Crooked?

Did you ever see a straight river—not a canal but a river? Probably not very often. You will notice that most rivers are crooked. It is called meandering. When we travel through the mountains the roads often follow the riverbed and as a result they twist and turn and double back so you have to go 20 miles to get 5 if you could go as the crow flies. To shorten the distance means leaving the river and tunneling through the mountain, or building a bridge over the river, or blasting the road through the mountain at great labor and expense.

Why are rivers crooked? What made them crooked in the first place? The answer is simple: Rivers are just lazy! They are too lazy to go over an obstacle, so they go around it. They seek out the easiest way. When a river comes to a rock ledge, instead of pushing hard and moving it out of the way, it goes around it. When a river meets a mountain, it backtracks and takes another route. Submitting to gravity, it just follows the path of least resistance. It is the natural response to the downward pull.

Isn't that the way we naturally are? We are crooked because we choose the easy way. We respond to the downward pull of temptation and sin. It is so much easier to yield to the temptation than to conquer it. It is so much easier to take the lazy way than to climb the mountains or remove the boulder. It is so much easier to avoid the difficult task and become soft and useless. It is so much easier to watch television than to memorize a Bible verse, or go to a prayer meeting. It is so much easier to let others do the work while we excuse ourselves—because we don't feel like it, or we're tired, or we have something else we'd rather do. It's all a way of avoiding responsibility.

How can you go straight instead of crooked? Next time you come to a rock or hard place in your life, instead of going around that rock or falling over it, why not get out your *"It is written"* bulldozer as Jesus did when He was tempted and push the boulder of temptation out of the way? This will make for a straighter and deeper life! ♦

You become what you allow yourself to think—
even when you don't think so.

The greatest thought that can occupy a man's mind
is his accountability to God.

If you would lift others up,
you must be on higher ground yourself.

Far too frequently in this life we are interested in only three
persons: Me, Myself and I.

HOME

At home we show our true character.

We all know people who put on company manners while in company with others, but should we not be as patient, as kind, as polite, as agreeable at home as we are in public?

At home is the place to start a Christian life, to have always that evenness of temper that makes us the same person, whether in public or in private. Persons practicing Christian virtues will have an even character. The Psalm, "*Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them,*" describes those who are Christ-like everywhere—all the time.

When our spouse or children do something not to our liking, or a friend calls for our help just when we finally are able to relax, or we have to cancel a vacation because of illness, these are the tests that reveal true character. Can we maintain an even temper and thank God for these tests?

Try an attitude like this and make your home a place of rest and pleasure, a place of inspiration and meditation, a place where God's spirit controls and His law is uppermost.

It takes courage:
to stand firm for an opinion in the face of ridicule;
to say what you believe when you know the reaction
will not be favorable and you could remain silent;
to avoid an easy compromise.

To nurse a grudge is to keep alive a thing that will
eventually destroy you.



Ambition never gets
anywhere until it
forms a partnership
with work.

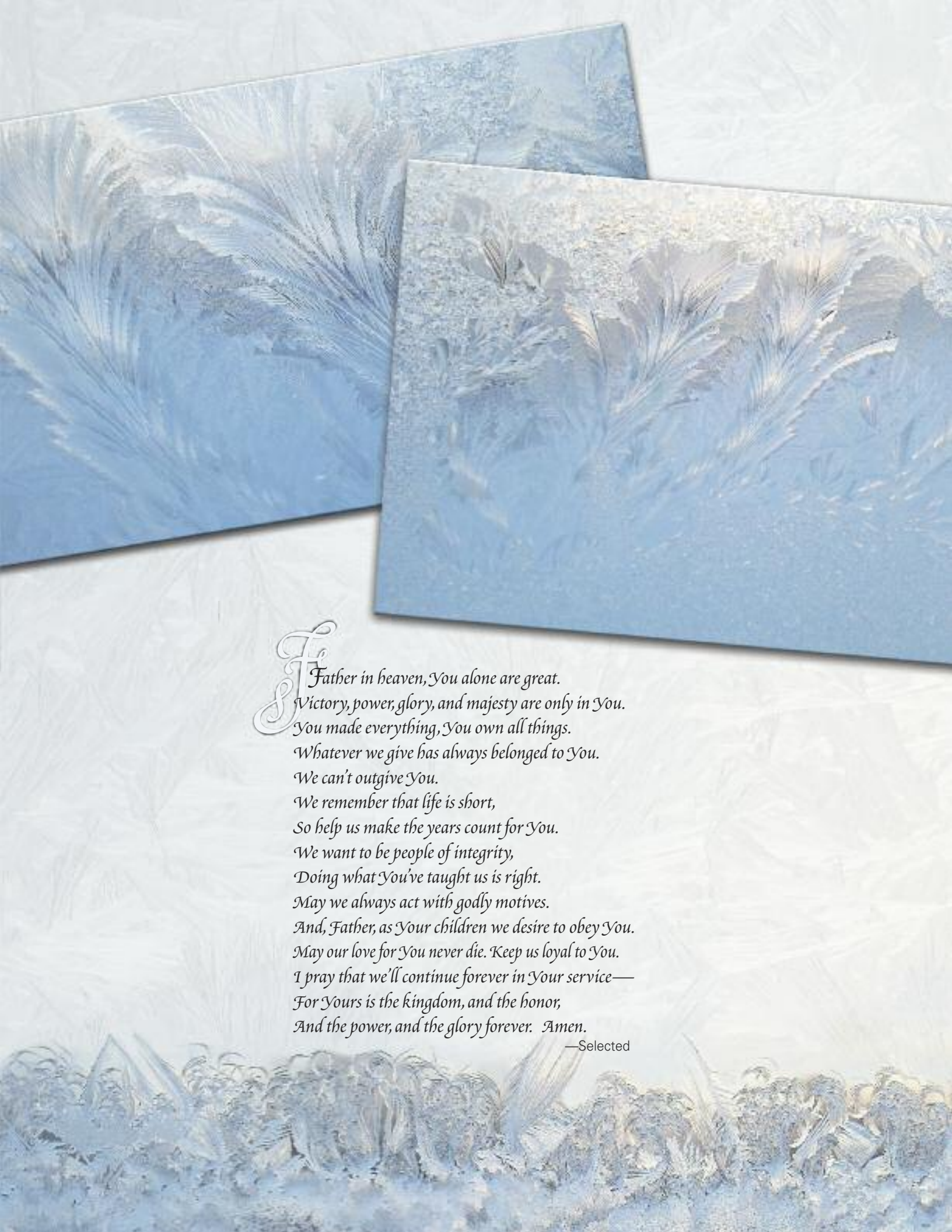
The only way we can erase unkindness is with kindness.
Don't lose the eraser.

God never puts anyone in a place too small to grow in.

You do not do God a favor by serving Him.
He honors you by allowing you to serve Him.

Encouragement is like premium gasoline. It helps to
take the knock out of living.

The one who really wants to do something
finds a way;
the rest find excuses.



*F*ather in heaven, You alone are great.
Victory, power, glory, and majesty are only in You.
You made everything, You own all things.
Whatever we give has always belonged to You.
We can't outgive You.
We remember that life is short,
So help us make the years count for You.
We want to be people of integrity,
Doing what You've taught us is right.
May we always act with godly motives.
And, Father, as Your children we desire to obey You.
May our love for You never die. Keep us loyal to You.
I pray that we'll continue forever in Your service—
For Yours is the kingdom, and the honor,
And the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

—Selected