

Megiddo Message

Vol. 87, No. 5
June, 2000

LOVE is patient, **LOVE** is kind. It does
not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking,
It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs....

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

LOVE never fails.

—1 Corinthians 13:4–8 NIV



The Final Exam

Do you remember the feel of the classroom during exam week, the almost eerie quiet that hangs over all? Something about finals makes everyone more serious.

One day the Judge will take His chair and every one of His servants will be called to take a final-final exam. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ"* (2 Cor. 5:10). In that blazing and unsparing light, all strut and boast will disappear. Glib answers to probing questions will die on our tongues before they reach our lips. That moment of truth will discourage, by its awesome finality, any jest, banter, or lightness.

That exam will be comprehensive—it will include the entire content of the course. During that exam all of our interactions will be examined. We will be rewarded just according to what we have done. *"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do"* (Heb. 4:13). And *"God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 2:16 NASB). Our attitudes will be reviewed, and a verdict rendered.

That exam will be final—what we have said, what we have done, what we have become inwardly will be revealed, to our eternal credit or shame. The Judge will determine just where we stand. This Judge is absolutely right, and cannot be deceived. He is perfect in righteousness, and cannot be bribed. And from His sentence there will be no appeal, for there is no higher court.

What can we do to prepare for that final exam? How shall we answer those "pass-fail" questions? What can we do to have *"boldness in the day of Christ"* and *"not be ashamed before Him at His coming"*? (1 John 2:28).

There is one fact common about all exams: The questions are always easy if you know the answers.

When it comes to our final exam at Judgment, how can we be sure of knowing the answers? There will be no new questions. There will be no real excuse for failing the exam. All the work will have been done in advance. The story of our life will have been pre-recorded, just as we dictated it. There is no reason to come to that final Judgment unprepared.

Right now is our time to prepare. Right now we are laying up the record which will witness for or against us. *"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"* (Matt. 12:37).

Students often "cram" for the final. A better way is to prepare early, to see every day as another opportunity to write the record well, so that we can be sure of an "A" in the presence of our heavenly Examiner.

If we handle each day's lessons well, we will not have to worry about the final. If we take every day as a test to see how well we can do, if we do not allow anything in our days which will distress us at the end, we can look forward with eagerness to the "final"—to receiving the certificate that will entitle us to Life and immortality in Christ's Kingdom.

What a day that will be! ♦

He who commands himself is free.



Lord, Teach Us to Love

"I love the Father...The Father loves the Son... As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Love one another as I have loved you."—Jesus

Have you ever noticed all the loving links that surround the Gospel? Love bonds the Son to the Father, and the Father to the Son (John 14:31; 3:35; 5:20; 17:23).

Love bonds the Son to His disciples, and the disciples to the Son (John 14:21; 15:9, 12; 13:34–35).

Love also bonds the disciples to one another, and to God (John 13:34; 14:21, 23).

Jesus gave the clear command, that those who would be saved must love God. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30 NIV).

What is this love?

The Apostle John gives a unique definition. After saying that everyone who loves the Father loves the Son, he seems to link all these heavenly loves together as he writes: *"This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:2–3 NIV).

How do we love the children of God (or one another)? *"By loving God."* And how do we love God? *"By carrying out his commands."* For *"This is love for God: to obey his commands."*

Our love for God and the love we show to one another are so closely intertwined that they cannot be separated. John says again, *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen"* (1 John 4:20 NIV).

Here is a love far removed from the standard brand that is popular on Main Street. Nor is it even the love that thrives in the happy family

circle. It is not a feeling determined by blood, sentiment or any human affection. It is an affection so deep and so much a part of us and so practical that it becomes visible as we obey God's commands.

And when God demonstrates love for us, it is a grace, a caring, a concern that includes every physical and spiritual benefit in the wisdom of providence.

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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).

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.

THE HERALD AND THE KING

OUR PLANET will soon witness the greatest events in its history. For centuries God has been silent. But that silence will soon be broken by the arrival of Elijah the prophet, who comes to herald the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"* (Mal. 4:5-6).

Then shall follow the King of kings and Lord of lords, to begin His momentous work of transforming our world into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of God.

Love Toward God

How Can I Love God?

A Marine general, while preparing his troops for battle, gave some advice one would not expect from a Marine: "When it really gets tough and you feel like fleeing, think about love. Why does a man throw his body over a hand grenade sacrificing himself to save those around him? It is love. You aren't out there fighting for your country," he said, "you are fighting for your buddy."

When we truly love God, we trust Him to the point of complete obedience, though it may bring affliction, opposition, even death. But if a soldier can sacrifice his life for his "buddy," how much more should we be willing to give ourselves to God! The only reward the soldier receives is praise for his heroism; he is soon forgotten with the rest of the dead. But when we make sacrifices because of our love for God, the sacrifices we make are like gifts to ourselves. When we sacrifice because we love God, we actually gain.

Such was the love Paul felt toward God. The Apostle Paul affirmed that nothing, not even death itself, could separate him from the love of God (Romans 8:38–39).

From the crystal clear springs of God flows the water of life to them that love Him. "As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" was the Psalmist's expression of his commitment (Ps. 42:1, NIV). Christ said, "Lo I come to do thy will," while Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me."

How is our commitment, yours and mine?

To Be a Friend of God...

What about having God for a "friend"? Is this a real possibility?

Others have. Moses spoke with God "*face to face, as a man speaks with his friend*" (Ex. 33:11 NIV). Abraham was called a friend of God (James 2:23). God has invited all who will separate themselves from all that is unholy and unclean to be His own sons and daughters—isn't that bringing us into the sphere of His love and friendship? (2 Cor. 6:17–18). Can we imagine the love that He has for His own sons and daughters?

God's love for us depends on our obedience. We either choose to obey His commands, or we do not. We choose either His friendship, or His enmity; His love or His wrath. Christ made this fact indisputable when He said, "*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*" (John 15:14). And if we are not His friends we are His enemies. There is no halfway ground.

The mere thought of being God's enemy should wake us up! "*If God be for us, who can be against us*"? But if God be *against* us, who can be *for* us?

No, we want His friendship, not His enmity. The decision is ours.

We pray to God for His help in times of trouble. Can we expect Him to come to our aid when we refuse to obey Him? And since we show our love for Him by our obedience, can we even expect Him to hear our prayer if we turn to Him a deaf ear?

On the other hand, we can expect His aid if we are His true friends. He preserves our life, He gives us our mind and our ability to work, everything we need to obey Him, so that we can replace the evil in our hearts with good. Then in the future, when Jesus comes, He will bestow upon us blessings beyond our most vivid imagination.

And our love—our obedience—is the cement of friendship. If we truly love God and the great reward He has set before us, we will want above all else to please Him.

To be a friend of God is to have a friend we can count on—always—eternally. ♦

Three Greek words for "love"

eros—the natural human emotion or passion, natural affection, human love. Used most commonly in the ancient Greek-speaking world.

It is interesting to note that this very common word, used almost exclusively in the Greek-speaking world to tell of love, is not used even once in the New Testament.

phileo—the warmth, closeness, and pleasure in brotherly affection; properly used of that which is near and dear. It is used of the Father's love for His Son (John 5:20), and of the devotion we owe to Jesus (1 Cor. 16:22).

agape—the love that seeks always the best interests of the one loved; a love that is a deliberate conviction of the mind that issues in a deliberate policy of life. Not a wave of passion or emotion; it is a victory of the will. To show *agape* love takes all of one's heart, and mind, and being.



I Love Thee

*I love Thee, I love Thee,
I love Thee, my Lord;
I love Thee, my Savior,
I love Thee, my God;
I love Thee, I love Thee,
and that Thou dost know;
But how much I love Thee
my actions will show.*

*I'm happy, I'm happy,
O wondrous account!
My joys are immortal,
I stand on the mount;
I gaze on my treasure
and long to be there,
With Jesus and angels
and kindred so dear.*

*O Jesus, my Savior,
with Thee I am blest,
My life and salvation,
my joy and my rest;
Thy truth be my theme,
and Thy love be my song;
Thy grace shall inspire both
my heart and my tongue.*

*O, who's like my Savior?
He's Salem's bright King;
He guides me, He chides me,
He helps me to sing;
I'll praise Him, I'll praise Him
with notes loud and clear,
Till rivers of pleasure
my spirit shall cheer.*

Do I Really *Love* Him?

What does it mean to love God?

If we consider the emphasis the Bible places on the word "love," this question becomes very important. When Christ was teaching, He taught that the central issue of our faith is our love to God, and that we must express it with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). He said also, *"He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him"* (John 14:21 NIV). And in His last intimate meeting with His disciples before He was crucified, He gave them a new commandment. The subject: love.

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35 NIV).

Before we can love as we should, we must understand it. Our understanding of it is at best inadequate, because we are human, limited in our power to understand the heavenly. Some concepts are just too grand, too rich, too far-reaching to reduce to human terms.

Nevertheless love is a brilliant and beautiful virtue, and if Jesus made it primary, we surely dare not disregard or misunderstand it.

But where can we go to learn about it? We must go to our only source of knowledge about God's thoughts, His written Word. And in this Word we learn that loving God is about surrender, yielding, obedience, discipline. It is about our attitudes and actions with one another, all subject to His law. This is what God is looking at when He determines whether or not we are worthy of His love, whether we are obeying His command to love.

How do we know this? Ponder these words by the Apostle John, *"This is the love of God that we keep his commandments."* We love God as we obey His law. The more closely we live by His law, the more love we show to God.

How can this be? Remember those words by John, *"This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."*

But our love for God is not merely obeying a list of rules or a body of codes. It is an obedience that includes a spirit, a willingness, a heart, an allegiance. It is an obedience based on a relationship and a commitment. It is a loving, cheerful, grateful obedience. How else can we show the change that knowing God makes in our lives? How else can we show our interest in what He has offered us? The Psalmist said it warmly when he wrote, *"Oh, how I love your law! I think about it all day long"* (Ps. 119:97 NLT). And again, *"I hate and abhor all falsehood, but I love your law"* (Ps. 119:163 NLT).

Godly love is a standard we must reach, a discipline we must submit to. It is not a generalization which says, "Do the best you can." It is a precise command that says clearly, "Do..." or "Do not..." Someone has compared it to archery. The goal is not just to stay within the concentric circles (although that is better than missing the target altogether). The goal is to hit the bull's eye.

Godly love is also a responsibility. If it becomes a dull and meaningless routine, it is no longer love. It is our enthusiastic heart-response to God's offer of life eternal. What can we possibly do that would merit such a gift?

What can we do in return for all He has given, is giving, and has offered to give? We can give Him a life of love, of full, heartfelt obedience. And the way we do this is by showing a right spirit, a right example to others. This is true, godly love. ♦



Love Toward One Another

as defined by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

In First Corinthians 13, in what has been called Paul's "Love Psalm," the Apostle pictures in detail this beautiful, exalted virtue. As you read it, you realize its depth and breadth. You notice that he is talking about heart qualities which express themselves in everyday, outward conduct in the most ordinary situations.

He is talking particularly about our interaction with other people. He says, in effect, that we cannot learn to love God alone! Why? Because love for God is a virtue we must practice *toward others*. It is a virtue we show in our attitudes toward others—how we relate to husband or wife or brother or sister; how we respond to those who disagree with us, how we react to difficulties with others, how we control our spirit toward others, how we look at our abilities and God-given gifts in relation to others (arrogant or humble), how we feel toward others (generous or selfish).

Yes, we should our love toward God by our attitude toward one another.

As Paul writes, he urges us (his readers) to look at our own lives. He wants us to see the emptiness of the life not motivated by love for God. Using many images, he shows that love is indeed the ultimate virtue. It cuts out envy, pride, selfishness, jealousy, rivalry, and deceit. With godly love controlling, we have no reason to be anything less than happy, harmonious people!

And Paul makes very clear that this love he is talking about is not an option. Paul is not saying, "Here is something good that I highly recommend." He is saying that it is a *must* for every would-be son or daughter of God. It is an absolute requirement for all who would inherit a place in Christ's kingdom (see 1 Cor. 6:1, 7-9). If you don't develop this quality of love in your life, he says, *you won't be there*.

So...let's go on to a full understanding of love!



Love,

the Measure of Our Character

Love is the key to our growth toward spiritual maturity—it is the measure of our character.

Love has been called "the circulatory system" of the body (the Church) of Christ. It gives it life and vitality, and allows it to be nourished and grow.

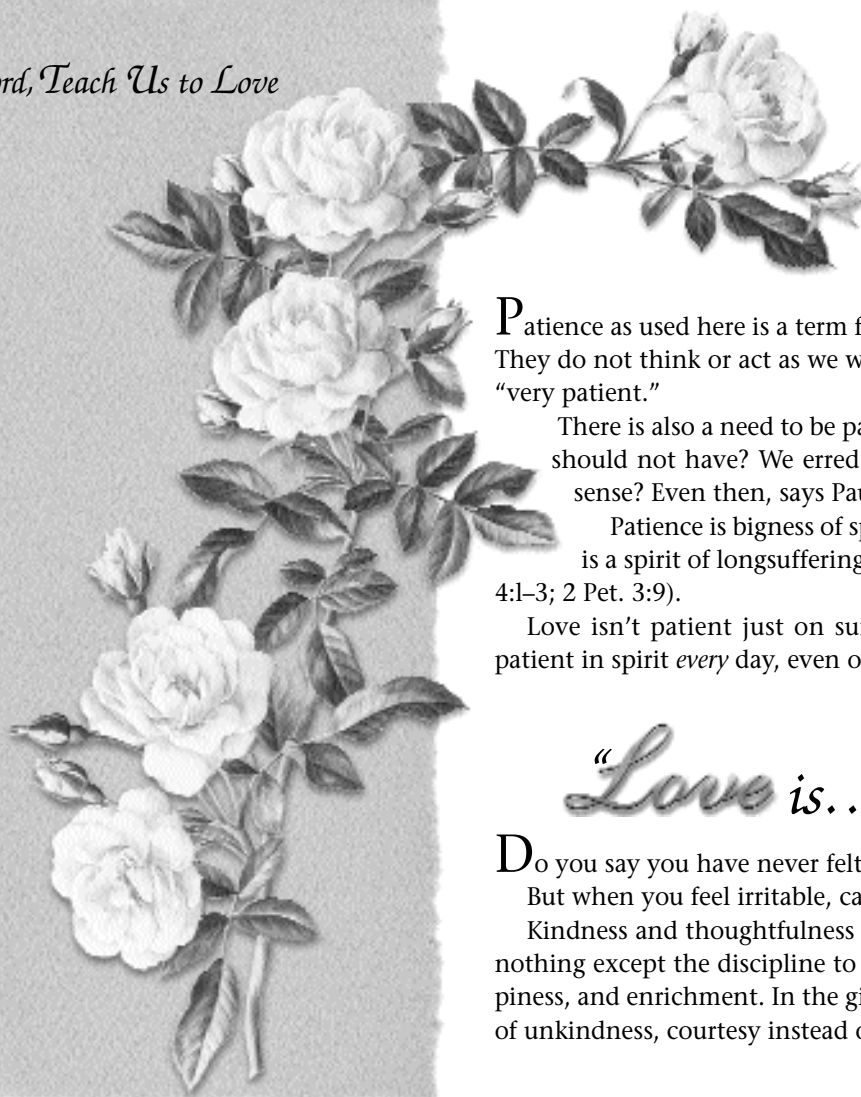
All good, upright Christian conduct is motivated by God's love. Jesus gave it as "*a new commandment: Love each other*" (John 13:34-35 NLT). It is one of the most important lessons to be learned in the school of faith.

Paul says that love is edifying. "*Knowledge puffs up but love edifies [builds up]*" (1 Cor. 8:1).

God's concept of love is lofty, yet it keeps its feet on the ground. It is not simply high-sounding theory. When Jesus said that we must love our neighbor as ourselves, He was stating a principle to be practiced everyday.

Let us look closely at Paul's matchless definitions of this heavenly virtue.

*Only when we
live according to
God's law do we
truly love God—
or our brother.*



“Love is very patient”

Patience as used here is a term for endurance. People around us are difficult? They do not think or act as we would like them to? Love demands that we be “very patient.”

There is also a need to be patient with ourselves. We blundered when we should not have? We erred in judgment? We didn’t use plain common sense? Even then, says Paul, “*love is very patient.*”

Patience is bigness of spirit, gracious toleration, greatness of heart. It is a spirit of longsuffering, with an undefined capacity to endure (Eph. 4:1–3; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Love isn’t patient just on sunny, pleasant, smooth-sailing days. Love is patient in spirit *every* day, even on stormy days.

“Love is... very kind”

Do you say you have never felt irritable? You must not be human!

But when you feel irritable, can you override the feeling by being kind?

Kindness and thoughtfulness are interlocked with courtesy. Courtesy costs nothing except the discipline to practice it. But it pays well in goodwill, happiness, and enrichment. In the give-and-take of life, we need kindness instead of unkindness, courtesy instead of discourtesy. ➡

Love Defined

Probably no other word in our language has been given so many definitions or been written about in such depth in poems, plays, novels, and philosophical and religious text as the word love.

The Greek language had three principle words for love. The first, and most commonly used, was *eros*, which is nothing more or less than romantic love. Interestingly, *eros* does not occur even once in the New Testament.

The second word for love is *phileo*, which is the love of comradeship, the type of love we feel toward our friends. This word occurs 22 times on its own in the New Testament, and numerous other times in combination with the object of the love.

By far the most important word translated love in the New Testament is *agape*, and this occurs more than 200 times. *Agape* is an expanding, growing, developing, selfless love. It is love that is the direct result of judgment and a “deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle.” This was the very special love that Jesus showed His disciples, and that He wants us to show to one another.

C. S. Lewis compared *agape* love to a tool that one uses to grow a garden. A gardener has a choice. He can let the garden

grow wild and unattended, and it will be filled with weeds. Or he can take the proper tool, and create a place of unimaginable beauty. The same is true with the garden of our lives. And the tool which God has provided, is a tool called love. If we would produce a life that is abundant in flower and fruit, we need *agape* love to do it.

Agape love is not an instinct. It is not a passion of nature. It grows only as we apply our minds to it. It is a deliberate choice. It does not depend on how we feel, it is a decision we make. Someone has compared it to an exercise program. When you start a program like walking, or running, or lifting weights, you don’t immediately pick up the heaviest weight or run the marathon. You exercise daily, and as you do, you become stronger and are able to walk further and lift heavier weights. The same is true of the practice of *agape* love. As we practice it, we learn to express it to one another and to God, we become stronger, more mature, more like Christ in thought and deed. The result is a stronger character, and brings us one step nearer to fulfilling Jesus’ command to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. ♦

“Love knows no jealousy”

Does anyone prefer jealousy to a spirit of Christian love?

Actually, jealousy is malfunctioning love. It is love turned possessive to the point that it wants to restrict the one it loves. It is love turned inside out, looking for the wrong thing in the wrong way for the wrong cause. It is love that has been blinded by selfishness.

What is the cure? The cure is to see ourselves and those we love from God's perspective and turn everything over to Him—isn't everything we have *from* Him? Don't we owe Him our very life?

Some translations use the word envy instead of jealousy. Love has no petty feelings toward those who are doing the same work only better.

We are growing spiritually when we can see what another has attained without any feeling of envy. With this kind of love, we can befriend another in spite of—or on account of—his successes, and even rejoice in his success.

The canker of envy spawns hatred, strife, hostility, and a host of emotional disturbances which cause life to turn sour, bitter, and miserable. It has even been known to bring on physical illness. What sane man or woman would not choose to let go the striving, the rivalry, the comparing—and follow the way of Christ-like love?

“Love makes no parade”

By nature, most people enjoy self-display. They like to feel that they are self-made—and worship their maker. It has been said that boasting about oneself is a disease that makes everyone ill except the one infected.

The cure? A humble submitting to the law of God; a heart full of love to God, humbly grateful for all that He gives and all wrapped up in thanking and praising Him. What a contrast to a spirit that “vaunts itself”!

The root word of this phrase points to a “wind bag.”

Humility is a primary ingredient of *agape* love.

“Love...gives itself no airs, [is not puffed up], is never rude [does not behave itself unseemly]”

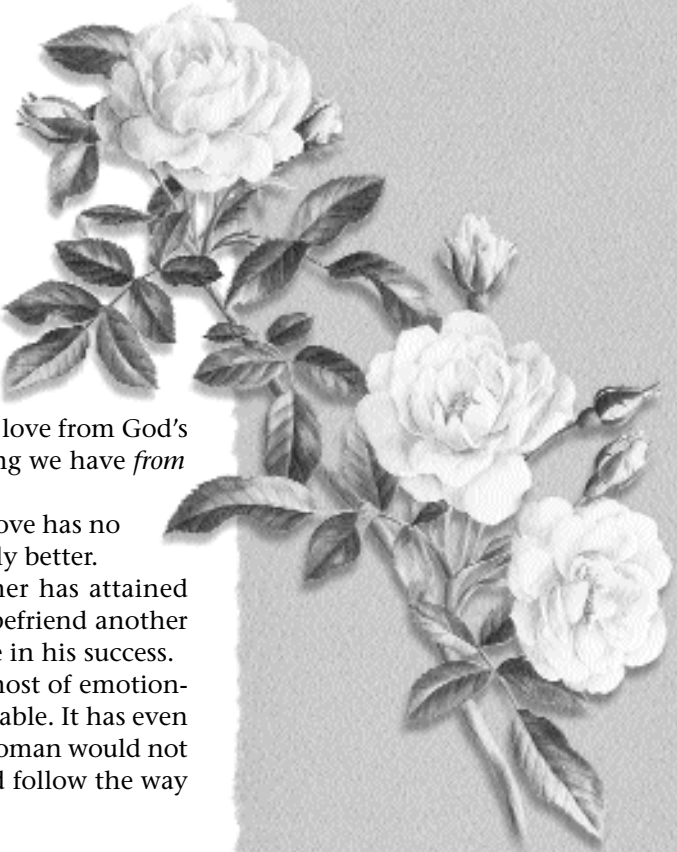
Who would do such a thing! But the Great Apostle did not write these words without purpose.

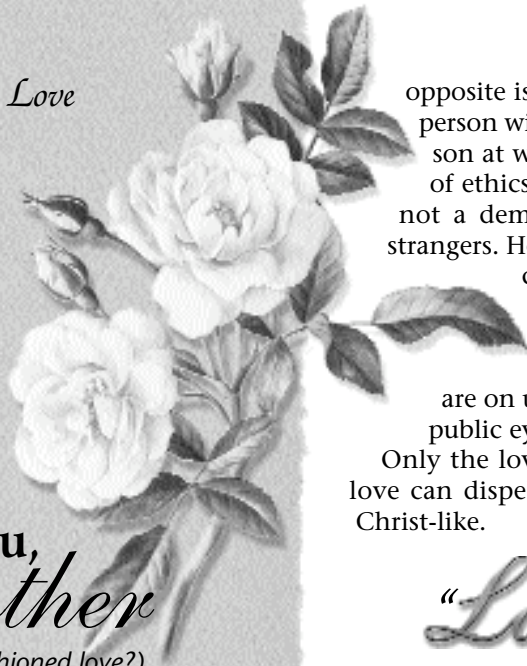
“Unseemly” behavior is unbecoming, disgraceful, dishonorable, or indiscreet. Christ-like love has no conceit on the inside, and no rudeness on the outside.

Arrogance “gives itself airs,” and has a mind filled with thoughts of its own importance. As a result, the arrogant one is hard headed and hard hearted. The loving one has a heart of affection and kindness toward others. What a contrast!

Arrogance makes one brittle, bitter, and abrupt. The arrogant are unbending, unyielding, and unapproachable.

Putting on “airs” suggests conduct that is “dressed” for the occasion. How





I Love You, Mother

(Is this old fashioned love?)

*"I love you, Mother," said little John,
Then forgetting his work, his cap went on
And off he went to the garden swing,
Forgetting the coal and the wood to bring.*

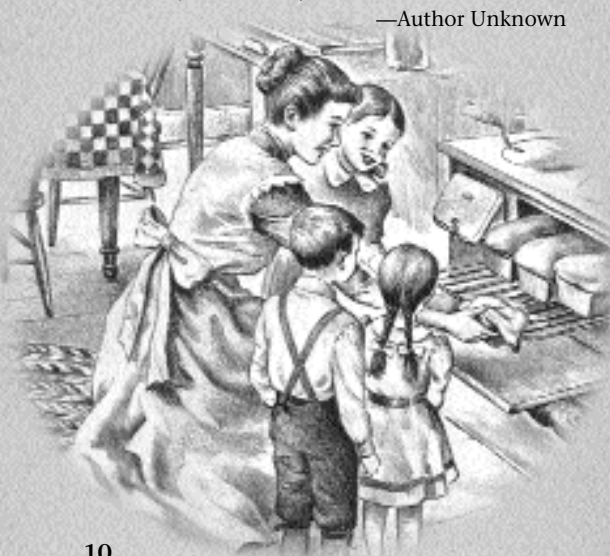
*"I love you, Mother," said little Nell,
"I love you better than tongue can tell;"
Then she teased and pouted full half the day
So her mother rejoiced when she went to play.*

*"I love you, Mother," said little Fan,
"Today I will help you all that I can:
How glad I am that school doesn't keep
And she rocked the baby till it fell asleep.*

*Then stepping softly she took the broom,
And swept the floor and dusted the room.
Happy and busy all day was she,
Helpful and cheerful as a child could be.*

*"I love you, Mother," again they said,
Three little children going to bed.
How do you think that mother guessed
Which of them really loved her the best?*

—Author Unknown



opposite is true, godly love. The love-inspired person is not one person with his friends and another at home. He is not one person at work and another at church. He does not have one set of ethics for his business and another for his recreation. He is not a demure saint where he is known and careless around strangers. He is genuine. Wherever he is, he is the same. He stands consistently for right and will not fall for the wrong.

This is why true, godly love is priceless. It is always the same. It supports us in sunshine or shadow. It is the same when backs are turned or when all eyes are on us. It is the same in the privacy of our homes as in the public eye.

Only the love of God can be genuine to this extent. Only godly love can dispel arrogance and rudeness and make us consistently Christ-like.

*"Love is never selfish [seeketh
not her own]"*

Selfishness is the root cause of most interpersonal problems in the world. If there were no selfishness in the home circle, it would be heaven on earth. But selfishness gets in and brings with it resentment, nagging and quarreling.

The only cure for selfishness is Christ-centeredness. When Christ is at the center, we no longer insist on doing it our way. Rather, we seek His way—and the good of others.

Christ-likeness frees us from being irritable and irritating. We are no longer bent on petty satisfactions, or annoyed by petty frustrations. Little things simply do not matter, so we are not disturbed. We do not become indignant over seeming slights or snubs.

This means we must do some tall growing. But God did not intend that we should continue to live in the infant stage. Our spiritual life must not be perpetual babyhood. We have been made to grow, and God gives us the situations in which we can grow. And as we grow, pettiness is replaced by a desire to promote the good of others. Selfishness is displaced by selflessness. And through it all we have a higher affection, higher goals, and a beautiful spirit.

Godly love makes every attitude lovely. The more Christ's love dominates our lives, the greater will be our growth in Christian character.

*"Love is never irritated, never
resentful [thinketh no evil]; love is never
glad when others go wrong
[rejoices not in iniquity]."*

What would ever make us irritated, resentful, and glad when others are hurt? What a dreadful line of action!

But it is part of our all-too-human nature.

To have that inner, controlling love which keeps us from being "glad when others go wrong" is a great accomplishment. How is it possible? Because *agape* love does not get exasperated at another's wrong, it is never irritated, never resentful. And it does not brood over

injuries—because it is interested in the other person's *benefit*!

The phrase "*thinketh no evil*" (KJV) means literally "does not keep any record of wrongs." Keeping a record of all wrongs done to us would mean that we had no mechanism for forgiveness. The love that Christ taught is a forgiving love, one that will not hold a remembrance of wrong against another.

Not thinking evil and not rejoicing in evil have something in common. One is on the inside (thinking), one is outside (rejoicing). If we are not thinking evil on the inside, we will not feel any joy in another's failure.

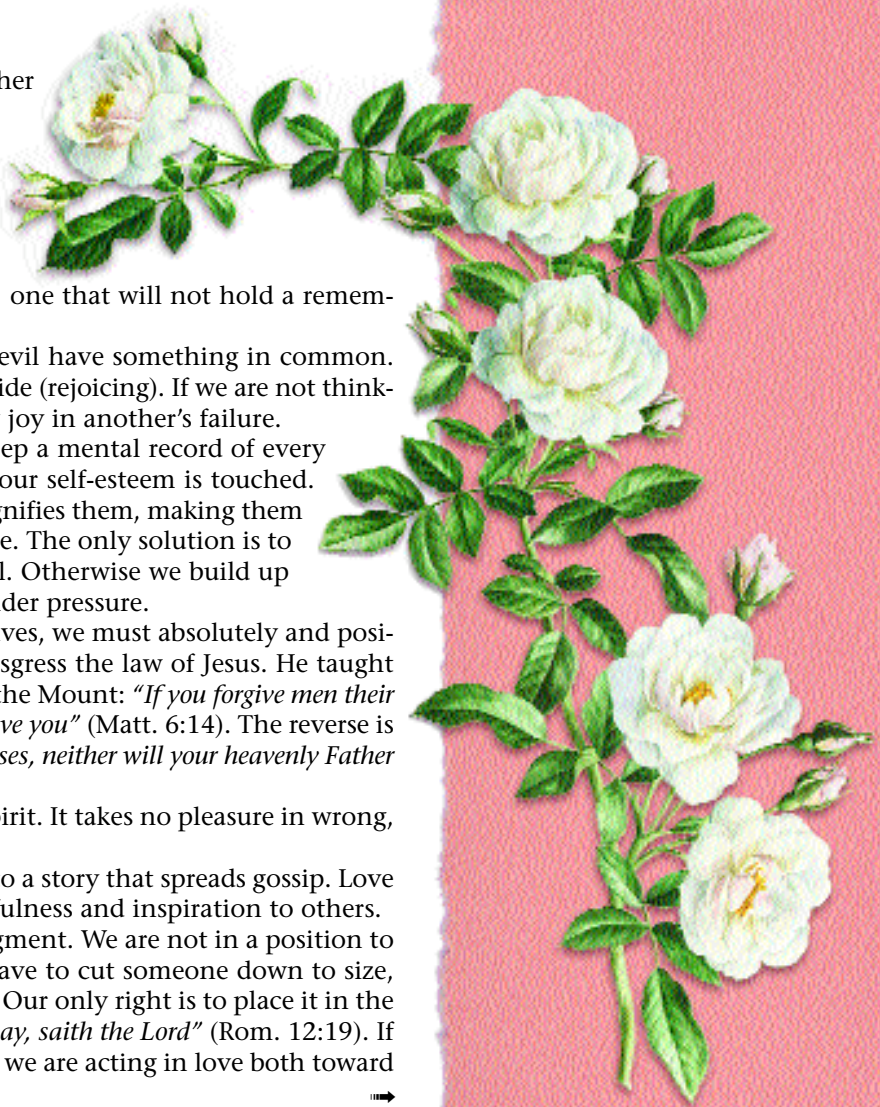
Without godly love, we are prone to keep a mental record of every slight and snub. We feel a jab every time our self-esteem is touched. Brooding on these cutting experiences magnifies them, making them appear so much greater than they really are. The only solution is to forgive the wrong, and let the wound heal. Otherwise we build up mental stress, and find ourselves living under pressure.

If a spirit of godly love dominates our lives, we must absolutely and positively forgive and forget a wrong—or transgress the law of Jesus. He taught the spirit of forgiveness in His Sermon on the Mount: "*If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*" (Matt. 6:14). The reverse is also true: "*If you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses*" (v. 15).

The forgiving spirit is part of a loving spirit. It takes no pleasure in wrong, but seeks only to correct and perfect.

Godly love cannot listen with pleasure to a story that spreads gossip. Love makes us sources of encouragement, helpfulness and inspiration to others.

Godly love refrains from executing judgment. We are not in a position to be fair or unfair with others. We do not have to cut someone down to size, even though they may have cut us deeply. Our only right is to place it in the hands of God. "*Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*" (Rom. 12:19). If we leave Him to take care of these matters, we are acting in love both toward Him and toward our fellowman.



Do You (Peter) Love Me (Jesus)?

The New Testament uses two very different words for "love." The difference is seen distinctly in the way Jesus used them in a conversation with Peter after His resurrection (John 21:15–17).

The word "love" occurs seven times in this passage, but two different words are used in the original. Let us read the passage and use the word "fondness" in place of one type of love (*phileo*), and "deep devotion" in place of the other (*agape*).

"Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you have a *deep devotion* for me, a devotion more than you have for these things? Peter said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I have a *fondness* for you.

"Jesus said to him again the second time, Simon, son of John, do you have

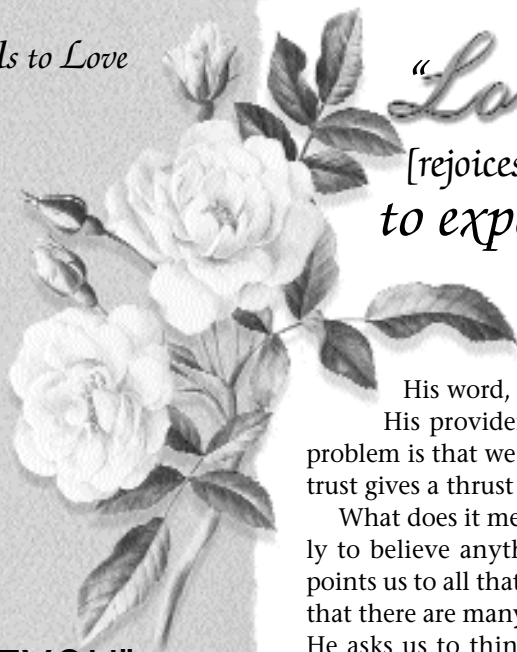
a *deep devotion* for me? Peter said to him, Yes, Lord, you know that I have a *fondness* for you.

"Jesus said to him a third time, Simon, son of John, do you have a *fondness* for me? Peter was grieved because Jesus said to him the third time, Do you have a *fondness* for me, and he said to him, Lord, you know all things. You know that I have a *fondness* for you."

Why was Peter grieved at the third question? Peter was hurt not because Jesus had asked him the question three times but because He changed the wording of his question. In the third question Jesus used the very word Peter had used in answering the first two questions, and with it He probed deep into the heart of Peter. It was as if He asked, How much do you really

love me, Peter? You have fondness for me, true enough; but you have not yet given Me that full commitment.

While Peter had his faults, a wonderful trait is visible when the distinction between the two Greek words for love is made. Peter was both honest and humble. Even under the careful scrutiny of the Master He did not change. Peter knew his own heart and stuck to his words. "Lord, you know all things. You know that I am fond of You." That was the best he could own at that moment. Yet in his heart he was longing for the higher level of devotion, so when Jesus in the third question used the lesser word (which Peter had been using of himself), Peter was hurt. But Jesus knew that very soon Peter's love would grow from *phileo* (fondness) to *agape* (deeply devoted love). ♦



"ILOVEYOU"

Did you get hurt by that computer worm that circled the globe recently, causing billions of dollars worth of damage? What made it most dangerous was the deceitful packaging. Its deadly dagger was wrapped in a guise of affection: "I love you."

But its designer knew that it was giving affliction, not affection.

Isn't that the great danger of sin, that it cloaks itself in a guise of love? But instead of giving love it gives danger of the deadliest sort. Instead of giving the glamorous pleasure it boasts, its real end is death.

Don't be deceived by the "ILOVEYOU" worm of sin. Sin—all sin, any sin—still ends in death.

This fact should make giving a cold shoulder to the "ILOVEYOU" worm of sin very easy!



"Love is gladdened by goodness [rejoices in the truth], love is always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best [beareth all things, believeth all things]"

Being "eager to believe the best" is the ability to take God at His word, believe what He says without reservation. Do we wonder why His providence allows certain things, why did this or that happen? The problem is that we see only part of the picture. And so we learn to trust, and this trust gives a thrust to the soul that enables us to get on top of every situation.

What does it mean to "believe all things"? Certainly God does not ask us literally to believe anything and everything spoken or written! This quality of love points us to all that God has spoken, "all things" that He endorses, and this means that there are many things we will *not* believe. It *limits* our believing to the things He asks us to think on (all that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report—Phil. 4:8).

"Love is always hopeful, always patient [hopeth all things, endureth all things]"

Hope for the future is one of the singular qualities of the Gospel of Christ. Godly love gives hope. Why? Because this love is expressed by our obedience, and obedience will finally turn hope to fulfillment.

Hope becomes real when God accepts our obedience. God has promised to fulfill His word if we keep our part of the agreement. Hope does not say, "Have a good day," or even "Have a good tomorrow." It says with all confidence, "Have a good forever!" Do we wonder why it can "bear all things" even if they are unpleasant? It is because hope is looking to the glorious, eternal future.

Love makes hope real because it keeps us looking forward and moving forward at a steady pace. It keeps us climbing new heights of spiritual achievement. And God's law of love provides the fuel that keeps our hope burning brightly. It is the current that makes our hope electric with expectation. It is the spark that fires the flame of enthusiasm.

Godly love makes real that hope which grows brighter and brighter unto the perfect day (Prov. 4:18).

"Love never disappears [never fails]"

Godly love is victorious. Why? Because it means that full and wholehearted obedience to God which God will recompense abundantly. So what reason does it have to falter under pressure, or sag under adversity?

Godly love always comes out triumphant—because God is behind it.

Love is a permanent virtue. It "never fails." The word is "never cease." We ought to be growing and maturing now, so that when Jesus comes we will be ready to meet Him. Love is part of the maturing process. Children live for the temporary; adults live for the permanent. Love is enduring, and what it produces will endure.

One measure of spiritual maturity is faithfulness. God is faithful in fulfilling His promises to us as we are faithful to Him. And that faithfulness is the

quality of love holding on, holding out, holding steadfast to the end because it knows that God will be true.

For this reason love never fails, faints, or falters. It holds true through every emergency with a glow, a gleam and a glory that is from another world—the world to come.

Faithfulness is the mark of growth in godliness. Love never fails because it achieves the great goals and ideals it set out to reach.

Love makes one more than a conqueror because it is itself unconquerable.

Do we think that God's love is something frail and fragile, something all soft and cuddly? Truly, it can be tender. But it is also tough. Love forges the strongest and most durable bonds of life because it has God behind it. And nothing from the earth, not the weight of pressure or the depth of sorrow; not the height of success or the depth of failure; not any power above or below shall be able to separate us from it (Rom. 8:38–39).

Why can love sing in the storm? Because it sees beyond the storm to the eternal day ahead.

Do we wonder why Paul said that three virtues abide: *"Faith, hope, and love,"* but only one endures, and that is love. Why? Because faith is only useful until it is changed to reality, then it is no longer faith. Hope is useful only until it comes to fruition, then it is no longer needed. But love will go on and on and on, through all the ages of eternity.

True godly love is the greatest.

When we set our affection on things above, we know what pure, satisfying, godly love is. And when we are captured by this love, it will master our plans and be the main-spring of our action, the thrust power of our aspirations. Our theme song will be,

*Ready to go, ready to stay,
Ready my place to fill;
Ready for service, lowly or great,
Ready to do His will.* ♦

Love Your Enemies



What did Jesus mean when He said, *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you"?* (Matt. 5:44).

Jesus set a very high standard of heart quality, in sharp contrast to the law of Moses with its simple outward requirements.

This text is Jesus' counter to the old Jewish law: *"Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy."*

In Jesus' time, *"Love your enemies"* was a new thought to Jews who hated anyone who opposed them or disagreed with them, whether Gentiles, Roman officials, promoters of heresy, etc., etc. Enemies were hated, and that hatred was considered to be in harmony with the Jewish religion. The ancient world was ruptured by many deep and often violent hatreds. When Jesus came saying *"Love your enemies,"* He was making a startling demand that cut sharply across Jewish ethics and morals.

When Jesus said *"Love your enemies,"* he used *"agape"* which meant a type of love that seeks the best interests of the one addressed, in this case a persistence in goodwill in Christ. He was not asking us to love everyone with a natural and spontaneous affection but rather to act in goodwill toward all.

This command was especially meaningful to the Jews of Jesus' day who justified their hatred of Roman authority by their interpretation of Moses' law. They made no attempt to control their bitter, hateful feelings, and this, said Jesus, was wrong. They were jealous, vengeful, hating Jesus even to the point of wanting to kill Him.

While Jesus told them the plain facts, He did not harbor any feelings of revenge. He did not wish them harm, or stir up His apostles and disciples to hatred or ill will. When Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant,

Jesus rebuked Peter and restored the ear (Mark 14:47; Lk. 22:50–51). When the disciples James and John asked Jesus to command fire to consume the Samaritans who would not receive them, Jesus rebuked their impetuous spirit.

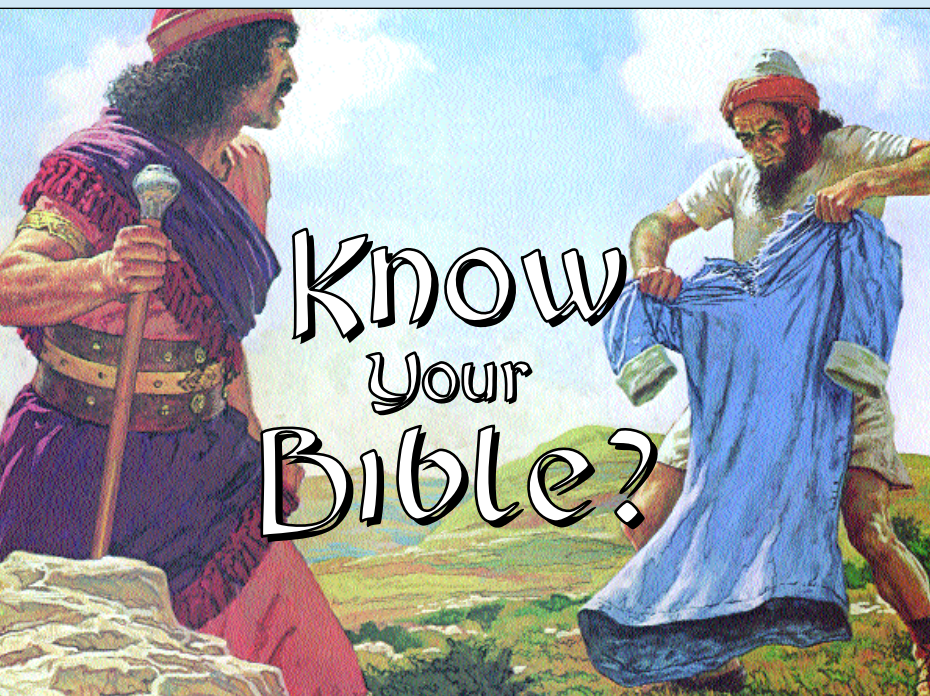
This does not say that Jesus condoned evil. He condemned it, and He separated Himself from it. But had He had feelings of ill or revenge toward those who opposed Him, He would have put a stain on His own character. As our perfect Example, He taught us how to maintain a spirit of goodwill even toward our enemies.

The apostle Paul tells how we should love our enemies in his letter to the Roman Church: *"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone; aim to be above reproach in the eyes of all; be at peace with all men, if possible, so far as that depends on you. Never revenge yourselves, beloved, but let the Wrath of God have its way; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will exact a requital—the Lord has said it."*

"No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in this way you will make him feel a burning sense of shame. Never let evil get the better of you; get the better of evil by doing good" (Rom. 12:17–21, Moffatt Bible).

Jesus then tells us to pray for our "enemies": *"Pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you"*—pray that they see their error, repent and turn to God.

Jesus goes on to say how God shows love to His enemies: *"for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"* (v. 45). We can do no better than to imitate God's pattern. If God had mercy on us even while we were still dead in sin, can we refuse to extend the same kindness to others? ♦



Know Your Bible?

OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

1. Who raised the son of the Shunammite from the dead?
2. Who was made judge of Israel on condition that he should defeat the Ammonites?
3. Who pulled down the temple of the god Dagon and slew a great multitude of Philistines?
4. Who, with his armor bearer, slew twenty Philistines at Michmash and put their army to flight?
5. Which of the twelve patriarchs was father of the largest tribe?
6. Who was the leader of the first colony of Jews that returned from the captivity in Babylon?
7. Who was the father of Jacob and Esau?
8. Who is first mentioned as "a tiller of the ground"?
9. Who plowed with twelve yoke of oxen?
10. Who was commanded to build an ark?
11. Whose strength was taken away when the seven locks of his hair were cut?
12. To what priest did Abraham pay tribute?
13. Who was punished with death for touching the ark of God?
14. What governor of Judea refused a salary from his people and treated them with princely hospitality?
15. To whose house was the ark taken when brought to Jerusalem, and how long did it remain?
16. Who was Samson's father?
17. Who was the first president mentioned in sacred history and by whom appointed?
18. What "mighty man of valor" was restored to health by means of a captive servant?
19. Among the men born after the flood, who attained the greatest age?
20. Who is the first one we read of to be put in prison for doing right?

KINGS

1. What king forsook the wise counsel of the old men who had served in the court of his father?
2. Who succeeded David as king of the Jews and built the first great temple at Jerusalem?
3. Who in his distress consulted the witch of Endor?
4. Who sent timber and skilled workmen to build David a house?
5. To whom did King Balak offer a reward if he would curse the Children of Israel?
6. Who was the last king of Babylon?
7. What king of the Jews had his eyes put out?
8. What Jew was cupbearer to Artaxerxes, King of Persia?
9. Who governed Judea under a commission from the king of Persia until superseded by Nehemiah?
10. Who put to death James the apostle and imprisoned Peter?
11. Who drew a bow and killed Jehoram (Joram), King of Israel?
12. Which of the kings of Israel built an ivory house?
13. What king of Judah was smitten with leprosy as a judgment of the Lord for his arrogance?
14. What king chose wisdom rather than long life or riches?
15. What tall and commanding person was the first king of Israel?
16. What king of Israel was a shepherd in his youth?

APOSTLES

1. What Levite of Cyprus sold his land and laid the money at the apostles feet?
2. Who said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor"?
3. Who was banished to the isle of Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation?
4. What man tried to deceive the apostles in regard to the price of the land he had sold?
5. Which of the twelve apostles was from Cana of Galilee?
6. Who was in prison bound to two soldiers when an angel appeared and led him from the prison?
7. Who sang praises to God at midnight while in prison?

answers on page 25

The Kingdom of God

- Real
- Literal
- Worldwide
- Eternal

IS THE CHURCH THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

HAS THE KINGDOM COME?

DID THE KINGDOM COME AT PENTECOST?

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAID,
"THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU"?

DID GOD HAVE A LITERAL KINGDOM IN ISRAEL?

WHEN WILL THE KINGDOM COME?

DID THE KINGDOM COME AT PENTECOST?

I hope you have an honest heart and will be honest with yourself. Please consider these scriptures direct from God's Word.

"Surely you will agree with me that the Bible is written in mystery form. We have to figure it out and put it together correctly to receive the greatest reward ever. For those who do not will be the greatest horror ever.

"Surely you agree that God will send an honest heart the truth, that he will not believe a lie. If He sends those who do not want truth a strong delusion, why would He not send those, who want truth, the truth?

"Here are scriptures to show you the Kingdom has come. If you disagree, please send me scriptures that prove these wrong."

—E. C., DeLeon, Texas

"When did Peter open the kingdom? Jesus commanded His disciples to wait at Jerusalem for the promise of the kingdom in Acts 1:4 'And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me.' (KJV) Jesus is the king. What did he spend his time teaching them? Was it not of his kingdom? He had just told them to wait at Jerusalem for it, but in verse six, they are still begging for it. Acts 1:6 'When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying,

Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? (KJV) When Jesus left, the kingdom had not been opened.

"In Acts the promise came. Acts 2:1-4: 'And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' (KJV) The Holy Ghost gave them miraculous power. Who did Jesus give the keys to open the kingdom? Acts 2:14, 'But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:' (KJV) Who opened the kingdom?

"One prophecy is answered directly in Acts 2:29-31 'Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne: He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.' (KJV) God promised David he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. The resurrection of Christ is the promise of God to David that He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. This is it!

"After Peter interpreted the prophecies to them and showed them that they had crucified the one that God had made Lord and Christ, they were touched. Acts 2:37, 'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?' How did Jesus say for man to enter the kingdom? John 3:5 'Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' (KJV) Jesus said that a man has to be born of the water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom. Peter told these people to be baptized (water) and they shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)."

It seems that our friend is confusing what is said about the Church with what is said about the Kingdom.

Jesus' reply to the disciples' question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel" (v. 6) gives no suggestion that the power they would receive would be "instead of" the literal

Could the Kingdom have come without the disciples realizing it?

Kingdom but only a power that would reveal to them more information about the future, the Kingdom and the time of its arrival, as well as to support their ministry as His “witnesses...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8). Jesus, on the night of the Last Supper, told His disciples that the power He would be sending would be to them a source of knowledge and even a heavenly power to recall words and experiences they had heard and seen, so they would be accurately recorded. This power He would send would “teach you all things” (John 14:26), it would “show you things to come,” it would “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13), it would “bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26), it would be a fountain of “living water,” symbolic of Divine truth (John 7:37).

The power was truly a multi-purpose gift from Jesus. Luke, narrating the same commission, says that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Matthew’s Gospel records that they were to teach their hearers “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Mark’s Gospel reveals the reason for the Holy Spirit power, that it was to confirm the word. “They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mark 16:20).

The apostle Paul recorded that this was indeed being done, also saying that the Gospel they were preaching was a hope, not a fulfilled event. In Colossians 1, Paul says that the Gospel which they preached was a gospel of “Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom” (Col. 1:23, 27–28). Nowhere are we told that they were preaching a kingdom which had already arrived and was then set up, with Christ as the King.

The apostle Paul wrote also that Jesus Christ “was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy” (Rom. 15:8–9). Here again was the reason for the Holy Spirit power, to confirm the Word through “mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed” (Rom. 15:18–19). Visible Divine power brought conviction as nothing else could, and the result was the growth of the early Church. It was God working, it was God’s power, and it was successful—thousands were added to the Church—but it was not the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Kingdom.

“Aren’t the Christians called Christian because together they comprise the kingdom? Read Acts 11:26: ‘And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.’ (KJV)”

“Why are Americans called Americans? Why are Africans called Africans? Why are Germans called Germans? Why are French called French? Are not Christians called Christians because they are of Christ’s Kingdom? Followers were not Christians in the days of old. Followers were disciples in Christ’s lifetime on earth. They were not Christians. Followers were

called Christians for the first time in Antioch. The kingdom came between Acts 1 and 11.”

I am sure that your conclusions are well-intended, but is your logic well founded? The followers of a man are often named after him, whether or not he founded a “kingdom.” A kingdom refers to a political entity, with rulers, laws, land, and people. The descendants of Israel were called Israelites long before they were a kingdom, and the people of Judah were called Jews even after they had lost their kingdom. Is there any solid relationship between the terms?

But all of this aside, what event between Acts 1 and 11 brought in the “Kingdom” that had been promised? The

Was Jesus ever the one and only King—as prophesied (Zech. 14:9)?

prophecy of Zechariah is, “The Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one” (Zech. 14:9). Was Christ made the one and only King on earth during this time?

The Psalmist, speaking of the coming King, said, “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth....Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him” (Ps. 72:1, 8, 11). Did “all kings” fall before Jesus at that time? If we recall the history, He was taken to heaven, to be seated at His Father’s right hand during this time (Acts 1:10–11), and Peter says, speaking of Jesus and His position on the day of Pentecost, quoting from David, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool” (Acts 2:34–35). Peter applied this passage to the situation at the time, where Christ was in heaven, where He would stay “until I (God) make thy foes thy footstool.” He was exalted in heaven but He was not yet King of earth. Revelation 11 pictures the great coronation when “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

“Last of all, when does Christ’s reign end? 1 Cor. 15:24–26, ‘Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.’ When the end comes, Christ is going to deliver his kingdom up to God and give up his rule, authority and power (His reign).”

“For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.’ Christ is going to reign until all enemies are destroyed. This was also in the prophesy Peter explained to the people. Acts 2:34–35: ‘For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, the Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool.’ (KJV)”

continued on page 22

FAITH In Action

by RUTH E. SISSON

Bible Text: Acts 1:12–14 NIV

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.



Prayer is both a thermometer and a thermostat. It indicates our spiritual temperature, and keeps our inner environment controlled.

WAITING IN PRAYER

 READ ACTS 1:12–14

What did the disciples do after Jesus had gone to heaven? They went back to Jerusalem *“with great joy”* (Luke 24:52), a distance of about *“a Sabbath day’s journey.”* It was a step of obedience because Jesus had told them that they must *“not depart from Jerusalem but wait...”* (Acts 1:4).

So they gathered together, and prayed, and waited. For the next number of days, the upper room seems to have become the home of the eleven apostles and the others who were with them.

Picture this little group of devoted ones waiting in that upper room. Here were the people who had been closest to Jesus. Here were the people who in ten days would be part of an experience that would change the course of history forever. Here were the people God was going to use to turn the world *“upside down.”*

As they waited, these believers prayed. That was the only communication they had with their Lord—who was now gone from them. In fact, prayer became a part of their daily ministry (Acts 2:42–47; 3:1). It is a good lesson for us today. We need this constant communion with our heavenly Father, and with our elder Brother.

First Corinthians 15 verse 6 speaks of a group of 500 believers. Only 120 were present in the upper room, awaiting the day of Pentecost. By either figure they are a very small number compared to the populace of Palestine at the time, estimated to be between one and four million. Yet these are the men and women who turned the world upside down for Christ!

In the Upper Room

1 What was the spirit among the disciples as they waited for power from on high? (Acts 1:14) _____

2 What were they doing with their time? _____

- 3 What changes do you observe in the disciples' attitude between the night of the Last Supper (the night before the crucifixion of Jesus) and now? _____
- 4 Who were waiting in this "upper room"? (Acts 1:13–14) _____
- 5 How long did they have to wait for the promised power? (Acts 1:3; 2:1) _____

Who Was There?

We do not know who all the people in that company were, but we know some of them. There were the eleven, and the faithful women, and Jesus' brothers.

We wonder about others. Was Lazarus there? Or Nicodemus? What about Zacchaeus? What about Bartimaeus?

Mary was there. And at least two of her other sons were there, Jesus' brothers. Now convinced that Jesus was who He claimed to be, Judas and James were about to become charter members of the new group which would be called the "Church" or body of Christ (Col. 1:18)—a real change from the day when it was written of them, "*his own brothers did not believe in him*" (John 7:5 NIV).

Altogether, they were a company of about 120. Not many, considering Jesus' three and one half years of preaching. But they were an important company. They were the seed from which would soon spring a much larger group, a group who would spread the gospel all through the known world.

Jesus' Brothers Believe

Prior to this time, Jesus' brothers had not believed in Him (John 7:5). But now their attitude had changed. Can we wonder—when they had seen Jesus crucified and resurrected? How could they not believe! Now they joined heart and hands with the apostles to carry on the work their elder Brother had begun.

- 1 Why do you think Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him earlier? _____
- 2 If you had been a younger brother or sister of Jesus, do you think you would have believed in Him as the Messiah and future King? Why or why not? _____

FILLING THE VACANCY



READ ACTS 1:15–26

Right now, the disciples' minds turned to the vacancy left by Judas. It was impossible for the Eleven to meet and not think of him. Judas had been one of them for over three years. He had been responsible for the group's finances. He had been with them as they walked, or talked, or rested. He had watched with them as Jesus healed the sick, and gave sight to the blind, and made the lame able to walk. He had been there when Jesus spoke those wonderful words of life by the sea, on the hillside, and along the road. He had even broken bread with them at the Lord's table. He had been, as Peter said, "*part of this ministry.*"

And he had thrown it all away for 30 wretched pieces of silver. Worse still, he had taken his own life—Judas, the man who might have been; the man



Insight

Mary ... in the upper room

When the disciples gathered in the upper room after the ascension, Mary, the mother of the Lord, was there (Acts 1:14), praying quietly as one of the group.

This is the last time Mary is mentioned in Scripture, and she is one of the group of believers. Notice that she is not taking the lead. No one is calling her "mother of God," nor is anyone praying to her. She is simply another earnest believer—a whole-hearted supporter of her Son's cause, the one person who knew His destiny from the first!

At this point she could think back some thirty years and say, "Yes, this has happened just as the angel said it would."

Bible Text: Acts 1:15–26 NIV

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus--

17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

18 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.

19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "'May another take his place of leadership.'"

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen

25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."

26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.



Insight

How many Apostles of Jesus?

The apostle John, observing the foundations of the Holy City in the vision given him by Jesus, saw only twelve: *“The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb”* (Rev. 21:14 NLT).

If Paul was “in”—and the New Testament makes very clear that he was—then Matthias was not. He might have been a very loyal believer and follower of Jesus, but he was not one of the Twelve.

“I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last.”

— Jesus to His Apostles (John 15:16 NLT)

who had great opportunity and literally threw it to the wind.

Only a little more than a month had passed since these traumatic events. Do we wonder that they were still thinking about it?

The question now was what to do about filling the vacancy. It seemed only natural that they should do something about it. If Jesus had wanted only eleven, He would have chosen only eleven.

The group began the discussion with prayer. Naturally they wanted to talk about their problem with Jesus, as they had been accustomed to doing, and now this was the only way they could do it. This was the only way they could share their problem with their Lord.

The Lord did not answer, and so Peter as spokesman for the group led the discussion as they proceeded to select two candidates by common vote, then chose one of them by drawing lots. The lot fell on Matthias, we read, and *“he was numbered with the eleven apostles”* (Acts 1:26).

The Task of Choosing

- 1 What else do we know about Matthias from the New Testament? _____
- 2 Why did Paul mention so many times that he was indeed an apostle? Why did the Jews not want to acknowledge his authority as an apostle of Jesus? _____
- 3 How did the disciples’ method of choosing the twelfth apostle compare with Jesus’ method of choosing the original Twelve? (see Luke 6:12–13) _____

Was Peter Right?

Peter may have been overstepping his authority to take upon himself the task of replacing Judas. Recall that each of the apostles was originally chosen by Jesus Christ Himself, and only after He had spent the night in prayer to His Father.

The Scriptures do not approve or condemn the action taken by Peter and the disciples that day. They only state what was done. But we hear no more of Matthias, and only a short time later, Jesus Himself appeared to Saul (later known as Paul) on the Damascus Road, officially placing him in the ministry and appointing him to the apostleship (Acts 9:3–15).

Although the Bible does not say in so many words that Saul (Paul) was appointed to fill the vacancy left by Judas, Paul frequently testified that he was called to be an apostle both by the will of God and by Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1). He begins nine of his inspired Epistles with the salutation, *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”* And in 1 Cor. 9:1–2 (NLT) he stated his case plainly, answering those who opposed: *“Do I not have as much freedom as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven’t I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn’t it because of my hard work that you are in the Lord? Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you, for you are living proof that I am the Lord’s apostle.”* At the time of his conversion, Christ said that Paul was His *“chosen instrument to take [His] message to the Gentiles, and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel”* (Acts 9:15 NLT).

POWER FROM HEAVEN: THE HOLY SPIRIT

 READ ACTS 2:1-4

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

It was time to start a new movement. Jesus had completed His ministry and departed. But He had appointed His apostles to carry on, and had given them a special commission. Just before He ascended He had told them that He would be sending them special power from heaven, and that when they received it they should go as His witnesses and preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins" in His name *"to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47 NIV).

They waited until Pentecost...and then it happened.

The day of Pentecost had come and gone some 1500 times before this, ever since Moses instituted the feast. But this Pentecost was different.

It was normal for people from every nation to gather at Jerusalem for the occasion. What a perfect time to launch the new movement, the birth of the new Church!

It Happened at Pentecost...

Pentecost this year, like every year previous, was a harvest festival. This very special Pentecost, like the ancient feast day, was also a harvest—a harvest of souls. It was the beginning of the growth of a body of believers solidly bound together, who would become the body of Christ. These were the men and women who would continue His work and carry the Gospel far and wide throughout the then known world.

The event was spectacular beyond description. As they were all gathered together, *"suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind."* The very description shows that it was beyond the normal human experience. *"A rushing mighty wind"* that comes from heaven is beyond the control of any human being.

It arrested their attention instantly—*"it filled all the house where they were sitting."*

There was something to hear, something to feel—and something to see. *"Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them"* (2:3 NLT).

What was the result? *"And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability"* (2:4 NLT).



WHAT IS PENTECOST?

Pentecost is the New Testament name for the ancient Israelite "Feast of Weeks." Derived from the Greek pentekoste meaning "fiftieth," it was celebrated seven weeks plus 1 day (50 days) after the wave offering of the barley sheaf on the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which occurred each year the day after the Passover, or the 15th day of the new year, see Lev. 23:15-16). The anniversary of Pentecost this year falls on June 7.

Pentecost was one of three feasts which all Israelite males were required to attend each year.

As the wave offering of the barley sheaf at the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated the beginning of the barley harvest, so Pentecost was the "day of firstfruits" of the summer wheat harvest.

According to the law, the loyal Israelite was to celebrate Pentecost by bringing two loaves of leavened bread as a wave offering of firstfruits to the Lord. Not one grain of their new harvest could be eaten until this offering to the Lord had been made. The loaves were not burned but were given to the officiating priests, along with drink offerings and peace offerings (Lev. 23:15-20).

Pentecost is thought to be the celebration of the day when God gave the law to Moses at Sinai. ♦

to be continued

Bible Text: Acts 2:1-4 NIV

- 1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.
- 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.
- 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.
- 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.



A closer look

There were all "of one accord"

The Bible says that "they were all of one accord"—of one mind, of one purpose, in one place.

There was not a dissenting voice. No murmuring. No complaining. Peter was not asking what John should do. Thomas was no longer doubting. John wasn't competing with Peter for first place, or Peter with John.

Now they were content to pray *together*, stand *together*, wait *together*, and worship *together* until the coming of the promised power.

The Kingdom of God

continued from page 17

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.' When people stop dying, the last enemy will be destroyed. When the last enemy is destroyed, Christ's reign will be over and his kingdom will be offered up to God. This is what the King said! The kingdom will end, when many think it will begin.

"Verse 24: When the end comes, Christ gives up his reign and offers his kingdom to God.

"Verse 25: Christ will reign until all enemies are destroyed.

"Verse 26: The last enemy is death. When people stop dying, it is the end and Christ's reign is over."

Can it be possible that Paul is saying that Christ's Kingdom will end (terminate, cease to be), when numerous passages of Scripture affirm that it is to be unending... forever...without end? Consider the following: "He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15); "Of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33). Of this same King the prophet Isaiah wrote, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. 9:7). The Psalmist described the Kingdom in these words, "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations" (Ps. 145:13). Again he wrote of the

duration of that wonderful government, "In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth....His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed" (Ps. 72:7, 17). The prophet Daniel made doubly clear that the Kingdom of which he spoke would be a kingdom that would last. Speaking of how this kingdom would break down all its predecessors, he wrote: "The kingdom...shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). Again he said, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14). Again, "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven (this is definitely describing the Kingdom on earth), shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27).

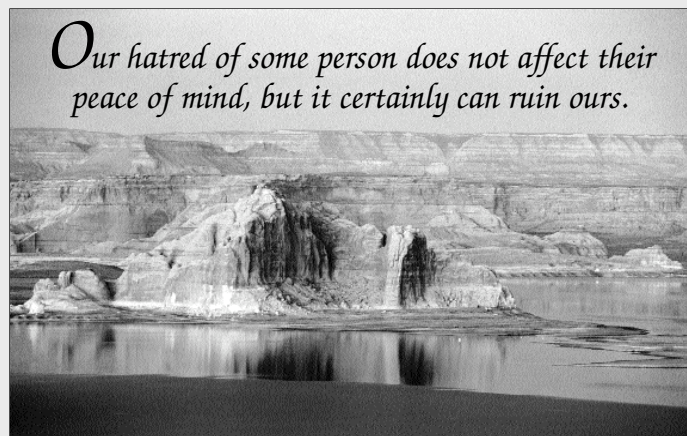
There seems to be no question in the writings of the Prophets as to the duration of the Kingdom of Christ, once it is established. What, then, could Paul have been saying in his passage in 1 Corinthians 15?

When death is destroyed, this simply means there will be no more dying, i.e., everyone who lives will be immortal. This will be the condition in the Kingdom, when there will be "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4). When death is destroyed, or in the symbolism of Revelation, when it is "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14), this will be the end of death, the very end which Paul spoke of when he said it was "the last enemy that shall be destroyed" (1 Cor. 15:26).

Will Christ's reign be over and His Kingdom finished when this time comes? I do not know of a single passage which applies any term such as "end, terminate" or "cease to be" to the Kingdom of Christ. On the contrary, there are many, many passages that say it will endure, last forever, be "as long as the sun and moon endure,"—what is the meaning of all these if the Kingdom comes to an end?

The Bible does identify a period of 1000 years, but at the close of that period, Christ does not step down. On the contrary, He turns over the Kingdom to the Father a finished product, glorified, and He and His saints shall "reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Far from Christ's glorious reign being over, it will have just begun! ♦

to be continued



Our hatred of some person does not affect their peace of mind, but it certainly can ruin ours.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 14

OLD TESTAMENT CHARACTERS

1. Elisha (2 Kings 4:32, 35)
2. Jephthah (Judges 11:8-10)
3. Samson (Judges 16:23-30)
4. Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:11-14)
5. Judah (Num. 1:21-46)
6. Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-2; 2:2)
7. Isaac (Gen. 25:26)
8. Cain (Gen. 4:2)
9. Elisha (1 Kings 19:19)
10. Noah (Gen. 6:13-18)
11. Samson (Judges 16:19-20)
12. Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20)
13. Uzzah (1 Chron. 13:10-13)
14. Nehemiah (Neh. 5:14-18).

15. Obed-edom, 3 months (1 Chron. 13:13-14)

16. Manoah (Judges 13:21-24)
17. Daniel by Darius (Dan. 6:1-2)
18. Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-14)
19. Eber (Gen. 11:17)
20. Joseph (Gen. 39:20)

KINGS

1. Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:6-8)
2. Solomon (1 Kings 1:13-39; 6:1, 37-38)
3. Saul (1 Sam. 28:7-8)
4. Hiram king of Tyre (2 Sam. 5:11)
5. Balaam (Num. 22:6-7)
6. Belshazzar (Dan. 5:30-31)
7. Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:7)
8. Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1, 11; 2:1)

9. Ezra (Ezra 7:6)
10. Herod (Agrippa I) (Acts 12:1-4)
11. Jehu (2 Kings 9:21, 24)
12. Ahab (1 Kings 22:39)
13. Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-21)
14. Solomon (2 Chron. 1:8-11)
15. Saul (1 Sam. 10:21-24)
16. David (1 Sam. 16:11-13; 17:15)

APOSTLES

1. Barnabas (Joses) (Acts. 4:36-37)
2. Judas (John 12:4-5)
3. John (Rev. 1:9-11)
4. Ananias (Acts 5:1-2)
5. Nathanael (John 21:2)
6. Peter (Acts 12:1-8)
7. Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25)

YOU alone are God. You have made...the heavens, the earth and the seas, and everything in them. You preserve it all. —Neh. 9:6 TLB

the Hand
that made us is Divine

Consider the Sloth

Did You Know...?

- ✓ ...that fossil remains have been found of ground sloths larger than our modern elephant?
- ✓ ...that the three-toed sloth has a diet of nothing but leaves?
- ✓ ...that sloths do not drink, though their diet is very difficult to digest?
- ✓ ...that the stomach of the sloth is always stuffed with leaves?
- ✓ ...that 30% of their body weight is the contents of the stomach?
- ✓ ...that though warm-blooded, the body temperature is similar to reptiles in that it is not controlled very well?
- ✓ ...that the body temperature drops to 68° F when it is most active?
- ✓ ...that the hair changes color as the rainfall increases or decreases?
- ✓ ...that if a sloth lived 40 years, it would only be conscious for 10 years?
- ✓ ...that in time value, only 4 years of the sloth's 40 are used for activity of any kind?
- ✓ ...that they spend almost all their lives hanging upside-down from tree branches?
- ✓ ...that their hair grows from the stomach side toward the back, opposite to other animals?
- ✓ ...that they can withstand serious injury and strong poisons?

The Bible uses different creatures of the animal kingdom as teaching media. For example, *"Go unto the ant, O slothful one, see her ways and be wise"* (Prov. 6:6 Young's Literal Translation).

The sloth (*pronounced SLOW-th*) was perhaps one of these creatures designed for our learning. Though not mentioned in the Bible in the original languages, its habits were certainly observed long ago. We even have in our language a word derived from the habits of this creature: "slothful." And because of our perception of this indolent creature as "sluggish; lazy; indolent," this word is in several Bible translations. No one wants to be thought of as slothful.

We will look at this creature to be certain we aren't taking on any of its ugly traits.

But first, let's look at the sloth from the Designer's point of view. For—can you believe it!—even the sloth is a masterpiece of design.

If you think of sloths as being fairly small, hairy creatures hanging around in trees, you may be surprised to know that's not how it has always been. Those who study fossil remains tell us that long ago there were sloths larger than our modern elephant. (That gets your attention, doesn't it!) The *Megatherium Americanum* sloth was 20 feet long. Its nearest rival was more than 13 feet long and 5 feet high. These South American residents, of about 500,000 years ago, were ground sloths. How far back the modern-day tree sloths date is unknown. We are told that there are no fossil remains. (But my guess is that they aren't recent arrivals.)

Tree sloths are restricted to forests from northern Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, to Southeastern Honduras. They are found only in dense tropical rain forests.

Two tree-dwelling sloths are very similar. One has two claws on each of the forefeet and eats a variety of berries, fruits, stems, leaves and some prey, while the other has three claws on each front foot and eats only cecropia leaves. In this article we will be looking at the three-clawed sloth.

These sloths, in spite of being strictly leaf-eaters, have teeth designed for eating insects, so it is said, not abrasive leaves. They don't



by GERALD R. PAYNE

even have enamel (the tough outer shell that protects teeth from wear and prolongs their life) on their teeth! Nor do they have incisors in the front for the purpose of biting off leaves. Seems this creature was just not meant to do what it does.

Did the Designer not know what He was doing? Don't judge too quickly. He is far wiser than we!

The Designer equipped the sloth with tough, hard lips that can strip the leaves right off the stem—no effort at all. And the teeth that seem not to be “designed for this job”? Even without enamel they last a lifetime (something like 30 to 40 years).

How do their teeth last so long? They grow continuously, at just the right growth rate. And instead of enamel they have a hard cement covering, so that as fast as they are wearing down they are growing. Talk about precision engineering! Is there, maybe, a built-in tooth monitor? (Could be we haven't figured this one out yet!)

A diet of nothing but leaves

Is it a mistake to design a creature that eats nothing but leaves—and does not even drink water? The sloth gets all the water it needs from the leaves it eats and from rain droplets. Wouldn't this give just about anyone a stomachache? Not the sloth. (He apparently never has a stomachache—at least he never has a problem sleeping, which seems to be what he enjoys doing most. More on that later.)

The wise Designer gave the sloth a multi-chambered stomach to handle the job. And a big job it is! The sloth's stomach holds lots of cecropia tree leaves, equal to about 30% of its body's weight. And it is stuffed all the time. Why so many leaves? Because it takes a long time to digest them and get the nourishment needed. The sloth's salad of cecropia leaves steeps in its stomach for up to a week before the process is completed!



The sloth — doing what he does best (sleeping)

Body temperature

The sloth's body temperature, not closely controlled, normally ranges from 82.4° F. to 95° F. Though the heavy coat of fur provides excellent insulation against heat loss, its body temperature still drops to nearly the surrounding temperature at night, when it is most active. It may drop to as low as 68° F, in which case it becomes torpid (loses all sensation and movement).

Defense from predators

While slowness would not help on the ground, where they spend very little time, it does help in the trees. In fact, the sloths' inactivity, or barely moving, contributes greatly to their camouflage from nocturnal enemies. Also to their advantage is their hair, which is yellowish to brownish. The hair, being covered with algae and mold which flourishes in the tropics, is an additional advantage, since the algae and mold give the sloth a greenish cast, especially during the rainy season. During the dryer season it loses some of the greenish color, blending better with dry leaves. The sleeping posture—hanging from a branch with feet bunched together and head tucked into the chest—aid in cam-

ouflage. It looks much like a bunch of dead leaves, a termite's nest or limb stump! In the face of danger it remains still, making it very difficult to spot.

It is claimed that sloths have very poor hearing. But this may be another case of misunderstanding. While scientists were experimenting with the sloth, one sloth broke a glass beaker in the laboratory. When the glass was being cleaned up, the sloth, hearing the rattle of broken glass, immediately came to life, ready to fight. However, it showed no response to a gun fired only a few inches from its head (demonstrated in a video published by Moody Institute). Is the sloth's hearing poor, or does it respond only to whatever it perceives as a threat?

If molested, the sloth bites savagely and strikes out furiously with its sharp claws. It can tolerate severe injuries and strong poisons. It also has thick skin, which is difficult to penetrate. Maybe this explains why a host of parasites, living in its hair, do not cause a problem.

Special Design

Sloths live in an upside down world. Even their organs (liver, stomach, spleen and pancreas) are in different positions than those of other animals. Accommodating this life of hanging upside down, even the hair grows in reverse, from the stomach side toward the back. This helps to shed rainwater. The Creator paid special attention to every detail.

Habits of the Sloth

Sloths spend up to 18 hours daily just sleeping. They spend only about 10% of their time barely moving. At top speed they can cover a mile in four hours—if they can stay awake that long. Trying to move on the ground they are nearly helpless. They just fall over unless they can grasp something to pull on and drag themselves along. While they cannot walk and can barely move in their

natural habitat, they are excellent swimmers.

Sloths never take a bath, and don't even bother with grooming. Can you imagine nearly 40 years of life like this? Not only is their hair covered with algae, but the algae and mold is home for a variety of mites, caterpillars, moths and beetles which feed on the algae.

Is it any wonder the sloth lives alone?

Life Applications for Us

Are you SLOW...or SLOTH-ful?

There is an important difference between being *slow* and *slothful*. Some of us are slow by nature, and all of us are human and tire out, become ill and eventually slow with age. But the slothful person gets very little accomplished on a regular routine and does not care, though he or she might be capable of far more.

Any parasites?

We have been commanded to love the Lord with all we have. This requires energy and efficiency. It can't be done when our attention is divided between God and the cares of this world. Our sins, especially those we hold onto without regard to what they are doing to us, are like parasites that keep us drained of spiritual vigor.

What parasites do we allow? Are we careful to apply the cleansing Word of God every day? Or are we slothful, not concerned with the parasites of sin?

Are you right side up?

The sloth lives in an upside-down world. Isn't this how we are when we

place ourselves and our interests above God? Don't we have everything upside down?

The sloth has become so accustomed to its upside-down world that it just cannot function in a world right side up!

Can we expect, after living in an upside-down world, to be able to stand before Christ when He returns as Judge? Like the sloth, which is helpless, we will be helpless before Him. Will He pity us if we have been slothful in our obedience?

How is your vision?

The sloth has color vision, a gift many animals do not have, yet, it is said that it cannot see very well. Is our vision impaired when it comes to seeing the life of Christ, our perfect example, and following Him?

Do you pay attention to warnings?

The sloth seems to lack a sense of real danger. Are we like the sloth, which ignores the danger of gunfire, yet fears the rattle of broken glass? Our sins, unrepented of, will one day prove as deadly as gunshot. Yet the spiritually slothful pay no attention.

Are you spiritually unkempt?

Our sins, in God's eyes, make us just as unkempt as the sloth, which never grooms or takes a bath. There is only one way to cleanse ourselves, and that is to skillfully apply the Word of God which cleanses the alert God-fearing man or woman from all filthiness. *"Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart"* (Ezek 36:25-26 NLT).

"Without natural affection"

Normally, being slothful means "disinclined to activity" (Webster). Can this include a lack of natural affection? The newborn sloth, about 10 inches long and weighing about 12 ounces, clings to the mother until about 5 weeks old. While the mother is never intentionally separated from the infant, if it takes a fall, the mother will completely ignore

its grief-stricken distress calls, as it lies helpless on the ground futilely struggling for life. If they survive to be about six months old, the mother will abandon the youngster for another foraging area and never miss her baby.

The Apostle Paul warned of a people who would be *"without natural affection,... unmerciful"* (Rom. 1:31), and advised Timothy (and us) to stay away from such. We see child abandonment and uncaring attitudes very frequently today. Isn't this slothfulness?

In Conclusion

Are we too hard on the sloth? Perhaps, when we think about the sloth's environment and needed camouflage, it has good reasons for its *slothfulness*.

First, it was designed for tree-life for which it is very well adapted. Nor can we find fault with its slow movements. If its body temperature was raised only a few degrees, it would increase its speed by 50%.

Then, too, the sloth conserves its energy for digestion—extracting nourishment from all those leaves must require much more energy than digesting a tender steak! Eat a big meal and go sit down and see if you don't get drowsy. No doubt about it—the sloth has one big, continuous meal to digest!

And it is designed for camouflage, including its slow, deliberate, hand-over-hand-motion as it goes about feeding.

Is the sloth a strange, lazy creature? The Creator designed it this way. Time has shown the wisdom in the design, as it still survives.

But we humans have no excuse for our slothfulness. God has equipped us to be active workers for Him. Our work, as Paul described it, is to qualify for the prize of eternal life, and this means we must run! *"Run in such a way that you may win"* (1 Cor. 9:24 NASB).

The race is on, so let's be running. Energetically!

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World Book Encyclopedia





How Is Your Garden Growing?

June is a busy month for the hard working gardener. In the garden of our life, we are constantly planting and reaping the harvest of our thoughts, attitudes, words, and deeds. Here are some gardening suggestions that will help one to reap a bountiful harvest of happiness. Fortunately, this garden may be planted any time of the year, but the sooner you plant, the sooner you can harvest.

Plant four rows of peas:

Prayer
Patience
Preparedness
Perseverance

Plant six rows of lettuce:

Let us look on the bright side.
Let us expect only good.
Let us love one another.
Let us remember God's commands.
Let us serve God with our whole heart.
Let us give unselfish service.

How about a few rows of squash?

Squash all fear and doubt.
Squash selfishness.
Squash gossip.

You will also want some turnips in your garden.

Turn up for religious devotions.
Turn up the corners of your mouth.
Turn up with some helpful ideas.

Perhaps you can think of other "vegetables" to plant in your garden of thoughts.

Did You Forget?

*Did you speak to Him this morning
As you rose in dawning light.
Did you praise for restful slumber
Through the dark and silent night?
Did you ask Him then to guide you
Through the day, at shop or loom,
Or did daily cares ensnare you
As you hastened from your room?*


*Did you lift your heart at midday
As you paused to rest awhile,
Did you praise Him for the blessing
Of His favor and His smile?
Did you bow your head a moment
Thank Him for the food He gave,
Or, with mind engrossed with problems,
Were you just a business slave?*

*And when evening shadows lengthened,
While you sat in easy chair,
Did your thoughts turn toward the Master
Who will all your burdens bear?
Were you resting, calm and peaceful,
Thankful for the tasks well-done,
Or did earthly cares still trouble
At the going down of sun?*

*When the darkness came, and rest-time,
Did you kneel in grateful prayer,
Did your voice ascend in praises
As you gladly worshipped there?
Did you lie in peace and calmness
After you His Word had read,
Or did restful sleep escape you
As you lay upon your bed?*

*And if wakened in the watches
Of the quiet, starlit night
Did you seek to know the reason;
And when sure that you were right,
Did you pray as He directed
Till assurance plainly came,
Or did you permit the troubles
Of the past to fret again?*

*Think—did you forget the Savior
From the dawn till setting sun,
And did you permit the evil
Just to keep you on the run?
Stop and pray this very moment,
Seek Him NOW, without delay;
Your defeat can turn to Victory,
If you conquer all the way.*



**Resolve each new day to live and
work with resolution.**

*If your life seems empty,
put more into it.*

A man is also known by the company he avoids.

God calls those who are busy, not idle.

To take the wind out of an angry man's sails, stay calm.

When did you have the last spiritual house-cleaning?

The egotist is an "I" specialist.

Our worries reveal the size of our character. There are those who can get as much trouble out of some slight disappointment that blocks their plans as others would out of an earthquake that ruins their homes. Joys and sorrows are matters of proportion, and each of us carries our own measuring stick.

When you are sure you are right, go straight ahead.

The less you look backward the further forward you are likely to get.

Don't ever get tied to the post of postponement.

You don't need references in order to borrow trouble.

If you don't want
to slip, don't go
to places where
it's slippery.

