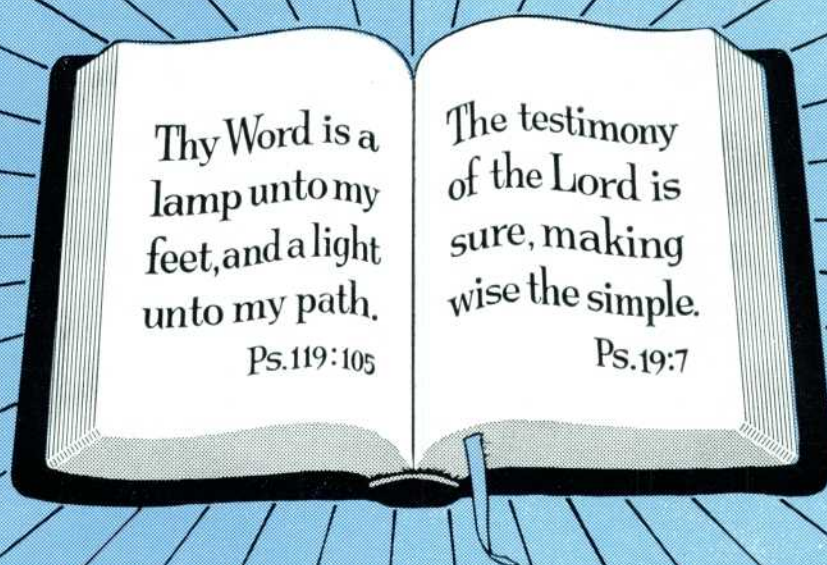


# Megiddo Message

DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST



## Growing Into Perfection

Death--According to the Bible

The Man Called John

Habits, Early and Late



# Pull Out the Earplugs

WE HAVE all seen the child that "can't hear"—because he doesn't *want* to. The problem is not a defective hearing mechanism but an effective earplug, an unconsenting will. He cannot *hear* because he does not want to *do*.

Most of us must admit that we do not truly "hear" all that we should, in a spiritual sense; and the problem with us is similar to that of the child—we have various earplugs, usually of our own creating, which are very effective.

Perhaps the most commonly used earplug is the pre-occupied mind. As far as any observer might be able to tell, we are listening; but our minds are far, far away in a different place, on a different subject, confronting a different problem. We do not exert the effort necessary to bring them back to the subject at hand; it is more comfortable to go along in our own thoughts than to change, be the subject ever so spiritually vital. Our ears are virtually plugged.

Another common earplug is the pre-formed judgment, the pre-conceived idea, the prior opinion. An issue is being discussed; instead of listening to what another is telling us, our ears are closed and we are thinking only of what is right in *our* eyes. Instead of learning what might be spiritually helpful we are grounding ourselves deeper in our own ideas.

Lack of interest or concern is another effective earplug. Jesus found this problem among the people who came to hear Him. Many were curious, but were quickly satisfied; they had not the interest to follow His thoughts and learn His heavenly teachings, so they closed their ears that they might not be disturbed. They had ears to hear, but they heard not; they were satisfied with themselves as they were.

Still another earplug—and one which may be very dangerous to us—is the earplug of familiarity. We repeat a passage of Scripture from memory. So familiar is the text, so often have we quoted it, that the words pour out without the slightest effort

or thought. What does the passage say to us? Very little, or nothing. We repeat the words much as the parrot says "Good morning, John," and at night is still saying "Good morning, John."

It may happen when we are reading a chapter we have read many times. Without any disrespect for its importance, we subconsciously feel there is little new in it for us, we have read it so many times; so we close our ears to its message and begin thinking about what we shall do tomorrow.

There is still another earplug which lets in that which is pleasing and blocks out what might cause us to be dissatisfied with ourselves as we are; to fashion and use such an earplug is exceedingly dangerous. It may please our unconsenting will when we cannot "hear," but the vital message of alarm may also escape our notice. We might be reading a chapter, such as Ephesians 4. We are delighted to think of Paul a prisoner for Christ's sake; but at that point we check out, as Paul goes on to relate *our* responsibility for *our* high calling. We are more comfortable when our ears are plugged.

No wonder God sent His prophets with this rousing cry: "Hear ye, and give ear." "Hear the word of the Lord." Open your ears. Pay attention. When it is the Word of the Lord, open your ears and hear! Whether it be familiar or unfamiliar, there is always some new thought we can find if we will seek. How many precious gems we miss when our ears are plugged!

It may be a warning of imminent danger; how will we know, if our ears are plugged? We have been alerted again and again that time is short, the hour is late, the King is on His way. Are our ears constantly open to the newness of the message? Does its reality grow constantly more vivid as we see the day approaching? Or have we plugged our ears with pettiness?

Let's pull out the earplugs now, while the Lord is still speaking. Soon it may be too late to hear and hearken. ●●

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## Megiddo Means

"a place of troops"

—Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon

"a place of God"

—Young's Analytical Concordance

Geographically, Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, located at a strategic point, demanding heavy fortification; for Palestine is the age-old gateway between East and West, and the avenue connecting North and South. Supremacy there has long been the envy of aggressive nations, and the prevailing power has guarded it with jealous eye. The famous pass at Megiddo through a solid mountain range is the one means by which this avenue between continents may be traversed.

In the spiritual parallel, it is a place of troops, where soldiers are equipped for spiritual warfare against the forces of evil without and within. "The weapons we wield are not merely human but divinely potent to demolish strongholds; we demolish sophistries and all that rears its proud head against the knowledge of God; we compel every human thought to surrender in obedience to Christ" (II Cor. 10:4-5, NEB).

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Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version

Other versions are abbreviated as: *New International Version* (NIV); *New English Bible* (NEB); *Revised Standard Version* (RSV); *The New Testament in Modern English* (Phillips); *The Living Bible* (TLB); *New American Standard* (NAS); *The Jerusalem Bible* (JB).

# Growing Into Perfection

THE WORD perfection is almost unacceptable today. Most people do not want to be perfect. And certainly no one thinks anybody else is. If anyone happens to think seriously of the idea, it is quite likely that he has a very imperfect understanding of what perfection by God's standard means.

But human misunderstanding does not alter the words of Scripture one iota. There they stand, plain and uneffaceable: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

They are Jesus' own words, yet very few people will concede that Jesus meant what these words seem to say. Perfection on a human level just isn't possible, they insist. "For a man to become absolutely perfect as God, is quite out of the question," writes a noted commentator. Another describes the proposition as "outrageous." Surely Jesus means us to take His words as relative to our human weakness, they reason. God knows our frame; He knows we are but dust, and how can dust ever be perfect? Of course it is fine to aim high; but we cannot expect to *reach* such a standard as perfection; mortal creatures like ourselves don't have it in us.

Yet Jesus said it: "Be ye therefore perfect."

To whom shall we listen—the wise of this world, or the Son of God? Nay, "Let God be true, though every man a liar." Let one word from God mean more to us than all the thoughts of all the men in the world combined. Let Jesus' words stand forever as the challenge of the ages: "Be ye therefore perfect." How dare anyone to suggest that Jesus was not able to say what He meant, and to mean what He said? Jesus spoke nothing except what He had received of His Father, and in calling us to perfection He was declaring a standard God designed untold ages ago. It is a standard designed to separate a few choice grains of wheat from an enormous quantity of chaff. It is a standard that demands the highest quality. It is the standard of a "righteous Lord" who "loveth righteousness," whose "countenance doth behold

the upright" (Ps. 11:7). It is the standard of a God who is of purer eyes than can behold iniquity with any degree of tolerance (Hab. 1:13).

## Is Perfection Relative?

Those who think perfection must be relative, something less than an all-out mastery of our own moral nature, go to the original word Jesus used and are pleased to find it means "complete" as well as perfect. "Complete" seems more comfortable; but how much less than "perfect" is that which is "complete"? Other definitions of the word are: "that which has attained the end or purpose for which it was made, complete, perfect"; "full grown, mature, adult"; "perfect, fully developed in a moral sense"; "wanting nothing necessary to completeness"; "that which is perfect: consummate human integrity and virtue." Is there anything in these definitions which allows for a *relative* understanding of perfection, or which compromises Christ's absolute demand?

Matthew 5:48 is not an isolated reference to the absolute standard God requires. The apostle Peter repeated it as a long-standing principle when he wrote, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:15-16). Is not this the equivalent of moral perfection?

The noble John set forth the same divine standard in these words: "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he [Christ] is pure" (I John 3:3). How can some say it is not possible for us to become pure as Christ was when the Scriptures contain these words? Every man who claims to share this hope must purify himself *even as Christ is pure*. Would God ask more than we are able to give? *Never!*

In a discussion with His disciples one time,

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NOTE: "Growing Into Perfection" is available on Cassette as a church-service recording. Price: \$3.00.

MEGIDDO MESSAGE

Jesus set forth the same standard, using a different simile. He spoke of the disciples as students, Himself as the Master, and said, "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (Luke 6:40). The standard to be reached is perfection. This text is more understandable in some of the newer versions: for example, the New English Bible reads: "A pupil is not superior to his teacher; but everyone, when his training is complete, will reach his teacher's level."

Isn't this the aim of every serious student? And is it not reasonable for God to expect us to reach the level of Christ our teacher by the time our training is complete? This is the divine standard; it is perfect, and we have no right to explain it away or dilute it with our own reasonings.

If we start judging God's standard according to what we think it should be and make allowances for what men think is not humanly possible, where will we stop? For example, if "Be ye therefore perfect" means we should aim for a height we can never expect to attain, then "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" might mean we should give Him as much of our devotion as we feel able to give. On the same basis, "Lie not one to another" could be interpreted, "Tell no really black lies"; "laying aside all malice, and all guile, . . . and all evil speakings" could be a gentle reminder that we are better off without qualities that offend others. "Let him that stole steal no more" could mean we should try very hard not to steal. And so we could go from one command to another, rendering *our* judgment of its meaning, and the law of God would lose all of its force and authority.

No, moral perfection is the standard God has set, and we must not tamper with it. "Be ye holy, for I am holy"—with no allowance for human weakness or any compromises to accommodate that which is inferior. God wants the best, the very best that we can give.

Does this seem like a very high standard? It is. Incomparably high. But is it not reasonable that God would ask *our* best when He is offering *His* best?

### Consider the Reward

Consider what God is offering: "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:7). Indeed, it was written of old, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Cor. 2:9). He

is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). Let us not allow the familiarity of these words to dull the splendor of their meaning to us. It is not *all* we can ask or think, or *above* all we can ask, or *abundantly* above, but it even exceeds all that—exceedingly!

Think of the glorious welcome awaiting those whom God accepts, the commencement exercises previewed by John on lonely Patmos. Imagine yourself among the triumphant winners, stepping forward to receive your crown of life everlasting! Then pause to listen as the thunders roll and the heavens ring and the angels of God begin to sing your praises!

Does perfection seem too high a price for all this?

Think of the nearest to supreme beauty your eye has seen; the richest sounds your ears have heard; the fondest dream your heart has cherished. Then set your imagination to work. Imagine as much as you can of the myriad joys and beauties and pleasures of the world made new. Peace, health, prosperity and happiness—everywhere! And everyone you meet will be another glorious angel of light.

Can we think for a moment that God is not justified in reserving such rewards for the very best? Has He not the right to sort and sift humankind until He has the very finest—especially when we consider that His selection, once made, will be *permanent*!

As we think about the magnificence of the divine plan, perhaps we can realize a little how the apostle Paul must have felt with the knowledge that was his by the power of the Holy Spirit. After thrilling anew at the high honor in store—"and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"—he was re-impressed with the urgent need of preparing. That is why he wrote as he did: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved"—indeed, what more could God have offered!—"let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 7:1). Here it is again, the high goal of perfection in every aspect of our mind and body over which we have control: "let us cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness* in the fear of God." It is just another way of saying what Jesus said: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is the standard set by God Himself, and needs no adjustments or alterations.

### The Way to Perfection

Now what about us in relation to that standard?

It doesn't take a lot of close scrutiny—we do not have to look very hard or long—to discover that the new creature God wants is something very different from what we are by nature. We are not born perfect. Far from it!

As we realize this, we feel a little like the fabled acorn that lay in the shade of the mighty oak and asked, "What makes anyone think *I* shall ever look like *you*?" for acorns bear little resemblance to oaks.

Yet acorns have the potential to become oaks; in fact, there never was an oak that was not first an acorn. Likewise, men and women who learn the law of God and start in the way of holiness have the potential to reach the full stature of Christ. How is it possible? Just one word: GROW!

Yes, grow! We are made to grow. The creative God made us for creative growth. Growth is the law of being. It is the law of life. Violate that law, and you violate yourself. There must be physical growth, and mental growth. Then, if a new creature is to be the result, there must be moral growth. This last type of growth—in character—is what concerns us.

### We Must Grow

This is the point often overlooked by those who think perfection is impossible. God doesn't expect us to start out full grown, anymore than parents expect their newborn child to walk and talk like an adult. Nor can maturity be reached in one grand leap. We are sinful by nature, conceived in iniquity. Time and again we transgress the law of God, and learning not to transgress takes time. We would all like to go to sleep some night and wake up a brand-new person. But it cannot happen that way. God has arranged that we should *grow*.

Yes. He *commands* us to grow.

These are the words of the apostle Peter: "Put away all malice, and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation" (I Pet. 2:1-2, RSV).

Here is a command that touches each of us. For who can say that he has never been guilty of malice, that he has never felt spiteful, or been deceitful, hypocritical or envious, or overly critical of others? The presence of these traits in us is sure evidence that we need to grow.

If these words came from one who by nature was nearly flawless, a perfectly developed person, they might have less meaning. But Peter stumbled. He stumbled badly, even as you and I stumble. Yet, as he writes this letter, he is in a position to say,

"Put away all those childish traits; let them be outgrown forever." And then, "like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation."

The final words of this same apostle are an admonition to grow. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:17). Again it is the elder brother admonishing his children. Growth must be two-sided: there must be growth in knowledge, and growth in grace. Knowledge is essential, but it must be applied to become that grace which transforms into a new creature. Immortal hope animates this injunction. It is as if to say, "I did it! If I did, *you* surely can. Just grow! Grow! *Grow!*"

The apostle Paul also emphasized the need to grow: "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The standard was not meant to be reached in a moment, but by "speaking the truth in love," he wrote, you "may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (v. 15).

Why must we be told to grow? You would never think of telling a child to grow, any more than you would think of telling a plant to grow. Yet the Word of God tells us again and again to grow. Why? Because we are not plants but men and women with *wills* which we can use either to further or to hinder our progress.

### Growth by Effort

Our growth in character is not automatic. "First the blade then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" (Mark 4:28), was never meant to describe how the Christian life comes to perfection. That is not how we grow. It is not an automatic, effortless advancement. To grow we must consciously apply ourselves and all of our faculties.

God cannot make us grow, but He has provided the factors necessary for our growth. First, we have something within us that yearns for a better life; God has set "eternity" in our hearts, which we may achieve if we but grow. Along with this we have His great and precious promises to serve as an incentive.

Then we have the environment which is appropriate for our growth. Environment is both physical and spiritual, as well as mental; and the spiritual and mental often present the greater problem. People make up much of it; and people can be as cruel as an earthquake or as caressing as a summer breeze; they can be as cantankerous and



persistent as weeds, or they can be as lovely as rare flowers. What about this environment of people when it seems to be against us? That, too, is part of the prod to perfection. It is part of the divine plan that imperfect people should help to make perfect those who are determined to grow and become perfect. Many grow on account of the resistances they have. Said the Wise Man, "Thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens" (Prov. 27:27). Not what happens to you, but what you do with it after it does happen determines the result. You have the power to decide whether you shall be *bitter* or *better*.

If we must live with imperfect people who seem to do a perfect job of nagging and harassing our spirits, this too can become a growing point. How we take it decides whether it will be a *groaning* point or a *growing* point. If we are compelled to live in an environment which seems hostile to our growth into holiness, whether at home, in the office, in the factory, in the field, there have been provided by the foresight and love of a gracious God the resources to help us grow in that en-

vironment. God will allow nothing to hinder our advancement in the divine life. All we have to do is to learn to use these provisions as He intends; then we will be able to turn our stumbling-blocks into steppingstones and reduce mountains to molehills. Actually, much of every situation is a matter of perspective, which is bound to change as we grow. What looks like a mountain to an ant would be brushed aside as nothing by even a small child.

Our founder, speaking of growth in the Christian life, once remarked, "God has provided the garment; it is for us to grow to fill it. A baby cannot fill it, a child half or two-thirds grown cannot fill it; only the full-grown man in Christ Jesus can fill it."

God has set the stage for our growth. If we don't grow, the fault lies with us. We have stifled the urge within us, and muffled the many opportunities around us. It amounts to just this: If, spiritually speaking, you are a stunted and runted individual, it is because you have decided to be just that. You are *self-stunted*. God means that you should *grow*. (Continued on page 8)

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## Let Us Pray . . .

Our loving Father, as once again we appear in Thy presence we come with thankful hearts acknowledging Thy goodness and our unworthiness of that goodness. Help us, Father, to be aware that Thy mercy will not always be available to us. A day of reckoning is coming, a day of judgment, a day when the righteous and wicked shall be separated, and only the pure in heart remain.

We rejoice that we are still on agreeable terms with Thee. May we work untiringly to keep our friendship in good repair, doing the things that are well pleasing in Thy sight, obeying from the heart that form of doctrine that has been delivered to us. May we spend each day all enwrapped in the things of Thy choosing, all absorbed in gaining for ourselves that boon of endless life.

Dear Father, we rejoice that there is built into our mortal make-up the potential for growth, the ability to change ourselves; that once an enemy to Thy noble purpose for us through the carnal mind, we need not always remain so. It is possible for us to cease to do evil and learn to do well, to grow into holiness through constant effort at self-improvement.

Thy standard is high, even perfection of character, but it is not beyond our capabilities. Thou art a merciful Father, a just and righteous God, and wouldst never demand of us a work that we were not able to do. Then may we not resist Thy will, distrust Thy care, or murmur at any of Thy wise decrees, or question any of Thy just demands.

Thou demandest of us perfection through growth, and that is well within our capabilities. Thou art a God of progress, progress is the very epitome of Thy nature. Thou demandest that we grow into the image of Thy dear Son, that we become full grown in the divine life, making no provision for the flesh in any way, but living a completely surrendered life.

Being built upon the foundation of the apostles, prophets, Jesus Christ Thy dear Son being the chief cornerstone, it is possible for us to grow until we become a part of Thy holy temple which one day will fill the earth with peace, plenty, and righteousness.

Help us to be watchful, to watch our actions that they conform perfectly with the Christ-life. May we watch our words that we speak only the things that please Thee, to watch our thoughts, aware that the thought of foolishness is sin, that at last we may merit a place in Thine eternal Kingdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## How Long Does It Take?

When we start a job, we like to have some idea of when we will be able to finish it. When we plant a crop, we figure on when we may expect to harvest it. So when we set out to grow a character for God's coming Kingdom, we want to know how long it will take until we come to that "perfect man," even to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Naturally we like things that are quick and easy. That is why there are such food products today

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*I stood the children, straight and tall,  
By last year's marks upon the wall.  
Another year! How soon they go,  
And see how fast the children grow!  
And then I thought of how God's Word  
Says "Grow in grace and in the Lord."  
And as I knelt with God alone  
He asked me gently, "Have you grown?"*

*"Can you look back and understand  
How sun and rain came from My hand?  
The trials and testings I decreed,  
Did they not prove my love indeed?  
Are you my trusted one much more  
Than you have ever been before?  
Do I seem nearer when you pray  
Than just a year ago today?"*

*"And does your zeal for My cause die  
Or greater grow, as years go by?"  
What deep and searching questions these!  
They kept me long upon my knees;  
Before His gaze my soul must own  
How very little it had grown.  
Dear Lord, this year may all men see  
That I grow daily more like Thee.*

---

as instant potatoes, instant oatmeal, and minute rice. We see advertisements that assure us of "instant" success in any line we might choose—music, drawing, art, or cooking in just three easy lessons. But let us not be deceived by the appeal of that word "instant," for perfecting any skill takes time. God shows us this in many ways. If you want to grow a squash, you need some ninety days. If you want to grow a cedar, you need a century.

Just so, there is no formula for instant salvation or instant perfection. There must be growth, and growth takes time. There are tastes to be

changed, desires to be re-designed, interests to be re-focussed, wills to be broken. We have to learn to think, speak and act like a child of God. And this takes time.

Someone has suggested that when a person is converted, there is an "instantaneous change from entire sinfulness to entire holiness." But nothing could be further from the truth. God never said that the way would be quick and easy. That is why He commands us to grow, and that is why He allows time for us to grow.

How long may we reasonably expect it to take? The question does not have a simple straightforward answer. It is a little like asking a runner how long it will take him to finish the race. There is no way of actually knowing until the final step has been taken. The finish line is established. But the time required to reach it depends on the runner—his physical strength, his endurance, his preparedness, and—perhaps most important—how intensely he wants what lies at the end of the race.

Likewise with the Christian runner, the length of the race is established—at least the finish line is set. How long is necessary to reach it depends largely on the runner. If he starts down the road toward the goal but takes frequent side excursions this way and that, he wastes considerable time and makes the race take much longer. The runner who has his heart set on what lies at the end heads straight for the finish line—and his chances of winning are multiplied.

The Word of God does not tell us how long we need to perfect a character in holiness, though it warns frequently that time is limited. A person's day of opportunity cannot possibly extend beyond the end of his mortal life, for we read that "in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Eccl. 11:3). Again, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10). Lifetime is working time; "behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2). And lifetime for anyone in any age is limited.

### The Time that Others Have Needed

As for the length of time God allows for the completing of the work, we may judge from the examples in the Bible that it varies. Only God knows what anyone *can* do or *will* do, or what special service he may be asked to do in behalf of others; and God may lengthen or shorten one's time accordingly. Moses was allotted the better part of 120 years, being taught in the faith from childhood by his own mother. We are not told at what age David was taught the law of God, but



he must have been quite young; he was called from following the sheep, where he had already learned to live close to God. David was about seventy-five years old when he died; so we may judge that his working time—with all his ups and downs—took the better part of sixty years. Samuel's was a lifelong service which, as nearly as can be computed from the information given, was about eighty years.

But it would seem, judging from what is recorded in Scripture, that growing a perfect character does not necessarily require fifty, sixty or seventy years. Jesus, our perfect example, had perfected His character and was judged acceptable to God at the end of thirty-three years. His accomplishment during this time was phenomenal—so strong was His determination that once He knew the law of God He never transgressed it. How much further ahead we could be if we limited our transgressions on each point to as few as *twice* after we learned. But oh! we stumble and dally, as though there were no goal to reach and time were infinite. Had we more determination to "copy Christ" and hold ourselves strictly to obeying at once, how much better we could do!

John the Baptist is another who finished the work in an amazingly short time. He was little more than thirty years old when his life was taken, yet his work must have been complete, for God allowed his time to terminate.

The length of time needed by different people would seem to vary in part according to the work God had laid out for them to do, and—most especially—according to the intensity of their effort. The distance between the beginning and the end is the same for all, but the time necessary to cover that distance depends on the speed at which one travels. And there is no speed limit posted; God sends nothing to hold us back. If we are behind, we have only ourselves to blame. If we are running to win, *we can win!*

#### What Determines Our Growth-Rate?

What factors might most directly affect the length of time we need to complete our growth?

First, the intensity of our desire for what God has offered us. If we keep in mind the unending life and glory and happiness and expansion which lie beyond the finish line—and which *can be ours!*—we surely will be able to run much faster than as if we let ourselves get all absorbed in the little flowers that bloom along the trail, and the side roads that lead away from it. The less we allow ourselves to be distracted, the faster we will be able to cover the ground.

Secondly, our progress will be affected by the

The oldest and largest living things on earth are the Giant Sequoias in California. One of these, the General Sherman, was a tall tree before the Egyptian pyramids were built. Today it is so tall it would take more than sixty average-size men, standing each on the other's shoulders, to reach the top. An average-size house could be placed on the base of the General Sherman with space left over for a rose garden.

How did it ever get to be so big and so tall? It just kept on growing! That's how giants are made—they just keep on growing.

God doesn't want spiritual pygmies. He expects us to grow, and keep on growing, as long as we live.

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spiritual strength and endurance we are able to develop and maintain. This depends on what we eat, and how steadily we eat. To be strong in the Lord we must eat the strong meat of daily discipline and discernment. We can never expect to be strong enough to run very far without fuel, and plenty of it. When the automobile runs out of gas, you can perhaps push it a little way, but you won't go very far, especially not uphill, until you get more fuel.

A third factor in our progress rate is our faith. According to our faith we will work. If our faith is up one day and down the next, if we are always vacillating between decision and indecision, we are bound to waste valuable running time. Just jumping up and down in one spot, or running in circles, is not progress. A steady conviction is the power behind a steady onward thrust.

Fourth, our progress will be affected by the concentration behind our effort. Are we into the race heart and soul and mind and strength? Are we really running, or just plodding along? Are we like the runner *straining* to arrive, or are we just taking things easy as they come?

We could hardly imagine a runner on a race course lying down by the way for an extended rest, or stopping to complain that the race-course was not laid out right. If he is bent on winning, he thinks of nothing except the goal and what he can do to get there.

#### What About Us?

In a spiritual sense, we are like the Israelites of old, en route from Egypt to Canaan. Egypt is the old life we have left behind. Canaan is our goal. How soon can we expect to arrive? That depends on how much time we spend wandering around in the wilderness. The Israelites could easily have reached Canaan in a couple of months,

had they been willing and obedient; instead, they took forty years.

What are *we* doing?

It has been truly said that we can accomplish the work of a month in a week, and the work of a year in a month, if we set to work with determination. Perhaps we can even exceed this—who knows? Let us never underestimate our possibilities. Better to exhaust ourselves outdoing ourselves than to risk doing less than our best!

Is it possible, though, that factors beyond our control—sudden illness, accident, or death—may take us before we have had sufficient time to complete our work?

Here we need—and will have—God, if we are sincere. If we are doing all we can, God will do what we cannot. We can be assured of His protection until we have had the time we need. We have “promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (I Tim. 4:8). God will not allow anything to come into our lives that will make it impossible for us to accomplish our work for Him. How can we be sure? “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). He has given His word, and we can depend on it.

#### In Our Day

We are living at a time unlike any other in history. Any day the Great King may arrive and end this present age. The arrival of that Day will mean the end of our probation, if we have had

sufficient time to complete our work—a real reason we should be giving the work our one hundred percent concentrated effort now!

What if our work is not done when that Day arrives? If we have squandered the opportunities we should have redeemed, we will be rejected.

But what if we have not had sufficient time? Is there danger that we will be cut off and lose all because we started too late?

Again we have the promise of God. If we have been using the time we have had and the end of the age finds us still struggling against the evils of our nature, we can trust God to grant us more time during the next age and to reward us accordingly. If we do our best and are not able to complete our work in time to be part of the “first harvest” that will be gathered when Christ comes, we will have opportunity to be part of the later crop. The Bible clearly indicates that there will be two harvests (Rev. 14:15, 18). And any part of our work we can accomplish now will be to our credit and will enlarge our blessings in the future age, for it is God’s changeless policy to reward every man according to his work. Those who complete even part of their work now will have advantage over those who wait until Christ arrives to begin serving Him.

But God forbid that the possibility of extended time should lead us to procrastinate now, thinking that if we miss the first harvest we can get in on the second. If we dally and dawdle now, how can we expect more? Extended time after Christ comes will *not* be given to compensate for time *wasted*. We are responsible *now* for what we have. To postpone what we know we should be doing now in prospect of easier working conditions later is certain to be fatal. If we are not sufficiently interested in what God offers to work for it now, we show ourselves unworthy indeed.

What if we suddenly wake up to the fact that we have wasted years of valuable time and have not grown as we should? Does this mean we have no hope? Should we stop and regret it? Let us stop for nothing! Regret is worse than useless. If we have wasted valuable time, let us begin at once and do everything in our power to advance our growth. Let us seize every opportunity that God in His mercy extends us. We have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

#### Check Your Growth-Rate

How can we know whether we are growing?

There are several points we can use to check our growth. One is our ability to control that little member of ours, the tongue. James says that he who can control his tongue is a “perfect man,”

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### How Long Till I Get There?

A traveler who was walking from one village to another came upon a woodsman working by the side of the road. “How long will it take me to get to the next village?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” replied the woodsman.

Disappointed, the traveler started off down the road again. But the woodsman was eyeing the traveler. While he was yet within shouting distance, the woodsman called out, “It will take you about one hour.”

The traveler stopped and looked back at the woodsman, indignant and amazed. “Why didn’t you tell me that in the *first* place?” he demanded.

“How could I?” replied the woodsman. “I didn’t know the length of your stride.”

*How long will it take us to reach our destination?  
It all depends on the length of our stride.*



so progress in this art is highly important. Well-ordered speech is an advanced form of self-control. And this takes growth. So easily we jump from impulse to words; so easily we criticize, or censure, or accuse or blame; so easily we speak words in haste which we regret in moments of sober reflection. No wonder James said, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." We can be sure no one starts out that way; it is a matter of growth.

Another check on our growth into holiness is our ability to control our innermost feelings. Rev. M. Hembree, our former pastor, said it meaningfully in these words: "Men and women growing into holiness are afraid of anything that disturbs their peace of mind." It is the command of God: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165). But oh, how little it takes sometimes to offend us. Just a misunderstanding, or a groundless assumption, or a too-strong opinion, or a false accusation, and our imperfect poise is all upset.

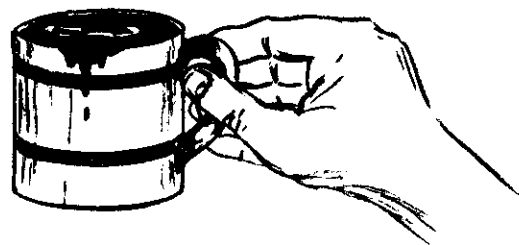
When our growth is complete, there will be nothing that can disturb our quiet, calm control of attitude, disposition or feeling; our heart will be so fixed on God and what He has promised that nothing of the passing moment will disturb us. How do we reach that point? Only one word: Grow!

Perhaps no one quality is a surer measure of our growth than our attitude toward sin in ourselves. Do we take any pleasure in any way, attitude, or feeling that God forbids? Do we find any satisfaction in what God does not approve? Is it our strongest desire to discover, disclose and dispense with everything wrong in our lives? Do we put our desire to actually *be right* ahead of our desire to *appear* right?

How are we growing, you and I? Are we making the very most of our time?

Check yourself today: Have you any more of Christ's likeness and beauty in your character now, any more of His truth in your soul, any more of His example in your life, than you had a year ago? a month ago? a week ago? The words of Scripture, remember, place no speed limit on our growth. They simply say: "Grow." There is no danger of growing too fast; there is great danger of growing too slow.

What is it that holds us back? What is keeping us from growing faster, as fast as is humanly possible? Let us search it out and eradicate it at once, and welcome into our lives every experience—pleasant or otherwise—which will help us grow. God will surely recompense—*abundantly!*—if we just grow. ●●



## My Cup Runneth Over

**MY CUP** is full and runneth over with joy! The Lord has filled it to the brim with blessings—blessings of knowing His life-giving words, blessings that will follow me all the days of my life and on into Eternity.

When temptations pour upon me, they cannot enter, for my cup is full!

When those sensitive feelings would steal upon me, they are dashed away—because my cup is full. God has warned me to be self-controlled and vigilant always.

When pride would possess my soul, no entrance can be found—for my cup is brimming over with humility.

When discouragement would lay me low and take my strength, His water pours into my cup and bubbles over, and the discouragement is washed away.

"Rely with all your heart on the Eternal, and never lean on your own insight: have mind of him wherever you may go" (Prov. 3:5-6, Moffatt).

In a bay along the coast of Florida in the Gulf of Mexico is a well of fresh water that is covered continually by the sea. The water in the well, however, is always fresh and pure; it is never mixed with the salt water of the sea. This is because fresh water from under the land constantly pours into the bottom of the well and keeps it filled, which prevents the salt water from flowing in.

We who are striving to walk in the path of righteousness must constantly be filled with the life-giving water; then there will be no room for any pollution of our carnal nature to come in.

"How precious is thy love, O God! to thee men come for shelter in the shadow of thy wings; they have their fill of choice food in thy house, the stream of thy delights to drink; for life's own fountain is within thy presence, and in thy smile we have the light of life" (Ps. 36:7-9, Moffatt). ●●

# Just Thinking . . .

I was thinking at work one day about the way God's people have to be tried in order to strengthen their character. Some days my old machine runs so badly it is a real trial. But Abraham had to offer his son as a burnt offering, and Jesus had to endure the suffering of crucifixion. Many others were cruelly treated; indeed, many of the faithful had to live with almost constant persecution. And in times closer to us our latter-day leader was once nearly killed because of the faith he had. We have never had to face persecution, but we are being tested just the same. I am determined to overcome my trials and not let them overcome me.

Time is growing short, so each day is very important to us. We must remember as we go through our daily routine that it is the little things which will build our character. Being patient all day and bringing all our thoughts and actions into subjection to divine law is a greater accomplishment than taking a city (Prov. 25:28). "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." In ancient times, it was a most critical and danger-

ous situation for a city to be without walls. And that is the very condition we are in when we do not rule ourselves. If we remain that way, we can be certain we will lose our eternal life.

If we want the reward we will strive to do right under all conditions, in sickness and in good health, in times of trial as well as in times when all is going smoothly. We naturally like things to go the way we planned them, but unexpected things often happen. Our car or perhaps a household appliance breaks down, meaning we will have a bill to pay we had not anticipated. We must not get upset or worried over things like this, but keep our faith. I have found that these problems work themselves out with time, and that by keeping myself under control and trusting in God a suitable solution can always be found.

In a temporal race, only the first to finish is the victor; but in the race for life, all who finish will receive the crown of victory. We must strain ourselves to reach the finish line. We don't want to face the Judge only 98 percent perfect, just inches short of the goal, figuratively speaking. We don't want to be among those who *almost* reach the city. We want to live in that city forevermore!

Let us follow the advice of the Wise Man, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

—From A Reader in Tennessee

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## Who'll Cast the First Stone?

I am sending a poem I would like you to read.

We read in the papers and hear on the air  
Of killing and stealing and crime everywhere.  
We sigh and we say, as we notice the trend,  
"This young generation—where will it all end?"

But can we be sure that it's all their fault,  
That maybe a part of it isn't our own?

Are we less guilty, who place in their way  
Too many things that lead them astray?  
Too much money, too much idle time,  
Too many movies of passion and crime,  
Too many books not fit to be read,  
Too much evil in what they hear said,  
Too many children encouraged to roam,  
Too many parents who won't stay at home.

Can we blame the youngsters?

They don't make the movies, they don't write the  
books;

They don't paint gay pictures of gangsters and  
crooks;

They don't make the liquor, they don't run the  
bars,

They don't make the laws and they don't sell the  
cars.

They don't peddle the drugs that addle the brain—  
That's all done by older folks, greedy for gain.

"Delinquent teenagers!" Oh, how we condemn  
The sins of the nation and blame it on them!  
By laws of the blameless the Savior made known—  
Who is there among us to cast the first stone?

For in so many cases, it's sad, but it's true,  
The title "delinquent" fits older folks, too!

—From A Reader in Illinois



who in their lifetime covenanted to serve Him, whether or not they kept that covenant, will share in the resurrection at the Second Advent. Their life beyond that point will be determined by their standing at the Judgment.

3. **"Death is simply the passage from one life to another."** Death is the passage from life to death, from the world of the living to the world of the dead. But it is not passage from one life to another life. There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that death means anything other than death, the end of life. Those who sleep in the grave know nothing more than one who is literally sound asleep. "The living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5). "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" (Ps. 6:5).

The apostle Paul referred to death as "the last enemy" to be destroyed (I Cor. 15:26). If death were no more than passing from one life to another, it could not be termed an enemy.

4. **"Death is but the separation of soul and body."** This is probably the most popular concept of death. It is a generally accepted view that the body goes to the grave at death, but the soul goes to heaven. This has been the theme of most funeral services from the time the church fathers adopted the idea from the Greek philosophers.

It may be comforting to the bereaved to picture the dead as happy around the throne of God, but it is not Biblical. A hope based on tradition is no hope at all. **Man does not have a soul, he IS a soul. Man is a whole being. While he has breath, he is alive. When God withdraws his breath, he is dead. The doctrine of the immortal soul came not from the Bible, but from the Greeks. The phrase "immortal soul" cannot be found in the Scriptures.** Our founder, Rev. L. T. Nichols, offered a reward of \$1000 to anyone who could find anything in the Bible to show that the soul was immortal. This was three quarters of a century ago and the offer stands, unclaimed.

Richard W. Doss, writing in his book, *The Last Enemy*, traces the history of the doctrine. "The doctrine of the immortality of the soul finds its roots not in the world of the Bible but in the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. It was the Greek philosopher Plato who proposed a philosophical argument as a means of coping with fear and anxiety about the nature of death."

According to Mr. Doss, Plato wrote a dialogue

to introduce his "proofs" for the immortality of the soul. He described the soul as "what is real in man," and death as "merely a moment of transition, a necessary door through which all men must pass." Plato said that "Only the body is corruptible and subject to death," and "since the soul is immortal, death is defined as the separation or release of the soul from the prison house of the body."\*

Christian theologians first began to use Greek ideas and concepts in the second and third century A.D., according to Mr. Doss, and this "culminated in a blending of philosophy and religion . . . which accepted the concepts of a body-soul dualism and the view of death as liberation." As a result, "a theological understanding of death utilizing Greek concepts became the official teaching of the [apostate] Christian church." Plato's "doctrine of the immortality of the soul" was declared a church dogma [doctrine] by the Lateran Council of 1512, and was easily "accepted by Protestant reformers and incorporated into Protestant confessions of faith in the 17th century."\*

Theology accepted the concept of the immortal soul as the best way to explain what happens at the moment of death, and it has been handed down from generation to generation without question. The idea finds absolutely no support in the Bible. Rather, man is described as mortal, subject to death: "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" (Job 4:17). Jesus Christ is mentioned specifically as the only one possessing immortality (I Tim. 6:16). We can accept as doctrine only that which can be proved from the Bible, hence the "immortal soul" is unacceptable, entirely lacking in support from the Scriptures. (For further discussion of the "soul," see in the *Megiddo Message*, February, 1978, article entitled "Is This All There Is?")

### B. What Death Is In the Old Testament

Death has been described in both prose and poetry by many fanciful names. But pleasant-sounding names have not changed the character of death. Death defined is "the permanent cessation of all vital life functions." This agrees with the Bible—but not with the poet. The well-known American poet Longfellow described death in these lines:

*"There is no death! What seems so is transition;  
This life of mortal breath  
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,  
Whose portal we call death."*

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\*Richard W. Doss, *The Last Enemy*, pp. 84-86.

Comforting words—if they were but true. We cannot look to poets and philosophers to tell us what death is; that which is received by tradition will not stand. To learn what death is and the nature of man in death we will go to the Bible, for the Word of God “came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:21). In matters of faith, only God’s Word is reliable.

The prophets, and the patriarchs before them, agreed with the apostles concerning the state of man in death. Let us review some of their testimony.

**1. The patriarchs.** Jacob, realizing that his end was drawing near, said “Behold, I die.” He further asked Joseph to attend to his burial, to return his body to his homeland (Gen. 48:21; 47:29-30). He did not express a desire to go to heaven, but chose that he not be buried in Egypt.

**Job** described the fleeting nature of man’s life: “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; for there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost [the breath of life], and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: so man lieth down, and riseth not. . . . If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come” (Job 14:1-2, 5, 7-12, 14).

Job knew that his own ending would be no different, that he would go to the grave to “wait.” He said also, “I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23).

**2. The prophets.** Isaiah knew that he would die as others, and in expressing his hope in the resurrection he included himself: “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for . . . the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isa. 26:19). The earth, not heaven, “shall cast out the dead.” He knew that his wait would be in the grave.

King Hezekiah, after he had recovered from his sickness (through the goodness of God) was

inspired to write: “For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day” (Isa. 38:18-19). It is too late to thank the Lord after death. Only the living can speak words of praise.

**3. The Wise Man.** Solomon wrote many words of wisdom received from the Lord. Although he failed to profit from them himself, we must listen because they are the words of God. He showed that a man in death is not above an animal: “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Eccl. 3:19-20). The breath of a man is as the breath of an animal. Without breath both man and beast die.

Concerning the state of the dead, the Wise Man said, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; . . . Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Eccl. 9:5-6, 10).

Whatever we do for the Lord or for ourselves must be done in life; there is neither wisdom nor knowledge—nor tongue to speak—in the grave. Without a resurrection, there is no possibility of escape from the grave.

**4. The Psalmist.** King David was also aware of the state of the dead. “Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust” (Ps. 104:29). When God chooses to withdraw the breath, man dies. The wealthy can carry no more to the grave than the poor. Likewise, earthly glory counts for nothing in the grave. “For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. . . . He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:17, 19, 20).

*Reprints of these studies available,  
10 cents per copy*



# Does God Make CRIMINALS?

**H**OW different everything would be if God had not said "Choose," if all of us were machines instead of men! Think about this as you read the following dialogue.

"God makes people, right?"

"Of course He does. If He were not the Creator, we wouldn't be here."

"Now some people are criminals. If God makes people and people are criminals, doesn't it follow that God makes criminals? Couldn't an Omniscient, Omnipotent God somehow have made people who would behave themselves and not cause so much trouble and suffering?"

"True, He could have. But that was not His plan. Here is an apple that is rotten to the core. Does God make rotten apples?"

"No, He makes apples grow and ripen, and we ought to eat them when they are ripe. If we leave them around too long, they rot. But what does that have to do with criminals?"

"Perhaps more than you think. Answer another question. Does God make whisky?"

"No, of course not. He only makes the grain. Men turn it into whisky."

"Yes, the wheat, rye, or corn that are created for food are rotted, spoiled for all useful purposes, and then distilled into poison. Man does this, and then calls whisky part of God's creation. But is it?"

"No, but if God knew when He made the grain grow that it could be turned into whisky, why did He put that element into the grain?"

"We will come to that later. Now another question. You were on the freeway the other day when that car's brakes failed and the car went through the guard rail and into the oncoming traffic."

"Indeed I was. I was a whole hour late getting home because of the traffic jam."

"Well, when you drove by and saw the car all smashed up, did you happen to notice what make it was?"

"Yes, it was a Chevy."

"Now did you say when you saw it, 'I know who made this wreck—it was General Motors! They had no business selling a car with brakes that could go out. They made the machine, and they are responsible for this accident!'"

"Never! Wouldn't think of such a thing! General Motors makes good cars. Thousands from their

plants are running on the highways all the time. They are perfectly safe, when properly used and kept up."

"But General Motors or any other auto manufacturer cannot make a car that cannot be abused, can they?"

"No, I suppose not. That's the driver's responsibility."

"Exactly. The driver in this case let the brake fluid get too low, so the brakes could not function properly. It was *his* fault, not the fault of the maker of the car. And the fact that the car is a machine of such tremendous power makes it extremely dangerous if not managed just right. Don't you agree?"

"I certainly do agree."

"Now do you see how God makes criminals? It is just like saying that General Motors makes wrecks, which everyone knows isn't right."

"But couldn't God have made men so that they would not be able to sin?"

"Of course He could. But what would they be worth? If man's obedience were like a clock, which you wind up and it has to run and mark the time until it runs down, man would be a machine, doing just what he was made to do without any virtue, challenge, choice or vitality. And what would life be worth, to man or to God? Nothing. So God didn't make machines. He made men free agents, every one responsible for himself, every one capable of choosing for himself. In the case of the criminal, the man chose the evil and disobedience, instead of the good life and obedience. That is all." ●●

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**B**EFORE we launch into a study of these Epistles, let us take notice of their background, particularly the background of their author.

John the fisherman had come a long way since the day Jesus first called him on the shores of Galilee. We picture him when he first met the Master, young and strong, his hands hardened by toil, his features bronzed by sea and storm, a man with courage equal to his task. As all the apostles, John was a rough diamond fresh from the quarry. He had to be carved and polished on the wheel of service by the Master Lapidary before his full beauty could be seen. This has ever been God's plan; each one who yielded to the Master Work-

## The Man Called John

man becomes ultimately like Him. In like manner did Jesus work with His apostles; He did not seek to destroy their individuality, but to develop and sanctify it.

One time when Jesus was naming over His twelve apostles, He referred to John and his brother James as "Sons of Thunder." It seems improbable that this was a meaningless nickname; Jesus was alluding to their qualities of character. They were men of fiery zeal and energy, impetuous and strong-willed.

This "Son-of-Thunder" nature showed itself on one occasion when Jesus and His apostles were passing through Samaria. The people of a certain Samaritan village were unhospitable to Jesus; John would have called down fire from heaven and destroyed them. But not Jesus. He used the opportunity to teach John a lesson in forbearance. It was not time to destroy these sinners; they must first be given opportunity to repent. To execute judgment upon the ungodly was not their task. Apparently John learned his lesson, for we find later that John with Peter conferred the Holy Spirit upon certain Samaritan believers.

Upon another occasion John interrupted the Master's discourse to find out if he had done wrong in forbidding a certain one from doing a miracle in Jesus' name. Jesus again used the opportunity to teach a lesson: that we should not resent or forbid any act performed in His name.

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\*In these studies, we will proceed upon the belief that these letters are the work of the apostle John, and that the Fourth Gospel and Revelation are also from his pen. There is nothing in the writings to contradict this belief, and much to suggest it. Scholars point also to the ancient testimony of the early Church, the use of common ideas, common vocabulary and common style within the writings, as well as biographical data concerning John which may be drawn from Scripture and from tradition, as further evidence that the Epistles are the work of the Apostle himself.

It is not right to be exclusive; every helper in the Master's service should be welcome. Again we can be certain John learned the lesson, for in his First Epistle we find him emphasizing the great need and importance of brotherly kindness and Christian love.

John was ambitious; like an eagle, he longed to soar high. Again the Master showed His superior wisdom. He did not turn him into a barnyard fowl. He did not even clip his wings. He sought only to guide his soaring in the right direction. Concerned about status, and desiring a place either at Jesus' right or left in the glory of His Kingdom, this son of Zebedee approached Jesus (Mark 10:35-38). Glory there would be, Jesus assured him; but He said, "Are ye able to pay the price?" By precept and example Jesus taught that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:44). Again we can be sure that John learned that highest ambition of seeking to serve, for in his Third Epistle he warned his brethren against the evil influence of one who "loveth to have the pre-eminence among [us]" (III John 9).

Much writing from John's pen has been preserved, and we cannot help noticing his humility throughout as he conceals his own worth and honor, even his identity.

John profited by his daily association with the Master. He walked with Him, he talked with Him, he listened to Him, he lived with Him. He became Jesus' most intimate friend. He meditated deeply on the words that fell from His lips. And after Jesus was parted from them, John maintained a firm and fearless witness for his Master, steadily growing in faith himself and inspiring faith in the hearts of others. His love was constantly centered on his Master, and his witness and work were always for His glory. His one desire was to be still Jesus' intimate friend in that distant Day when they should be together once again, when Jesus should return as an immortal King.

All three of John's Epistles glow with warm, brotherly love and show the care and concern he felt for his people as their devoted pastor.

### John's Purpose in Writing

Why did John write these Epistles?

We can safely say that the foremost reason for the writing of these Epistles was that a holy man of God wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. God wanted these Epistles written, both for His people in the churches at that time, and for those who would find help and strength

in their words in centuries to come, even us.

But what might *John's* immediate purpose have been as he sat and thought about what he might say to his scattered brethren in Christ?

In his First Epistle John mentioned three specific purposes:

1) He wrote to share with his brethren the sheer joy of faith and dedication which had been his. "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1:4), that "our joy may be complete" (RSV). It is the overflowing statement of an overflowing heart. John was now an old man, and time had brought a wealth of insight and meaning to his early experiences with the Master. The "word of life" had been made animate in a human being, even Jesus Christ—they had heard, they had seen with their eyes, they had touched with their hands! The overwhelming realization of this privilege had grown with the years. And now it was John's supreme joy to share the absolute surety of the Christian faith with younger believers. Few years were left to him, and he realized his obligation to the churches. It was his desire and duty to interpret in practical, everyday terms the responsibilities of Christian discipleship. And so he wrote from the compulsion of that kindred love that cannot rest until all in the family have shared his overflowing joy.

It was the same inner compulsion he had felt years earlier when he and Peter, being commanded by the council to "preach no more in the name of Jesus," had replied that they had heard and seen such great things that they *could not* keep quiet (Acts 4:16-20).

2) John's second purpose in writing these Epistles was as a warning against serious danger: "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (2:1). The young churches stood in jeopardy. False teachers and false ideas were everywhere threatening to disrupt the faith and confidence of the brotherhood and to lead them into sin. John wanted them to beware!

At the time John was writing these Epistles, the young Church was experiencing especially difficult—even critical—times. There were several reasons. The early radiance of the faith was flickering; in the hearts of too many, the first thrill was gone. Many were thinking less and less of the Kingdom Christ had proclaimed, and more and more of the present system of things; and this made the high standard which Christ had demanded seem a burden and a weariness. With no hope in the future, they found the Christian call to separation harder and harder to answer.

*(Continued on page 23)*





# SCRIPTURAL SPOTLIGHT

*"What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" —James 4:14.*

THE AUTHOR of the book of James presents this four-word question, "What is your life?" Then, in the next breath, he answers it: Your life is "even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14). The question, in its context, might be taken as a negative statement; in other words, what does your life amount to? It is so quickly over and gone, like the morning mist. How frequently we need reminding of this fact.

But let us borrow James' question and present it to ourselves at its face value: What is your life? What is its meaning, objective, and motive?

Our definition of life may depend largely upon our point of view, for those who live in the basements of life cannot describe the glory of the mountaintops.

Some cynic has defined life as "the predicament that precedes death." Another has said, "Life is a brief and discreditable episode on one of the minor planets." This is surely a basement-view of life.

To some people life is things. They live exclusively for the material, which moth and rust can corrupt, which fire can destroy and thieves can steal. Jesus warned against this view when He said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Again He emphasized that life is greater than the questions of "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewith shall we be clothed?"

Have you ever thought that the leading business in America today is the "junk" business? Oh, we call it clothes, or cars, or jewelry, or house furnishings; we like it because it is useful, and colorful or bright or shiny for a day. But tomorrow all these things decay, and the junk man comes and hauls them away.

God doesn't ask us to ignore things, but He doesn't want things to control us. They must not be the aim and object of our lives. "Learn to hold loosely all that is not eternal," said a sage of yesterday. Use "things" to the glory of God.

For many people, the value of life is found in momentary thrills. This is a pleasure-mad day. But the thrills of earthly pleasure can't begin to compare with the thrill of knowing we are getting ready to live forever. Why choose the lesser when we can have that which is so much greater? Why eat at the greasy hamburger stands of the world when we have been invited to feast at the table of the King?

To another group of people the goal of life is "success," and the key to success is academic attainment. Now education has enriched many a life; it may even solve some of life's problems. Yet one may be thoroughly educated and still know very little—or nothing—of the real meaning of life. Someone has defined the "intelligentsia" as "those who have been educated beyond their intelligence." They have missed life's true meaning and objective.

So much of education is only the learning of human values, human standards, human opinions, and human theories. As has been said, "I'd rather know a few things for certain than be sure of a lot of things that aren't so." Man wants to go "headfirst." God's way is "heartfirst." Better to be a believer than a philosopher. A philosopher is always seeking and never coming to the knowledge of the truth; the believer has committed himself to his faith in God and is on the way to salvation. Peter the apostle wrote, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." We don't have to theorize about eternal matters. We *know*, because God in His holy Word has revealed them with crystal clarity.

Now let us look in the words of Paul for an answer to James' question. What is your life? Paul replies, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). "Christ . . . is our life" (Col. 3:4).

When Paul described "life" as "Christ," he meant, "To me, to live is to live as Christ lived"; or, "I pattern my life after Christ"; or, "My life is the Christ-life."

Can we say this? Or must we say, "To me to live is pleasure, or things, or money, or popularity, or fame"?

There is no other way you and I can escape the end of the life that is as "a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14). There is no other way to real life, except to let Christ be the ruling power of our lives now.

Do we have His standards, His words, His ways so thoroughly within us that we can say He is our life?

What is your life? Is it Christ, or is it self? And is it for a moment, or for eternity? ●●

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## Our Christian Hope

**H**OW WE should thank God for the living hope that we have in Christ Jesus. It makes life full of purpose and meaning, seeing it is founded on the promises of God, the solid Rock of divine truth, and is both sure and steadfast.

Our hope lives because it is rooted in the Living Lord. We know He lives, and is alive for evermore. How wonderful must have been the joy of the loved ones who followed Him on that first Resurrection Morning! Their hope was indeed in the Risen Lord; He had been crucified, but they were witnesses to His resurrection! He lived again and forevermore, and how it must have strengthened the fires of faith and hope in their hearts. As time went on, they remembered all He taught them, and no doubt experienced the joy and peace Jesus had so earnestly spoken of to them. It was His great experience, because He did always those things which pleased His heavenly Father. It was nourished and grown in His daily life by His exemplary obedience. Our hope is just as sure today; it is the same living hope, in the same Living Lord, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect Day as we make our calling and election sure. And we do need frequently to examine ourselves to make sure our hope is secure in this life-giving Way. Is our faith and love working consistently to produce the beautiful fruits of

the Spirit in our lives so we can know that this glorious hope will be a living reality to us in that Day so near, when God will collect His jewels?

The Christian's hope is surely founded on the whole Word of God, centered in the Lord Jesus, for He has given us an example that we should follow in His steps. The Psalms tell us of the testimonies given, that the Christian might set his hope in God and forget not His wonderful works but keep His commandments (Ps. 78:7). In doing so, our hope is made sure, for He is faithful who promised and gave us this glorious hope.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Through all our learnings, our trials, and experiences, this glorious hope of life and fulfillment in the Kingdom of God should be ever before us and brighten to a fulness of joy as we see the Day of His coming so near. Yes, indeed, the Bible is filled with hope, glorious abounding hope! And I do truly want to keep it fixed before me. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Our hope exerciseth unto patience, for we are still awaiting the fulfillment. It means salvation, the grand hope of eternal life, if we endure unto the end. God will help us through all our trials, and will be true if we are faithful to Him, for He has assured us that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

First John 3:3 tells us, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Those words bring to our minds Jesus' words, to be perfect "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." So it truly stands, that if we want to make our hope sure, we must rid ourselves of every offending way of the flesh. The lovely pure fruits of the Spirit must grow abundantly in their stead, and if we keep by the living waters, we shall be well nourished and shall bring forth fruits meet for repentance. I do like that verse, it should urge us on to perfection, for our hope is made sure and secure as we bring forth fruits to perfection. We must become like Christ, of a perfect and holy character, if we ever become "like him" and "see him as he is" (I John 3:2). ●● —From A Reader in Australia

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*I used to censure everyone,  
I was a Pharisee;  
Until, quite unexpectedly,  
I got a glimpse of me.*

# Concerning Christ the Son

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

—Hebrews 1:1-3

THIS passage raises several questions. First, what is the overall message of the text?

The author of Hebrews is introducing Christ as God's special means of speaking to the people of "these last days," that is, the people of that final age, that present time. In many parts and in many ways God delivered His message to the Israelite fathers—some had visions; some saw angels; some received their messages through revelation. In "these last days," says the author, God has surpassed all His former means of communication by sending to us His own Son, "whom he hath appointed heir of all things." Christ is indeed "heir of all things"—they are not yet within His power but He has the promise that "all things" on earth will eventually come under His authority and domain. He is the "heir" of the great promised inheritance, for "he shall have dominion also from sea to sea" (Ps. 72:8).

But what about the next phrase: "by whom also he made the worlds"?

The original Greek word rendered "worlds" in this text is *aionas*, which usually means "age," or in its plural form "ages." According to the lexicon, it may refer to a very long time. It may also refer to a segment of time, as a present age, or as time future, the age to come. It is used in Romans 12:2 of the present age: "Be not conformed to this world." It is used in Luke 20:35 of the Messianic Age: "But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world," or that age to come. It is used again in Ephesians 2:7, where it is translated "ages": "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The word never refers to the physical earth or the literal creation.

Christ certainly is the maker of the age to come, and the author is speaking of "things that be not as though they were" already done. He says himself in the next chapter that it is "the world to come, whereof we speak" (Heb. 2:5). And Christ

is the creator of that "world to come."

But let us read on: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (v. 3). What are we to learn from the fact that Christ is "the express image" of God's "person"?

Here again a look at the original words may help us. The word translated "express image" is defined as "impress, reproduction, representation; characteristic trait or manner, outward appearance." The word translated "person" means "substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality." Hence the phrase might read: Christ bears the outward impress of God's substantial nature or actual being. He is stressing the fact that God is a real being.

It is possible that the author may have been arguing for the reality of Christ and the reality of God against those who taught that Christ was only a spirit and not real, and that God is likewise spirit rather than substance. He may have been saying in effect that Christ obtained His effulgent radiance from His Father and also His real being. He was just as much a real physical being as His Father.

God being the supreme Ruler and Creator of the universes, we cannot profess too much knowledge of His physical likeness or appearance. Let us be satisfied to say what the author of Hebrews plainly states, that God is a real being of substance, and that Christ was in like manner real, being a representation of His Father. We dare not venture too far in interpreting the author's words, lest we find ourselves drawing unlikely conclusions in matters that are too great for us and which are not revealed.

The author goes on to extol Christ even more: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and . . . upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." How did Christ "by himself purge our sins"?



This does indeed sound like Christ's sacrificial death on Calvary to take away the sins of all mankind. But did the author of Hebrews believe this? No, for he says later: "Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein" (Heb. 10:8).

It is interesting to note that the words "by himself" and "our" are omitted in five of the best manuscripts. Without these words the phrase reads, "when he had purged sins," or a better rendering of the phrase, "after he had provided purification for sins." This Christ did. He purified Himself, just as each of us must purify ourselves from sin (I John 3:3). He provided for His own purification and left the example for each of us to follow. And when this process of purification was complete, when His character had been polished to perfection, Christ was taken to heaven where He "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (v. 3). This was the crowning reward for the years of self-denial and submission, the painful process of purification. ●●

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## The Man Called John

(Continued from page 19)

Why stand out against the world? Why deny oneself the pleasures this world could offer? Why refuse to conform to social standards and practices and make oneself an alien and an enemy when just a little compromise—and a little more, and a little more—could make one a friend of all? Thus the uplifting challenge to dedication that Christ had offered His followers, and the attitude of "I delight to do thy will" disappeared among those who felt security in being not quite fully committed. Surely a *little* sin would not matter.

How timely, then, was John's warning to earnest brethren: "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (2:1).

There is no indication in John's writings that the Church at this time was being persecuted. The peril was from *within*, from strife, discord and heresy among the believers themselves. Jesus had foreseen this when He said: "And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:11). Then He added what the result would be: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (v. 12). The apostle Paul foresaw this same danger, and warned against it: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away

disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

One source of the trouble at this time was an "advanced" Greek philosophy known as Gnosticism. The Gnostic's pride was in his knowledge; ideas were the great thing, without any consideration being given to their practical application or consequence. The basic Gnostic thought was that only the spirit matters, the physical and material do not. Hence, one might indulge any passion, lust, or appetite without restraint or control, and he would not sin, for the spirit was above the possibility of sin and the body did not matter. Some of the Gnostics denied that Christ had a human body or nature at all, claiming that He was a purely spiritual being and only *appeared* to have a body.

There were those in the Christian Church who sought to bring Christianity to terms with these philosophical ideas. Some were ready to combine the "best" of Christian thought and the "best" of Gnostic thought to form an "improved" variety of Christianity.

To combat such ideas and their consequences, John wrote his Epistles: "that ye sin not." To answer false claims to spirituality which false teachers were making, he emphasized that there can be no honest *saying* without actual *doing*. It is impossible to know God unless our heart is resolutely set to obey God's commands. And we cannot make any claim to be "in the light" unless we are confessing our sin and putting it away.

And so, point by point, John wrote to combat the false teachings that were threatening the security of those he loved.

3) John's third expressed reason for writing is closely related: to strengthen their faith in Christ and their hope of eternal life. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (I John 5:13).

Solid belief is the center of true religion; without it, we have nothing. And so John wrote to "you that believe" to strengthen them in their belief. Faith must be continually renewed, and John wanted to remind his brethren of this. Thus he wrote to "you that believe . . . that ye may believe." There is no contradiction here; John knew their need. He wanted them to realize more deeply what diligence they must give to keeping their faith renewed if ever they might be able to have eternal life—they were on the way, they had it now by promise (I John 2:25); but there was much to do before the promise could be a reality.

We can be thankful John felt the need to write

these Epistles. They have permanent value, for the crises which those early churches faced are still with us today. Gnosticism has its modern counterpart. We today are still in need of lessons in the practical application of what we know. We today are still threatened by a subtle contentment in *knowing* that almost makes *doing* seem secondary. We today still stand in need of continually renewing our faith and conviction. We today still stand in need of tests by which to try the sincerity of our Christian profession.

Thank God! we today can study John's Epistles and find all this. ••

*Next Month:* THE PROLOGUE—A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

# Habits -

## Early and Late

ONE TIME a little boy was given a cucumber inside a bottle. The neck of the bottle was so small and the cucumber so large that it could not possibly pass through it. He wondered how it got inside.

One day he went to the garden and he saw a bottle slipped over a little green cucumber. Then he understood—his cucumber had grown inside the bottle.

Perhaps we have all observed men or women with habits which we wonder how any sensible person could acquire, habits that are foolish, small, dishonest or mean. We see these people act the spoiled child—they whine, sulk, pout, are stubborn, or throw a tantrum when they do not get their way. Obviously, these habits have been growing inside them since they were young.

It is altogether likely that if we look closely at ourselves we will see where one of these habit traits has been growing up in us. Few have had the good sense, virtue, and industry to quench the evil impulses before they had a chance to grow.

The young child is continually forming habits either for good or for evil. A child sometimes thinks he will be more sensible and respectable when he grows up, not realizing that grownups are the sum total of their early habits. Habit is the child of impulse; therefore it is of tremendous importance that parents guide the natural impulses of their children that they may form habits of right doing. For what is stronger and more difficult to change than a habit that has been form-

ing for ten, then twenty, forty, or fifty years. Like the small green cucumber that grew inside the bottle, such habits are not easily slipped out of us. In the young child, habits of neatness, industry and honesty can be as easily acquired as disagreeable traits. And the steady action of good habits is a continuous source of gratification and enjoyment; while habits of idleness, selfishness, and deceit bring unhappiness.

Many years ago God, speaking through Moses, warned all Israel to teach His laws diligently to their children. God's word was to be engraven on Israel's memory and impressed upon the minds of the children. It was to be the subject of their conversation at home and abroad, at the break of day and at its close; when they sat or walked by the way. The sublime Word of God was to be their daily inspiration and daily practice.

Paul repeated the command when in the days of the apostles he taught the young churches to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

What can we do, we who have grown sizeable undesirable habits that will not easily slip out of us? Thanks be to God, though these old habits will not easily slip out, it is possible to get them out. But we must work much harder. Does anyone think he can easily remove envy, sensitiveness, or impatience from his character when it has been growing there for years? Take for example a simple habit. Just notice how you tie your shoe in the morning. Then change your method—you can hardly do it. If it takes effort to change so simple a habit, know that it will take much more watchfulness and perseverance to change a habit of character.

But it *can* be done. We find a great example of this in Brother Paul. He had been brought up among the strictest sect of the Jews, a Pharisee, and he became a zealous follower of Christ. The religion of the Jews had never gone deep enough to disturb the smugness of the synagogue or the broad phylacteries of the high priests. The religion which Paul now embraced called for an utter cleansing within, the bringing into captivity of every thought to Christ. We learn from Paul's own words what drastic measures he had to use to change his pattern of life. "I conferred not with flesh and blood." And, "I am my body's sternest master" (Gal. 1:16; I Cor. 9:27, Phillips). He replaced his old thoughts with thoughts that are honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, thoughts of virtue and of praise.

How well Paul knew that these old habits will not easily slip out. He wrote, "Therefore put to death your earthward inclinations" (Col. 3:5, Wey-

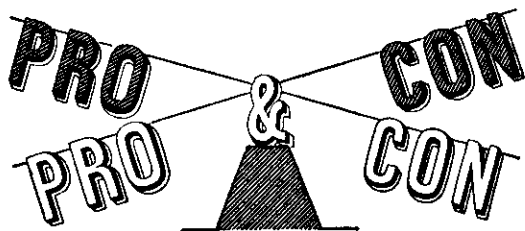
mouth). They must be killed within us.

To change habits is a greater work than to change "things." Let us read Paul's words, substituting "habits" for "things" in II Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old habits are passed away, behold all habits are become new." This great work of transforming his own life and helping others to do the same was the first thing and the center and circumference of Paul's energetic life.

Neither should we allow anything in our lives

to crowd out this first great cause which alone can give us eternal life. No secondary efforts will accomplish the task. Then let us go to work and grow habits—like the cucumber in the bottle—but let us be sure they are habits of goodness, patience, meekness, and love. Let us grow them so large and mature that they will never slip out of us. What joy and happiness they will give us!

Indeed, when all godly virtues become our habit, they will be ours for the ages—they will be our dress for eternity! ••



#### *A Column for Open Discussion*

*All our readers do not agree with us. If you are among those who differ on some point, write us your views and we will consider them in the light of Scripture teaching. Our policy is the Apostle's injunction: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

#### • How do we obtain forgiveness?

"The natural state of man—what we commonly call 'human nature'—is imparted to mankind since Adam by that great fallen archangel known as Satan the devil."

—D. L. N., New Berlin, Wisconsin

Before we go any further into this discussion, we need chapter and verse for your statement. We are unable to find it, or anything similar to it, in the Scriptures.

"Adam and Eve let the devil appeal to their desire to be 'wise.' Therefore, they took to themselves the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, deciding for themselves right from wrong. In so doing, they rebelled against God's authority, disobeyed the law (the command) He had given them, and sinned. By this act they chose and acquired the 'nature' or attitude of sin from Satan. This is how sin entered into the world."

We cannot believe that God created any literal being to tempt man to turn from the right way and to sin. The Bible says clearly, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (Jas. 1:13-14). Adam and Eve's own "desire to be wise" was the "devil" that tempted them—they needed no external power of evil to make the appeal. And this is what happens in every man or woman who agrees to serve God and then sins—his or her own evil desires dominate his or her course of action, and the result is sin.

We will be discussing the subject of the devil more thoroughly in a coming issue of the **Megiddo Message**, "Pro & Con" column.

"Don't make the mistake of overlooking repentance as a necessary step to salvation. Don't assume that you can be made right with God by some man-devised method which is falsely called 'repentance.'"

"Repentance is not only a matter of feeling. It is not just a matter of stirring up one's emotions. It is a matter of heart and mind as well as emotion. It is a heartfelt realization that you have thought, spoken, and lived contrary to God's spiritual laws, and that you should quit doing so!"

You are right. Repentance is the first step toward getting right with God, and we must follow God's plan in our repenting, which is clearly spelled out in the Word: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them [his sins] shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The essential part of repentance is the positive result of it: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8). Don't make the mistake of starting the job and not finishing it.

"No amount of human works can bring about the forgiveness of sin. Even the great sacrificial laws of the Old Testament could not bring about forgiveness and a clear conscience. They were only a type looking for-



**ward to the supreme sacrifice for sin—Jesus Christ—who was to come much later (Heb. 9:9-14)."**

Your statement that "no amount of human works can bring about the forgiveness of sin" needs clarifying. If you mean by "human works" the living of a life of a hermit or recluse who determines in his own mind what is right, then you are correct; those "works," self-ordained, cannot bring about forgiveness of sin.

But there are works which are necessary before we can obtain forgiveness. They are spelled out in II Chronicles 7:14 as "humble [ourselves]" and "pray, and seek [God's] face, and turn from [our] wicked ways"; and then and only then will God "hear from heaven" and "forgive their sin."

If you suggest that keeping the commandments of God as set forth in His Word cannot bring about forgiveness of sin, you are most certainly wrong. Jesus' last statement in Revelation includes the following: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). The blessing—which includes forgiveness—depends upon the **doing**. And many another promised blessing in the Book of Revelation is "to him that overcometh."

We cannot agree with your statement about the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament either, that those laws were looking forward to the supreme sacrifice for sin of Jesus Christ. The verse

you mention (Heb. 9:11) states that Christ is our "high priest." As "high priest" He has now entered the holy place, even heaven. You are trying to say that Christ was the sacrificial victim, the lamb or whatever. It was the high priest's duty to **offer** the sacrifice, not to **be** the sacrifice.

**"Only the sacrifice of Christ can pay that ultimate penalty, and the only way that sacrifice can be applied to blot out your sins is by accepting it and forsaking your past life of disobedience—by repentance!"**

You are correct in saying that we must forsake our past life of disobedience; this is turning from our sins and doing what is right—which is what the law of God demands of us. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa. 55:7). "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways" (Ezek. 33:11).

But when you say "only the sacrifice of Christ can pay the ultimate penalty," we cannot agree. This theory is responsible in large measure for the condition of the world today. It relieves mankind of responsibility for their sins. It gives them a false sense of security, telling them that regardless of their actions everything will turn out all right in the end. If this theory were true and a person on his deathbed could repent of his whole life's sins by saying "I believe and accept Christ's death for my sins," and be saved, why could he not do the same at the Judgment? Why could he not say "Lord, I believe, and repent of all my sins" as he was being turned to the left? Surely the Lord would not refuse just because his timing was off slightly.

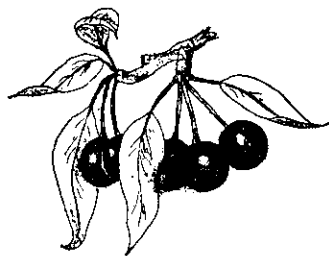
No, this cannot be done. It is high time we realized that there is something to do on our part. Paul said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and this is a work which takes time (Phil. 2:12). Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," (John 14:15), and all His commandments cannot be kept at the last moment if one has not been in the habit of keeping them through his life.

**"At the end of your column you state that if any of your readers have any comment, they should not hesitate to write. Well, that is what I'm doing, and I only pray to God that you place this letter in your column for others to read."**

We are very glad to print your letter and discuss these topics with you, hoping that you and others may see their serious mistake before it is too late. ●●

Fruitful

Fragments



Don't dwell on the past. Reviewing the glorious performances of yesterdays feeds the ego, but it will starve our future.

*Christ never asks of us such busy labor as leaves no time for resting at His feet.*

Whether God's investment in us will be a blessing or a loss depends on how we invest and use ourselves.

*Rudeness is the weak man's poor imitation of strength.*

Count your blessings, name them four by four,  
And it will surprise you there are still some more.

## *Redeeming the Time*

**W**E cannot be negligent in the service of the Lord; we must be reminded time and again that lifetime is working time.

Truly, "wise people . . . make the best possible use of their time" (Eph. 5:16, Berkeley). Our days for work are numbered. What must be done in character building has to be done now, tomorrow may be our call to stand before the Judge to render our account.

To redeem the time means something. There is possibly no more character-revealing exercise than to meticulously record how each hour in any given week is spent. None who have ever set out in earnest to actually practice this can honestly deny that it is an all-out effort to live victoriously each moment of every day. For when we would do good, evil is present. At times when pressured with the burden of things to do, we simply forget to keep our determination to redeem the time. Looking back regretfully, how we would wish to recall even a single misspent moment. But alas, the clock ticks on. The pages of the calendar are turned, never to be turned back again.

This is a sobering reminder for all followers of God; there must be more anxious fear to redeem the time, lest in some unguarded moment we lose our self-control and fail.

The life to come depends entirely on how we spend our present time. To hear the Word of the Lord is easier than to do. But if we would be doers of the Word we must act out its life-giving principles in our daily life. To merit God's smile of approval in the Final Day we will be daily bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; we will walk as children of light and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them by our works of righteousness.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promises. We shall be more than amply rewarded for our labor of love in His service. What He has in reserve for those who love Him in sincerity and truth cannot be entirely visualized now. But the more we read and think about it, the stronger our faith will grow. Wonderful hope that is ours! Can we afford to misspend our time now and forfeit a right to enter the gates of the City where "God shall wipe away all tears," to live in that land where there will be no night and no more fear of death?

Who would not like to live there? Then let us be up and doing. ●●

May, 1978

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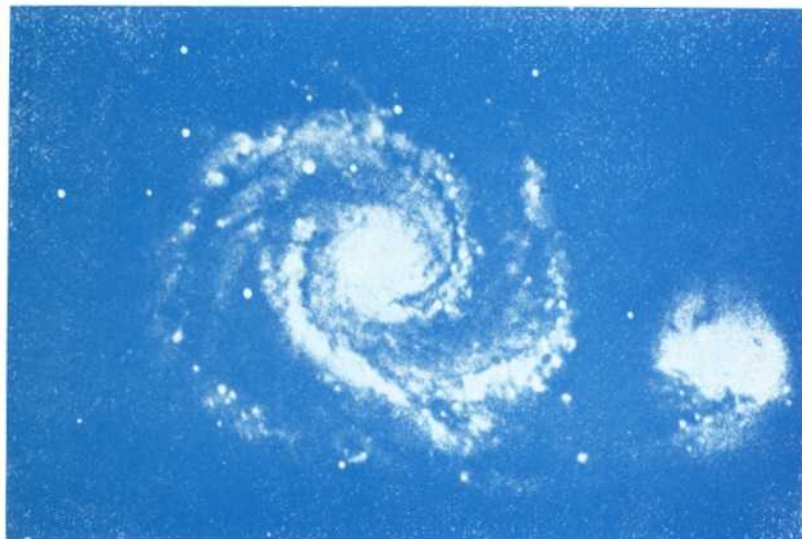
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# ONE with THEE

*Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round,  
Of circling planets singing on their way,  
Guide of the nations from the night profound  
Into the glory of the perfect Day,  
Rule in our hearts, that we may ever be  
Guided and strengthened and upheld by Thee.*

*We would be one in hatred of all wrong,  
One in our love of all things sweet and fair,  
One with the joy that breaketh into song,  
One with the thanks that breaketh into pray'r,  
One in the power that makes Thy children free  
To follow truth, and thus to follow Thee.*

*O clothe us with Thy heavenly armor, Lord,  
Thy trusty shield, Thy sword of love divine:  
Our inspiration be Thy constant Word,  
We ask no victories that are not Thine,  
Give or withhold, let pain or pleasure be;  
Enough to know that we are serving Thee.*