

The Statue of Liberty is shown from the chest up, holding the torch aloft. It is positioned behind the title text. The background is a clear blue sky.

# Megiddo Message

Vol. 86, No. 6  
July, 1999

A dramatic photograph of a rocky coastline with large, white-capped waves crashing against the shore. The sky is a deep blue. The text is overlaid on the lower right portion of the image.

**f**orgive  
as you would  
be forgiven.





# The Soap Must Be APPLIED

**W**hy does a gospel so powerful as that of Jesus Christ not make a great and stunning change in the world? Why is evil rampant? Why are those who profess to follow Him still tempted by sin?

There is a story of a preacher who was walking down a street when he met the owner of a company that made soap. As they talked, the soapmaker said, "The gospel you preach can't be very good—there are still a lot of wicked people." The preacher noticed a child nearby making mud pies. The tot was smeared with dirt from head to toe. The preacher said to his friend, "Your soap can't be very good, for there is still a lot of dirt in the world." The soapmaker was quick to respond: "Our soap only cleanses when somebody uses it." "Exactly!" said the preacher.

We are individuals, free moral agents, free to make our own choices in life and take the consequences. When we agree to serve God, we take on a responsibility. We agree to complete a certain task, that of remaking our character into the moral likeness of Christ, after which we will be judged and rewarded for our work.

In the words of the apostle Paul, "*We therefore make it our ambition, wherever we are...to be acceptable to him. For we must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ, where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad*" (2 Cor. 5:10, NEB). Or as it is phrased in the Jerusalem Bible, "*All the truth about us will be brought out in the law court of Christ, and each of us will get what he deserves for the things he did.*"

Here is demonstrated the matchless wisdom and fairness of God, in blessing or punishing exactly according to what each one has done. Nothing could be more just, or more generous. No good deed will go unrewarded, and no evil will go unpunished.

To liberal Twentieth Century minds, this may sound hard and narrow-minded. Aren't Christians supposed to love one another, help one another, bear with one another, support, encourage and edify one another?

But it is possible that in being so concerned about cleansing others we neglect our primary God-given responsibility: the cleansing of our own heart and conscience. Paul admonished Timothy to be selfish when he wrote him to "*save thyself,*" then added "*and them that hear thee.*" This is important, because the end benefit of all our efforts lies wholly with ourselves. We will either

reap reward or suffer loss because of what we do.

We may give generously to help others—the church, the community, the unfortunate—but there will be no benefit to us unless our hearts are right in the giving.

We may speak good, upbuilding words. But only the other person will be built up unless we open our own hearts to receive impressions. Solomon spoke and wrote many excellent words that have reached even to us, but they were profitless to him—because his own heart was not touched by them.

We may use our hands to help others, but only others will benefit unless our motives and our thoughts are right.

We should thank God for all the "soap" He has provided. But unless we actually use it to cleanse our own hearts and character, it will not avail to our salvation.

The Scriptures contain numerous examples of this truth. In the familiar phrase, "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (Gal. 6:7). And conversely, if you don't sow you can't expect to reap.

In the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, was any laborer rewarded for what someone else had done? In the parable of the Talents, did the persons entrusted with the master's wealth decide to pool and divide equally the proceeds of their stewardship? The one talent man might have favored such a plan (he had nothing to lose!), but surely not the servant who had gained ten talents, or even the servant who had only five.

In the parable of the Ten Virgins, when the five foolish virgins said to their companions "*Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out,*" what was the response of their companions? They all had one answer: No. Why? Why such a heartless refusal? Because they needed it themselves.

And they had to supply their own need first. Even though we are commissioned to love and help each other, God has made us responsible for ourselves. It is a hard fact that each of us must recognize and live with, grow with, suffer with, die with. I must fight my own battles, face my own temptations, be rewarded for my own achievements and suffer the consequences of my own failures.

Yes, we have to use the soap ourselves. But when all is said and done, who would want it any other way? ♦



## MEGIDDO MEANS ...

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon); "a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

## WE BELIEVE ...

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

## The Herald and the KING

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

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

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# Megiddo Message

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Note: If you wish to remove label on cover, warm with hair dryer and carefully peel off.







Americans today enjoy a heritage of freedom unequalled in the world. But this freedom did not come without price, a very high price.

What about those who signed the Declaration of Independence? What were their backgrounds, their occupations?

These men were not poor, nor were they wild-eyed pirates. As far as we can know from history, they were peace-loving, quiet, family men. They were educated, determined, and reverent. Although they were financially secure, they set a higher value on liberty. Of the 56 who signed, 24 were lawyers and jurists; 11 were merchants; and nine were farmers and plantation owners. They knew full well that they would have to suffer should they be captured by the British. Death would be the penalty of disclosure and capture.

It is reported that one of them said, at the time of the signing, "we must all hang together." To which Franklin replied, "we must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

In declaring their independence from an earthly power, they made a forthright declaration of dependence upon God Almighty. Standing together, they vowed themselves together in these words: "For the support of this declaration of the Divine Providence, with a firm reliance on the protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

We trace our national heritage of freedom back to the founding fathers and the days of the Revolutionary War. Had it not been for the unfaltering faith and courage of those early patriots, their strong and unflinching belief in individual liberty, and their willingness to suffer for that belief, we might not have the freedoms we enjoy today. Had it not been for their willingness to risk all for freedom, the concept might have perished in infancy.

What was the high cost of liberty paid by those who signed and

pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor? What happened to them?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died from wounds or the hardships of war during the Revolution. Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy trader and planter, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy, was forced to sell his home to pay his debts, and died bankrupt. Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to

teen children fled for their lives. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves. Returning home after the war, he found his wife dead and his children vanished. A few weeks later he died from exhaustion and a broken heart. Both Morris and Livingston suffered similar fates.

Tales of horror, all of them. They had temporal security, but they valued freedom and liberty more, and were willing to pay the price. They lost their lives and their fortunes, but none lost their sacred honor.

Together they left a legacy of "liberty or death."

☆☆☆☆☆  
*Standing together, the  
founding fathers pledged to each  
other their lives, their fortunes,  
and their sacred honor.*  
☆☆☆☆☆

move his family constantly and keep in hiding. His possessions were confiscated, and he died in poverty. British soldiers or vandals looted the properties of Effery, Clymer, Hall, Walton, Swinner, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr., noting that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for the British headquarters, quietly urged General Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed; Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and property destroyed. The British jailed his wife, who died within a few months.

John Hart, a farmer-miller-legislator, was driven from farm and family when his wife was dying. His fields and gristmill were destroyed. His thir-

Are we as willing to sacrifice for our Christian heritage as were those brave men who signed our Declaration of Independence? How much are we willing to pay for freedom that is eternal? Will we prove faithful all the way?

#### **The Price of Freedom**

Our faith doesn't really mean enough to us until it has cost us something. We might have convictions, but not until we have done some earnest struggling, some inner wrestling, some genuine sacrificing do we know how much we are willing to pay for true freedom.

This was the test of the early Church in a measure we can scarcely imagine. Their philosophy was simple: "This we believe, and no matter what it costs us, here we stand." But



when they made this pledge, they put their very lives on the line.

By comparison our faith costs us practically nothing. To them, faith could be costly. If you and I were to attend some of their services, we would have felt the difference.

It does not take any large measure of courage in America today to meet together to worship God. But in some countries today it is not this way. Freedom still has a price, and we must be willing to pay it.

That is why God tests us, to see whether we are willing to pay the price of freedom. As Thomas Paine put it in

1776, "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis shrink." So it will be with Christ's soldiers. Only the faithful will be saved. "My righteous one will live by faith" (Heb. 10:38 NIV).

Someday we shall be permitted to join the ranks of the immortals, to travel with the angels, to explore the far reaches of the universe, and even to look upon the face of God. That will be freedom beyond anything we can imagine.

How much are we willing to pay for that freedom? Are we willing to give our all? ♦

## WASHINGTON'S INAUGURATION PRAYER

ALMIGHTY GOD, WE MAKE OUR EARNEST PRAYER THAT THOU WILT KEEP THE UNITED STATES IN THY HOLY PROTECTION THAT THOU WILT INCLINE THE HEARTS OF THE CITIZENS TO CULTIVATE A SPIRIT OF SUBORDINATION AND OBEDIENCE TO GOVERNMENT; AND ENTERTAIN A BROTHERLY AFFECTION AND LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND FOR THEIR FELLOW CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES AT LARGE. AND, FINALLY, THAT THOU WILT MOST GRACIOUSLY BE PLEASED TO DISPOSE US ALL TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE MERCY AND TO DEMEAN OURSELVES WITH CHARITY, HUMILITY AND PACIFIC TEMPER OF MIND WHICH WERE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIVINE AUTHOR OF OUR BLESSED RELIGION, AND WITHOUT AN HUMBLE IMITATION OF WHOSE EXAMPLE IN THESE THINGS WE CAN NEVER HOPE TO BE A HAPPY NATION. GRANT OUR SUPPLICATION, WE BESEECH THEE, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.



Prayer Window: U.S. Capitol





## *"The truth shall make you free" —Jesus*

**B**UT...

- ☆ Of what value is the right of free speech if I am a slave to my tongue and cannot keep myself from foolish comments, idle slander, or vulgar remarks?
- ☆ Of what value is the right of free assembly if I neglect to assemble with those who support the same cause I support?
- ☆ Of what value is the right of free thought and expression if I refuse to think?
- ☆ Of what value is freedom of worship if I seldom seek the company of God or hold communion with all that is noblest and best?
- ☆ Of what value is it to be called to become a son or daughter of God if I live like a child of earth?
- ☆ Of what value is brotherly love if I always put myself and my own interests first?
- ☆ Of what value is Christ if I do not seek His kingdom, His glory and His good above all earthly goals, and aspire every day to copy His virtues?



# SELECTED QUOTES ON *Forgiveness*

## **Burying the Hatchet**

Old Jack was dying. For years he had been at odds with Tom, formerly one of his best friends. Wanting to straighten things out, he sent word for Tom to come and see him.

When Tom arrived, Jack told him that he was afraid to go into eternity with such a bad feeling between them. Then, very reluctantly and with great effort, Jack apologized for things he had said and done. He also assured Tom that he forgave him for his offenses. Everything seemed fine until Tom turned to go. As Tom walked out of the room, Jack called after him, "But, remember, if I get better, this don't count!"

Do we ever say that we forgive, but when the least friction arises, quickly resurrect past grievances? Do we ever "bury the hatchet" with the handle sticking out—so that we can easily pick it up again and use it to our advantage?

What shame on any who profess to follow Christ! True Christ-like forgiveness buries the hatchet.

And the handle.



He who cannot forgive another breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass, for every one has need to be forgiven.



*"You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."* —Colossians 3:13 NLT



Forgiveness is the glue that repairs broken relationships.



Said General Oglethorpe to Wesley, "I never forgive anyone."

"Then I hope, Sir," said Wesley, "that you never sin."

Christians will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirit.



Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways;  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
In purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.



Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one makes you even with him; forgiving it sets you above him. —George Washington



Never does the human soul appear so strong and noble as when it foregoes revenge, and dares to forgive an injury.



A small boy, repeating the Lord's Prayer one evening prayed: "And forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are dead against us."



*"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."* —Matt. 6:14-15 NLT



Little, vicious minds abound with anger and revenge; great minds forgive.



The noblest revenge is to make your enemy your friend.



*others. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others. Forgive*

## SPECIAL SECTION

# Forgiveness

## God's Forgiveness

Do you understand God's forgiveness?  
Can you answer these questions?

- \_\_\_ Upon what conditions does God forgive?
- \_\_\_ Is God's forgiveness ever whimsical?
- \_\_\_ Is God like a fond parent, varying His requirements according to our wish?
- \_\_\_ To what extent does God promise to wipe out a sin He has forgiven?
- \_\_\_ What happens if I sin again after God has forgiven me?
- \_\_\_ How does God's mercy compare with human mercy?
- \_\_\_ If I sin, how can I be sure God will forgive me?
- \_\_\_ Can I commit an unforgiveable sin?
- \_\_\_ When will God *not* forgive me?

## My Forgiveness

Answer Yes or No to these questions.

- \_\_\_ Have I ever been hurt by another person?
- \_\_\_ Do I ever want full retribution before I forgive someone else?
- \_\_\_ Am I harboring any resentment toward anyone?
- \_\_\_ Do I ever feel any pleasure in "getting even"?
- \_\_\_ Do I withhold forgiving another until I see they have reformed?
- \_\_\_ Do I find myself having a hard time forgetting a wrong someone has done me?
- \_\_\_ Does the memory of a wrong done me by another stir up any pain in me that I thought I had left behind?
- \_\_\_ Do I need forgiveness from God?



ins as we forgive others. Forgive us our sins as we forgive

STRIFE ENVY  
ANGER HATE  
GOSSIP MURDER  
RAGE

**O**ur forgiving God will forgive. If only we meet His conditions, He will wipe the slate clean, as clean as though we had never sinned.

ARROGANCE  
BOASTING  
LYING  
IDOLATRY  
SELFISH  
GREED  
BITTERNESS  
LUST



others. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others. Forgive

# Our Forgiving God

*"LORD, if you kept a record of our sins, who, O Lord, could ever survive? But you offer forgiveness, that we might learn to fear you." —Psalm 130:3-4 NLT*

Sin is everywhere. We see it in the reports of dealings between nations, companies, groups and individuals. We see it in our society, our government, on our streets. We see it most intimately in ourselves and our own natural tendencies. The news headlines of recent months have included several reports of serious sin in people of high rank—of the President in a sex scandal; of government officials selling nuclear secrets to China; of another official publishing high security information on the Net; of ministers and priests involved in drug dealing, adultery and robbery. What is the response from the public and the press to such flagrant misconduct? It is almost as if the events were staged, a play with no serious consequences. Seeing this on-going drama, one wonders what values are being framed in the minds of the young.

What was the attitude of the apostle Paul toward the sins of others? Did he just say casually, "That's what we have to expect"? Or did he take the attitude, "They can't help it, they're only human like the rest of us"? Or did he say in a self-satisfied, self-vindicating tone, "I don't need to worry, I'd never do a thing like that"? Not at all. He took sin—any and all sin—as a lesson from which to learn. He even included himself, an astute and committed apostle called by Jesus Himself, among those to take warning. Speaking of the Israelites in the wilderness and how many fell because of open rebellion and flagrant disobedience,

he wrote, *"These things happened to them as examples, and they were written down as warnings for us"—yes, warnings for "us," you and me. We must take heed, we who feel ourselves above these flagrant sins of idolatry, and sexual immorality, and outright refusing to obey God. Even those who are strong in the faith, he said, had better not grow overconfident in their ability to overcome temptation. "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor. 10:11-12 NIV). "...Be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin" (New Living Translation).*

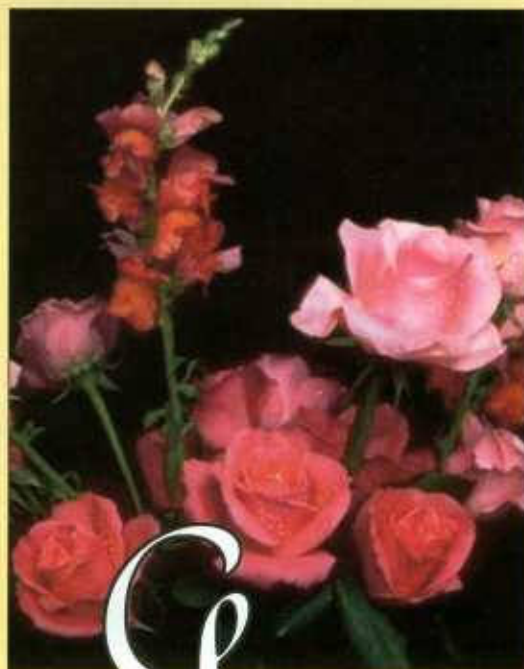
What was Paul saying? That none of us are beyond the need for caution. None of us are above the need to be startled into rigorous self-examination by another's failure. Anyone can slip. Anyone can fall. Anyone can sin.

But something in us still objects. Why should I be warned, when I have never sinned like Israel of old? Why should gross sins like theirs be a warning to me? Maybe I'm not perfect, but I'm no murderer!

Such objections sound reasonable, until we realize what murder—or any other sin—really is. To sin is literally to refuse the authority of God over us, to refuse to obey God. It is saying, "I know my

limits. I know what is right for me. I know how to stop before I step over the line. Just a little of this isn't going to hurt anything." But little sins do not stay little. And even in their "little" state, they can have big consequences.

Because of our natural resistance to authority, whether from God or anyone else, and our own human weak-



God wants  
purity that is  
all pure; truth that is all  
true; righteousness that  
is all right.



ness, we have all transgressed God's law many times. We have all sinned. We all stand accused before God. And but for His mercy and forgiveness, we would not have a chance of securing anything eternal from Him. We may not have committed what we call a great sin, but just read the New Testament rosters of sins deserving death, and it isn't hard to find some category that fits us. Listen to Paul describe what he calls *"the fruits of the flesh,"* or as translated in the New International Version, *"the acts of the sinful nature"* (Gal. 5:19-21). Look closely at what ranks right alongside *"sexual immoral-*

itate consequences of gossip are usually less. Yet the Biblical answer is clear: God wants purity that is *all* pure; truth that is *all* true; righteousness that is *all* right. *Anything* less is sin. In God's sight, no sin is little; no sin is without significance. Pride or gossip or deceit will separate us as completely from the Kingdom as will idol worship.

And in one sense, the seeming insignificance of a lesser sin can make it all the more deadly, because we tend to justify or ignore it. The so-called *"big"* sins may command our attention and shock us into repentance by being so obvious, while we let the little ones slip by quietly, until they rub a callous on our conscience—and we become numb to them.

Oh, thank God for anything that calls to our attention the evils of our nature! Thank Him for anything that brings us up short and says to us, *"Here you are not right. Here you must change"*—now, before it is too late. For who wants to be excluded from the eternal inheritance, denied a share in the glorious Kingdom to come because of some little sin? Who wants to be rejected by Jesus when He comes in all His glory?

Even though sin is sin, even though sin on our record is without degree, there may be degrees of the consequences of sin. For example, the results of a murder are more terrible than those of selfishness.

But when it comes to our record in heaven, how careful, how watchful we should be. No wonder Paul wrote that *"the wages of sin [any sin, all sin] is death"* (Rom. 6:23).

Yes, the wages of sin is death. But thank God those wages are not paid every night!

#### **The Source of Sin**

Let us look now at the source of sin. Where does it come from? Again the

apostle Paul has analyzed the problem before us and has the answer. As he presented specific sins in Gal. 5:19-21, he called them the *"fruits of the flesh"*—fruits, ripened evidence of soil within the soul. Jesus identified the same source in simplest terms: *"For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God"* (Mark 7:21-23 NLT).

David, at a time of heartfelt repentance and seeking after God, saw the seriousness of sin and also looked for its source. Where did he come by the sinful heart that was leading him into adultery and murder and every other sin? He said nothing of his forebears but only of himself. The source was his own human heart. *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me"* (Ps. 51:5). Not that we carry any guilt from our ancestors, as is commonly believed, but we are all by nature prone to sin. Our built-in survival equipment gives us animal instincts, and these, uncontrolled, cause us to be selfish, self-centered, defensive and opinionated. That is why David took responsibility for his sin. *"Have mercy on me, O God,"* he pleaded, *"because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin"* (Ps. 51:1-2 NLT). It was *"my sins..."* and *"my guilt."*

How can we find favor in God's sight? What is the solution to this all-too-human problem? There is only one answer: forgiveness.

#### **The Road to Forgiveness**

Unlike the gods created by ancient peoples in their own (ungodly) image; unlike the deities who were thought to be placated only by human sacrifice and suffering, our God is a forgiving God, a *"faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand genera-*



*Thank God, He  
has arranged a way  
whereby we can obtain  
His forgiveness.*

*ity, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft"*—we shudder to read the rest: *"hatred, discord, jealousy,... selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy."* These last sins don't seem so bad, but *all* such things, says Paul, will deny us an inheritance in the Kingdom of God. They're all of one piece: *"A man who keeps the whole Law but for a single exception is nonetheless a Law-breaker"* (James. 2:10 Phillips Trans).

These are hard words. Is God that particular? Surely, we insist, there are degrees of sin. Surely murder is worse than gossip!

It is certainly true that the imme-



tions of those who love him and keep his commands" (Deut. 7:9 NIV). "The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion" (Num. 14:18 NIV). "The LORD... is good! His mercy endures forever" (1 Chron. 16:34 NKJV). How many times is it written that His mercy endures forever!

But we must be obedient and faithful from our side. Never is He said to be eternally merciful to everyone.

But thank God, He has arranged a way whereby we can obtain His forgiveness.

What is it? How can we get His forgiveness?

The process is stated in simplest form in the words of the prophet Isaiah to Israel: "Cease to do evil, learn to do well" (Isa. 1:16-17). In other words, when you know something is wrong, stop it, and do right.

This type of thinking isn't popular today. In religious circles, the most common idea is to claim Christ's death as a clearinghouse for sin. In non-religious circles, sin exists only as anyone defines it. So if it isn't distasteful to you or keeping you from your goals, it's all right.

Nothing could be further from the thoughts of God. God's definition of sin doesn't change. It is anything contrary to His law. If He calls something right, it is right; and if He says it's wrong, it's wrong. And he adds through his prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20 NIV).

And when God says something is wrong, it's deadly. And to play with it is to take the same risk that one would take in playing with a boa constrictor.

This Biblical approach to sin, that it is deadly, that it is abhorrent to God and will bring every sinner to ultimate death and ruin, is not what we like to think. But God has planned that His earth shall not be forever populated by sinful men and women. One day soon He will make a clean sweep, and all who sin will be brought down; only the humble, the penitent, the obedient will be permitted to live.

Alas! Who shall live when God does this? Who shall live when God

interrupts our comfortable lives, breaks into our modern world, and starts dictating firm standards of right and wrong?

In our current cultural climate, this serious a look at sin might be viewed by many as too narrow, too drastic, too vengeful, too harsh for a God of love. Yet it is His plan, and no one on earth shall interfere.



When we  
repent, God puts His  
mark of approval on  
our book and forgives.

#### Abundant Redemption

In the face of God's extremely severe view of sin and His determination to rid the earth of all sin and sinners, how grateful we can be that "with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption" (Ps. 130:7 NKJV).

What does this mean? It means that if you and I want God's favor in the great Day to come, we must be seeking—and finding—it now. The only question is: How can we find God's mercy and forgiveness?

We must make every effort to merit God's mercy and forgiveness. Immediately let us take seriously the advice given in Isaiah 55 and seek the Lord "while he may be found." Let us "call on him while he is near." Then

comes the specific actions that only we can take: "Let the people turn from their wicked deeds. Let them banish from their minds the very thought of doing wrong! Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7 NLT). "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19 NIV). "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds" (Heb. 10:17 NLT).

Mercy...pardon...abundant pardon...our iniquities hurled into the depths of the sea...our sins never again remembered. What more can we ask?

Oh, do we realize how much we owe to God's mercy? Indeed, it is a daily blessing. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22) we who have failed so often as a race, as a nation, as individuals. It is by God's mercy that we even breathe. I am reminded again and again of Paul's words in Acts 17:28: "In [God] we live and move and have our being." This means I owe my very existence to God. If for even a fraction of an instant my Creator ever ceased to sustain me, I would cease to exist. If God didn't give me my very "being," I wouldn't be here to need His mercy!

Such a realization brings us to a new sense of humility, a new feeling of awe and reverence for our Great Creator, as we appreciate His great goodness to us and realize our total dependence upon Him, both for this life and the life to come. We live even now by His mercy, and we shall share that life to come only as He extends His forgiveness and mercy to us. How meaningful are the words of Jeremiah the prophet, who wrote, speaking for God: "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (31:34 NIV). If God has forgotten my sin, it has truly ceased to exist. Here is the ultimate forgiveness. With our Creator, to forgive is to forget, and to forget is nothing less than to annihilate. Oh, our wonderful, merciful, forgiving God!

But even though God will ulti-





When you know something is wrong, stop it.

mately wipe out the sins we repent of and turn from, this does not mean He will deliver us immediately from their consequences in this life. It is part of His wisdom that in this world we reap as we sow. If we carelessly destroy our health, we must live with the consequences. If we, even without thinking, act unwisely in a financial matter, it may be many years before we can recover. If we violate God's moral laws, again we will have to face the consequences of our folly. But if we repent and turn, ask His forgiveness, and go on to do what is right, even

though we have consequences to face in this world, His forgiveness will make the final tapestry of our lives perfect, a specimen that we can one day present before "the presence of His glory," before Jesus and all the holy angels, "with exceeding joy." Oh the goodness of our forgiving God!

God's forgiveness is not a once-and-for-all gift. It is a mark of approval that He puts on our books, an acknowledgement that comes repeatedly to restore the broken relationship with Him every time we repent from our sin and with an hon-

## Remember Peter's Trial



The apostle Peter had a dramatic, first-hand experience with forgiveness. Someone has suggested that along with Jesus' warning to "Remember Lot's wife" we might frame these words: "Remember Peter's trial." For Peter sinned, he sinned terribly. Looking back on it, he found it hard to believe he could fall so hard, or so far. But to his everlasting credit, he got up and went on, and on, and on to a glorious finish.

Yes, Peter is a powerful example to us because he didn't stay down. As quickly as he fell he rose to his feet, with courage and greater determination than ever before to become the disciple Jesus had called him to be.

Let us re-live that dark night with Peter, so that we can share in the lesson he learned.

Peter had seen the last flickering torch disappear around the turn in the path that wound down the hill. Only once in a while the procession could be seen through the trees like giant fireflies. The murmur of voices, the crackling of twigs, the rustling

of dislodged stones died away.

Suddenly there swept over Peter the realization that his Master had at last been captured and was marching away to die. The icy fear that gripped his heart was a startling contrast to the flaming courage with which he drew his short sword a few minutes before.

Peter hurried to catch up with the others, yet not anxious to get too close. The procession made for the house of Annas, into which they escorted Jesus. The heavy door creaked shut behind Him. When Peter approached timidly, it was to find John standing there.

John persuaded the girl stationed at the door to let them in. And as they slipped past her, she scrutinized Peter and said, "Aren't you one of this man's disciples?" And Peter said, "I am not."

Now they brought the Lord from Annas to Caiaphas. And the soldiers and the temple guard mingled with the servants in the courtyard. Because the night was cold, they had kindled a fire in the brazier. And Peter, joining the crowd, stretching out his hands, warmed himself at their fire.

He wasn't paying much attention to their conversation until one of the soldiers nudged him, and said, "You are one of them!" And Peter, for the second time, said, "I am not."

An hour passed, and now a soldier who had come out of the palace joined the group. As he greeted his friends in the circle, his eyes fell on Peter, whom he peered at closely. Peter feeling the examination of the newcomer, looked around at the soldier. "Didn't I see you in the garden with Him?" One of his friends joined





# thers. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others. Forgive

est and true heart do what is right. But the problem is never that God is lacking in forgiveness. He simply cannot give it until we have met His conditions. He will not allow us to forsake half a sin while hanging on to the other half. God does not work by halves. To receive His forgiveness we must be willing to forsake *all* of it. Only then will He pardon.

Oh, blessed be God, He is still extending our time. He is still lengthening out the last hour of this Day, giving us a little more time to repent, a little more time to turn and do what

is right, a little more time to make the change from the old creature to the new.

And our forgiving God will forgive. If only we meet His conditions, He will wipe the slate clean, as clean as though we had never sinned... and grant us a share in the riches of His glory, and honor and immortality, even "life forevermore."

If only we do it now...for "with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption" (Ps. 130:7 NKJV). ♦



*Little vicious  
minds harbor revenge;  
great minds forgive.*

him. "Certainly, he is one of the Galileans. Just listen to his accent." The soldier stubbornly went on, "I am sure I saw him in the garden, for my kinsman, Malchus, was wounded by one of them who drew a sword. And if I am not mistaken, it was this very fellow." Then Peter began to curse and swear and said, "I don't know the Man." He used language that he had not used for years. Just then the cock crowed. Immediately he remembered the Lord's prophecy: Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.

Like a wave the realization of what he had done swept over Peter. All of a sudden he remembered what Jesus had said. And with tears streaming down his face, he turned away from the fire. Through the mist of tears he could see ahead of him the stairs that led to Pilate's palace. And as if by some terrible providence, it was at that very moment Jesus was being led up the stairs to appear before Pilate.

The Lord had heard. The Lord had heard every hot searing word. The Lord had heard the blistering denial.

Now He paused on the stairway and looked over the rail, looked into the very soul of Peter. At that moment the eyes of the two met...through the tears...that lovely face, that dreadful face; those sad eyes, those reproachful eyes, yet tender as if they understood and forgave.

The world seemed to stand still for that moment, as Peter looked at the One he had denied, the One he loved. We do not know what passed between them, but Jesus seemed to say again, "Simon, Simon, I have prayed for you. Satan has desired to

have you..., but I have prayed for you that your faith does not fail." And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

He went out into the night; into the night of remorse and regret; into the night of repentance and merciless self-abnegation. Into the night; but as has been beautifully said, it was to meet the morning's dawn.

We may never come to such a place in our lives. We do not have the Master to look upon us. But let us remember that He sees every act, He knows every thought. He hears every hot, searing word. What are we doing that we would like to keep from Him? Let us hold back. Hold back the bitterness, the selfishness, the anger, the revenge. Hold back the hasty word, the proud spirit, the unkind deed. For as surely as we are here today, so surely we shall stand before the Judgment seat of Christ. And then it will be told, whether we served Him in love and godly fear, or whether we went our own selfish way. Then it will be told whether we stood firmly for truth and right, or whether we compromised to accommodate this or that. ♦

## *In the Hour of Trial*

*In the hour of trial, Jesus, plead for me,  
Lest, by base denial, I depart from Thee;  
When Thou see'st me waver, with a look recall;  
Nor for fear or favor suffer me to fall.*

*With forbidden pleasures would this vain  
world charm,  
Or its sordid treasures spread to work me harm;  
Bring to my remembrance sad Gethsemane,  
Or, in darker semblance, rugged Calvary.*

*Should Thy mercy send me sorrow, toil, and woe,  
Or should pain attend me on my path below,  
Grant that I may never fail Thy hand to see;  
Grant that I may ever cast my care on Thee.*



*A Lesson from the Master:*

# You Must Forgive

**P**eter apparently had observed His Master's forgiving spirit and was wondering one day how much of this spirit he should have to practice. So he asked Jesus: "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:21-22 NIV). This was a serious matter to Peter. His old Jewish philosophy was more like that of an "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, slight for slight." Forgiveness was not part of Jewish law in that day. Jesus' answer astonished Peter and silenced in shame his unforgiving spirit. "I say not unto you, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

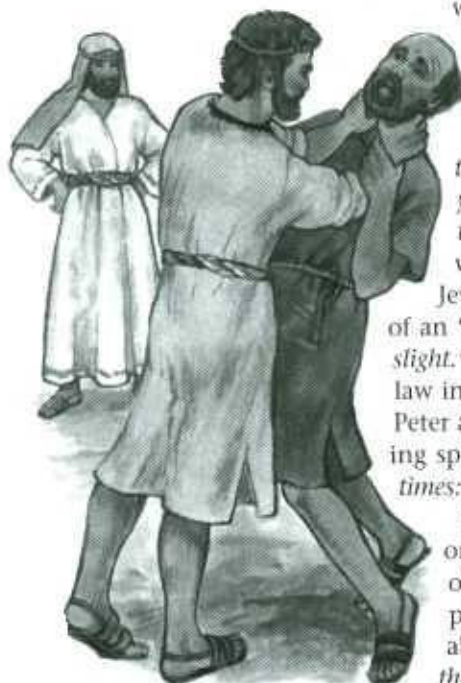
But Jesus did not stop here. He went on to give an even greater illustration of the truth He was teaching in the parable of the Two Debtors. He told about a slave who owed his king "ten thousand talents." Now a talent of silver, we are told, is the equivalent of about 15 years' wages. If the slave worked his entire lifetime for the king, he could not pos-

sibly repay a debt of ten thousand talents. And how could a slave work for wages anyway? And even if his wife and children and all that he had were sold, the payment could not be made in full. So the parable reads, "the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

But what did the servant do, that servant who had received such an enormous measure of forgiveness? He went out and found "one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence." A pence was the wages for a single day of work, so this man's creditor owed him a mere one hundred days of work. "And he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest." He even "went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt."

Some translations indicate that the difference in value between the two debts is the difference between hundreds of thousands of dollars—and something like \$18. Could Peter have missed the point?

Isn't God's goodness in forgiving us our transgressions just that far surpassing any debt our fellowman could owe us? And shouldn't we be willing to forgive as we have been forgiven—even "until seventy times seven"? ♦





# Can I & Forgive?

Everyone is hurt sometime or other by someone else. Whether or not the hurt be intentional, whether it be major or minor, long-term or short, it is a wound which must be properly treated.

What is the right thing to do when we are hurt?

We have two options. We can act by instinct, or by plan. Acting by instinct is always easiest. You don't have to tell little Johnny, "If Bobby hits you, you just hit him back, and a little harder than he hit you." Striking back is instinct, and Johnny will hit back unless and until the child has a compelling reason to show an alternate type of behavior.

Our instinct tells us to retaliate to defend ourselves, our reputation, or our feelings. But God says no; if you want to obey me, you can't do that. "Never pay back evil for evil." Never? Never!

But even refusing to retaliate is not enough. If we would be Christ-like we must actually forgive.

How can we learn forgiveness? Where shall we turn for the pattern to follow?

The first place to look is to Jesus Christ, the one God sent to be our Pattern. His experience being so much more extreme than ours, we can hardly think of His life as a Pattern. But the principle is there, and can be applied to any situation. What do we read of Jesus? "He did not retaliate when he was insulted. When he suffered he did not threaten to get even. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly" (1 Pet. 2:22-23 NLT).

Whatever the wrong, don't retaliate, don't try to get even, don't fight back. Don't try to take judgment into your own hands, but leave your case "in the hands of God, who always judges fairly."

The apostle Paul has given us another example. In his second letter to Timothy he wrote, "Alexander the coppersmith has done me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said" (2 Tim. 4:14-15 NLT). Imagine someone who fights against everything you say. Who of us has confronted that situation? Yet Paul had no desire

OUR EXAMPLE: Joseph

"God turned into good what you meant for evil... Am I God, to judge and punish you?"

(Gen. 50:19-20 NLT)

OUR EXAMPLE: Stephen

"Lord, don't charge them with this sin! and with that, he died."

(Acts 7:60 TLB)

OUR EXAMPLE: Jesus

"Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."

(Luke 23:34 NEB)

OUR EXAMPLE: Paul

"... they all deserted me, God forgive them!" (2 Tim. 4:16 Phillips)



If I would be forgiven, I must forgive others.



to "get even." He was not even feeling vindictive. Rather, he said, "The Lord will judge him for what he has done." He committed the case to God, knowing God would be fair and right.



*The Judge is  
at the door. Is my  
heart right?*

Another example is that of Joseph. Favorite son of his father Jacob, he was horribly mistreated by his jealous brothers, thrown into a pit, then sold into slavery, then through no fault of his own was cast into prison. His tender heart could have been overcome with bitterness. What did he do to deserve such treatment? Where was the God he professed to serve? Give him a chance, and he'd let those brothers of his feel the pain of what they did to him.

Through the providence of God, Joseph had the chance to show them. But when he saw his brothers again after many years, there was no bitterness in his heart to show, only gratitude to God for bringing him through. "God turned into good what you meant for evil," he said with a full heart, and he meant it (Gen. 50:19-20 NLT). Instead of retaliating, he forgave.

Another example is that of Stephen. Stephen's example of forgiveness comes to us from a point of

extreme trial. He was being literally stoned to death. But in the midst of such suffering, what was his feeling toward his tormentors, those who were taking his life? By instinct, anyone would have been railing against them, consumed with the strongest possible impulses to revenge. But at the point of death, what did Stephen pray? "He fell to his knees, shouting, 'Lord, don't charge them with this sin!' and with that he died" (Acts 7:59-60 NLT). Again, he committed the case to God.

This was the gospel Paul preached. He wrote in his letter to the Romans, "Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, 'I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it,' says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you.' Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good" (Rom. 12:19-21 NLT).

#### **How Shall I Forgive?**

What shall be our plan of action and attitude when we have been wronged, hurt, disappointed?

If we let instinct control, we will be upset, hurt, and ready to retaliate in kind. If retaliation is not appropriate, we will feel offended and hurt, and will nurture a grudge or feeling of ill against the one who has wronged us. Our spirit of brotherliness will be displaced with a spirit of "I'm-going-to-give-as-good-as-I-get," and we will watch for opportunities to show it.

With such an attitude our opponent is unharmed, but we are hurting ourselves. We are encumbering ourselves with a feeling that is not Christ-like, and which will keep us from obtaining God's forgiveness. For did not Jesus say that God will forgive us as we forgive one another? "For if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15 NKJV).

But perhaps we are not overcome with this spirit. We say, rather, that we will wait and see. If our opponent repents and turns, we will forgive—

with the inference that if he doesn't, we won't.

Now this is the plan which God follows toward us. He forgives when we turn and do right. But we are not God. We are not in a position to read the other person's heart, to know whether his or her acknowledgment is sincere or only momentary. We cannot know whether one has truly repented.

If we make their attitude toward us a condition of forgiveness, we are saying, "I will not grow in character unless the other person does as they should." So as long as they refuse to change, we continue to nurse our hurt. Can't we see the folly of it?

And oh, the danger of delaying. How much better to follow the example of Jesus, to forgive the wrong and place it in the hands of God, let God judge and reward, and go on with making our own heart and life right. For in the final analysis, we are responsible only for ourselves. And we are told absolutely and positively to forgive one another if we would be forgiven, and hold no grudges against anyone. This is what James warned: "Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door!" (James. 5:9 NLT).

The Judge is at the door. Is my heart right? Is yours? Are we ready to open the door and welcome Him? For any feeling that stands between us and our brother stands between us and God, stands between us and eternal life.

Oh, let us take on the spirit of Christ and let go any feeling of ill, be ready to forgive totally, whether or not they repent, whether or not they ask our forgiveness, whether or not they do what we feel is right. Yes, they should approach us to ask our forgiveness. If we wrong another, that is what we must do, humbly apologize and ask for forgiveness, then take it to God, who will forgive as we turn. But we cannot harbor any resentment or ill will.

Oh, the freedom of forgiveness! Forgiveness frees us from the pain of  
(Continued on page 20)



# Know Your Bible?

## CITIES

1. What two places have been called "the city of David"?
2. What people lived in Jerusalem before David captured it?
3. What is the common Biblical expression denoting the distance between two places, north and south?
4. What was the name of the place that Jacob called "Bethel"?
5. Name the most common pair of cities used to denote extreme wickedness.
6. In what city was Mars' hill located?
7. In what town did Samson pull down the gates and carry them away?
8. In what city were the disciples first called Christians?
9. Was the "impotent man" cured at Bethsaida or Bethesda?
10. What was the home town of Paul, Peter, and Nathanael or Bartholomew?

## NAMES AND THEIR MEANINGS

1. "Thou shalt call his name \_\_\_\_\_; for he shall save his people from their sins."
2. "And she called his name \_\_\_\_\_; and she said, Because I drew him out of the water."
3. "Call me not Naomi, call me \_\_\_\_\_; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."
4. "Thy name shall be \_\_\_\_\_; for a father of many nations have I made thee."
5. "Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name \_\_\_\_\_."
6. "Is not he rightly named \_\_\_\_\_? for he hath supplanted me these two times."
7. "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but \_\_\_\_\_; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men."

8. "Thou art Simon...thou shalt be called \_\_\_\_\_, which is by interpretation, A stone."
9. "They shall call his name \_\_\_\_\_, which being interpreted is, God with us."
10. "Joses, ...by the apostles was surnamed \_\_\_\_\_, which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation."

## COLORS

Fill in the blanks with the correct colors, as used in the text:

1. "Is there any taste in the \_\_\_\_\_ of an egg?"
2. "Look not thou upon the wine when it is \_\_\_\_\_."
3. "Jacob took him rods of \_\_\_\_\_ poplar."
4. "His locks are bushy and \_\_\_\_\_."
5. "When I am old and \_\_\_\_\_ headed, O God, forsake me not."
6. "Put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of \_\_\_\_\_."
7. "And they clothed him with \_\_\_\_\_, and plated a crown of thorns, and put it about his head."
8. "Though your sins be as \_\_\_\_\_, they shall be as \_\_\_\_\_ as snow; though they be \_\_\_\_\_ like \_\_\_\_\_, they shall be as wool."
9. "I will pass through all thy flock today, removing...all the \_\_\_\_\_ cattle."
10. "...yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with \_\_\_\_\_, and her feathers with \_\_\_\_\_ gold."

## LOVE

1. Who said: "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee," and yet had denied his Lord three times not long before?
2. What is the most famous example in the Bible of devoted friendship between two men?
3. What is the most famous example in the Bible of a loving bond between two women?
4. Who was known as the disciple whom Jesus loved?
5. Who said: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"?
6. What woman had an only son whom she loved dearly, yet gave him up to be reared in the temple for God's service?
7. Finish this text: "If ye love me..."
8. Which patriarch had a dearly loved son in his old age, and yet was willing to offer him up as a sacrifice at God's command?

(Answers on page 25)



hate and the gall of bitterness, and leaves us free to serve God with a clear conscience, intent only on doing and being right.

What should we do when we are wronged? We are not free to retaliate. We are not free to hold grudges. And we cannot make another



*Forgiveness frees us  
from the pain of hate  
and the gall of bitterness.*

person repent. So we have only one option: to immediately and completely forgive. Being hurt or resentful only makes a wrong on both sides.

Jesus taught the same lesson in His Sermon on the Mount. "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:14-15 NLT). This tells us that we must positively and completely forgive those who wrong us if we expect to receive forgiveness from God.

A certain General Oglethorpe was said to have stated very proudly to John Wesley, "I never forgive anyone"; to which Wesley replied, "Then I hope, Sir, that you never sin."

Bitterness is a serious issue with our stumbling, human nature. So easily it springs up if someone doesn't do something just to our liking. The author of Hebrews calls it a "root," and a root as it grows sends up more and more shoots, poisoning more and more.

Let us dig up every root of bitterness, forgive as fully as we shall want to be forgiven when we stand before the great Judge, that we may be among those of whom it will be said, "I will forgive their wrongdoings, and I will never again remember their sins" (Heb. 8:12 NLT). ♦

# About Forgiveness

By John Alan Cohan, Attorney at Law

Jesus said that if you forgive others their wrongs, "your Father in Heaven will also forgive yours. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you either" (Matt. 6:14.) When Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times must I forgive the offenses of my brother? Seven times?" Jesus replied, "No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:21.) Jesus clearly didn't mean to forgive others a mathematically precise number of times and then quit, but meant that we should have an unlimited supply of forgiveness.

Clearly, forgiveness is a virtue of considerable importance. Indeed, to practice it is our obligation.

Just what is forgiveness? Can you forgive someone who doesn't ask for forgiveness? If you are forgiven by someone, how does that affect your relationship with them?

First of all, forgiveness is a response to moral wrongdoing of another against you. Forgiveness has a role only if someone has hurt or disappointed you in a way that is morally wrong. Forgiveness has no place in cases of imaginary or trivial slights.

Who can do the forgiving? It is the "aggrieved party" who is entitled to bestow forgiveness, not someone else. I cannot forgive a criminal for his misdeed unless I was the victim. You cannot forgive someone for the wrongs they did to another person unless you yourself were wronged in the process.

Nor can you seek forgiveness for another person's wrongs. To seek forgiveness is the responsibility of the wrongdoer and no one else.

Forgiveness is a volitional act that involves emotions. It is impossible for forgiveness to go through if your emotions are not involved. Forgiveness is not merely the utterance of words of forgiveness—"I see, you have repented; good, I forgive you." With forgiveness we have a shift in attitude: It is a matter of what is in the heart. One attitude associated with forgiveness is generosity of spirit. Forgiveness is something like a gift—more than that, it expresses some largeness of soul.

*(Continued on page 26)*



*An important  
part of forgiveness is  
overcoming resentment.*



# PUSH! —or BE PATIENT



**I**f you consider yourself a patient person, just try taking a couple of five-year-olds fishing. The prospect of becoming an air traffic controller will probably look easy by comparison. On one recent excursion with my children I spent most of the time baiting hooks, untangling lines, answering questions (such as, "Do fish eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?"), and counting very slowly to ten.

Jeff and Jenny faired little better than their dear old dad in the patience department. They would hardly let the worm stay in the water long enough to get wet. A split second after I would throw the line out, they would reel it in, fully expecting to find a blue gill or killer whale at the other end. After repeated attempts, I finally made them understand that their haste made it unlikely that even a fish with suicidal tendencies could move fast enough to hook itself. They eventually learned to let the bait linger a little longer.

How many times do we come up empty handed merely because we do not have the capacity to wait? While we may possess most of the right equipment, we are like the rich young ruler in that it could be said of us, *"one thing lackest thou."* In our case, the deficiency is often in the area of patience. That which we might have easily obtained is lost simply because we tend to plunge ahead like a brakeless train on a downhill grade.

In our age of instant this and that, the ability to bide one's time seems to become increasingly rare.

We are so accustomed to instant potatoes and promises of being an instant winner that we consider anything short of immediate gratification to be an unbearable delay. Often we fail to take a lesson from the world God created. The incomparable beauty of the Grand Canyon was not completed on a two-week schedule with the help of the Arizona highway department and a fleet of bulldozers. It required the slow wearing away of countless, unrelenting centuries.

The tongue-tingling taste of fresh corn on the cob is not developed by dropping a seed in the ground and returning at sunset for the harvest. Time is needed to grow food that both pleases and nourishes.

Many things in life simply take patience. It is no accident that formal education is planned to stretch over many years rather than a three-day weekend. If you have ever tried to teach a child how to tie her or his shoelaces, then you sense instinctively that it will likely take more than a single afternoon for him to master the intricacies of chemistry and trigonometry. Even the brightest of minds must

be given adequate time to allow the roots of lasting knowledge to gain a firm hold.

While one cannot argue with the truism that "he who hesitates is lost," yet it is also true that sometimes "waiting is better than accelerating."

Wisdom lies in learning when to push, and when to be patient.

—Selected







# The End of the Age

## FROM THE DAYS OF LOT

### PART TWO

#### CHARACTERS:

Ophir ..... husband  
Birsha ..... wife  
Heth ..... 16-year-old son of Ophir and Birsha  
Rizpah ..... 10-year-old daughter of Ophir and Birsha  
Elam ..... son-in-law of Lot

#### SETTING:

Living room of a family next door to Lot (in Sodom).

#### NARRATOR:

We all know what happened to the world of Noah's time. They lingered, refused, and were lost. The end came, just as God had predicted.

And the message comes to us: Who? who will hearken and hear, for the time to come?

Now we go to another day and another age, and hear another warning. It is the voice of God's messenger speaking to His servant Lot:

#### VOICE:

*"Hast thou here any besides?...whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it."*

#### NARRATOR:

The age was to end; Heaven had issued the decree. Doom was to descend upon several thriving but wicked cities, among them Sodom and Gomorrah. We know little of these cities of the plains except that *"their sin was very grievous."*

God did not always punish wickedness immediately, but this time He chose to act. Perhaps it was for the example these cities would be to those who in years to come

should choose to disregard God. Jesus perpetuated the memory of Sodom with His timeless warning: *"Remember Lot's wife."* And as was written years later by one named Judas, *"I must remind you—and you know it well—that even though the Lord rescued the whole nation of Israel from Egypt, he later destroyed every one of those who did not remain faithful....And don't forget the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with sexual immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and are a warning of the eternal fire [destruction] that will punish all who are evil"* (Jude 5, 7 NLT).

The angels warned Lot, and he warned others, as God had directed him. But did the people of Sodom believe? Let us see.

*(As curtain opens, Father Ophir is just coming in from working in the grain fields; it is late summer; Heth enters with him.)*

HETH: *(talking as they enter, in a tone of deep pity)*

Poor Father Lot! He is so easily frightened.

OPHIR: The idea that his God would destroy Sodom, with all its wealth and prosperity! Nonsense. I wouldn't worry about it a minute!

RIZPAH: What? Something going to happen?

BIRSHA: What's this I hear? Lot told you—

HETH: *(scoffing)* Lot's God is going to destroy Sodom—completely destroy it! And soon! Lot's all excited, says we'd better get our things together and get out right away.

OPHIR: He even went all the way to the field to warn us! It would be on a night when we had to work late. All that grain to get in, and if it should rain—

RIZPAH: *(frightened)* What if something should happen? Lot's God has done some mighty things!

HETH: Now Rizpah, what do you know about Lot's God? All you know is something Lot has told you. You don't



know anything, so be quiet! Hear me?

RIZPAH: Lot told me He was the mightiest of gods, and could—

HETH: (*interrupting, mockingly*) You don't believe it, do you? All the gods can do mighty things. Just ask the priest of Ishtar or the priest of Innin. They'll tell you!

OPHIR: I can't believe in the gods anyway. But any god that would even think of destroying a wealthy place like Sodom is downright foolish!

HETH: The gods should be happy!—with all the rich gifts we give them!

OPHIR: The gifts we give to the gods—or to the priests!

HETH: Do you suppose Lot told Elam? I think I'll go see. (*starts for the door, when there is a knock. Elam enters.*)

HETH: Well, Elam! I was just starting out to find you.

ELAM: My good friend Heth! (*nods a greeting to all in the room*)

OPHIR: All packed, Elam?

ELAM: (*laughs*) So you've seen Lot too!

HETH: (*looking Elam up and down conspicuously, speaks in mocking tone*) You don't look too frightened.

OPHIR: We were thinking you might be leaving this fair city soon.

ELAM: Not me! It would take more than that to make me run!

BIRSHA: What did Lot tell you?

ELAM: He said he had some visitors from his God (*laugh*). They're going to destroy this (*scorning*) wicked city and (*craftily*) they're giving us a special advance-warning. We're supposed to get out of here. Right away!

OPHIR: And now, Elam, what are your plans for next winter? I mean, after Sodom is destroyed! (*all laugh*)

BIRSHA: (*thoughtful and serious*) Is there any possibility Lot is right?

OPHIR: My good wife (*lays his hand comfortingly on her shoulder*) you've seen a good many suns rise and set on the city of Sodom, and I assure you that you'll be seeing a good many more.

HETH: Lot is really taking it seriously, though. He said his wife and daughters—

ELAM: Daughters!

HETH: Yes, Lot says his wife and daughters are busy packing. They plan to leave as soon as they can.

RIZPAH: Like tomorrow?

HETH: I don't know—we'll have to wait and see. They won't be gone long (*mocking*) before they come dragging all their stuff back again.

BIRSHA: Don't you think it might be wise to at least go over to Lot's home and talk with the family...just in case there's something to it?

HETH: Mother, you'd make yourself look like a fool. What would all the neighbors think when they found out?

ELAM: Sodom has been here a good long time, and it isn't ready to go off the map yet. Father Lot is old, and probably gets nervous easily. He'll feel better after he gets a

good night's sleep. At least, I hope he doesn't leave town for good! He has a fine daughter, and—

RIZPAH: And a lot of money!

HETH: Be quiet, Riz! (*disconcerted pause*) Lot's always been rather queer, anyway, in different things. Remember, Elam, last spring, when he took us out to his altar one evening to worship with him? Strangest thing I ever saw for religion. No priest, no god, nothing you could see. Just a very plain altar, and—

ELAM: I think I could go along with that part, but what gets me about Lot's religion is all the "do's" and "don't's." When I set out to get his daughter, I never dreamed what I was getting into! But I decided to see it through. The inheritance will be worth it. But once I have that in my hands, I'm going to have my way about religion and I'm afraid it won't resemble Lot's ideas.

HETH: Yet, I can't help admiring Lot for his devotion, I just don't understand it.

OPHIR: Lot is always telling how wicked this city is—

ELAM: (*interrupting*) As if he were so righteous. To hear him talk, you'd think Sodom was about the worst place in the world to live.

OPHIR: Wonder what ever brought him here, if Sodom is so bad.

RIZPAH: Maybe that's why he wants to go.

BIRSHA: Then you're sure we don't need to look further into this matter?

OPHIR: I'm sure of it. Positive sure. Let's drop the dreary subject of doom right now and take it up again next moon. Sodom will still be here.

ELAM: Yes, Sodom will still be here—and I'll be settled in my own little home. Goodnight. (*coffing*) See you tomorrow.

NARRATOR:

We know that they did not live to learn—that it is fatal to disregard the Divine decree. God knows whereof He speaks, and when He commands, we disobey at our own peril.

This is why the Lord caused the record of these events to be preserved for us, so that we might not fall where they fell; so that we might escape the doom which fell upon them.

This was the message in Jesus' words: "Just as it was in the days of Noah,...so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all...It was the same in the days of Lot...It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30 NLT)

Human nature has not changed; the instinctive rebellion of the human heart has not changed; and the unalterable certainty of the Divine decree has not changed. As it was, so shall it be.

Let us take heed. ♦

(To be continued next issue)



## WHERE IS THE WEDDING?

**"In the Megiddo Message for November 1998, the Q&A page, we read 'Why did Jesus compare Himself to a lord returning from the wedding? If we understand the Bible right, the wedding is on the earth, not up in heaven.' Careful reading of the Bible doesn't appear to bear out the above."**

The wedding of Christ and His bride is surely an event of sufficient importance to merit our concern and deep interest, and we are thankful that the Bible reveals as much as it does, although I am sure we agree that we would like more details. But given what is told in Scripture, what do we have?

I believe we agree on the identity of both the bridegroom and the bride, the bridegroom being Christ and the bride being the Church, composed of all faithful believers in all ages up to the time of Christ's second advent. Christ is the "one husband," and the faithful are a "chaste virgin" which will be presented to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).

Now let us think about the location of the wedding. First, where are the respective parties before the wedding takes place (i.e., now)? Again, I am sure we agree that the bridegroom is in heaven, at the Father's right hand, awaiting the time when He will return to earth. Those making up the bride are on earth. A few are living, the majority are sleeping in death, awaiting the appointed time of resurrection (at the return of Christ) when they will be restored to life and together with the living believers be caught up to meet their returning Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

One more event is necessary before the wedding, and that is the Judgment which will determine who among the believers are faithful and therefore eligible to attend the wedding feast, and who are not. The apostle Paul mentions the Judgment in several of his Epistles, saying that "everyone of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12); "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10) and "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10 NIV). He was also very conscious of his own personal accountability, as he said in 1 Cor. 4:4-5: "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (NIV).

Jesus describes the Judgment scene using the simile of a shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats. "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then

shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:33-34).

In the description in Rev. 14:4, of a scene following the Judgment, both Jesus and the saints (the bride) are on the earth. The Revelator saw in vision the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the one hundred forty four thousand redeemed ones. He noted also their high achievement: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (verses 4-5).

At this point the stage is set for the wedding. From Revelation 19 we get the timing and the picture of the ceremony: "After these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia: Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:1, 7). Who are the "much people" in heaven? It seems that they must be angels (they are also the "us" in verse 7), and they are giving honor to "Him" (the Bridegroom) because "his wife" (the bride) "has made herself ready." The "much people in heaven" (the angels) are giving honor to "Him" (the Bridegroom) because it is time for the marriage of the Lamb, and the "wife" (bride) is ready. It does not seem in the context of the passage that the "much people in heaven" could refer to either the Bridegroom or the bride.

There are other passages of Scripture which indicate that the bride could not be in heaven. Jesus said to His disciples shortly before His crucifixion, speaking of Himself going to heaven, "Whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 13:33). We realize that it is widely believed that the bride does go to heaven, either at death and/or at the time of the rapture, but a careful reading of Scripture does not support this position. Jesus said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14:3)—He did not say that He would receive them to Himself in heaven. Rather He said, "I will come again." Likewise in 1 Thess. 4, after it is stated that the living believers along with the resurrected ones will rise to "meet the Lord in the air," and it goes on to say, "so shall we ever be with the Lord" (v. 17), it does not suggest or state that being together will be in heaven. Many other passages in Scripture let us know that it will be on the earth, that Christ is coming to reign on the earth, to establish His kingdom on earth, with headquarters at Jerusalem (Zeph. 2:12; Matt. 5:35); to sit upon His throne, and to share His authority with His faithful bride (Rev. 2:26; 3:21).



**Our Subscriber continues:**

"Following the actual marriage ceremony and the supper comes the wedding trip, description of which starts four verses after the mention of the wedding itself. 'And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war...and his name is called The Word of God ... And he bath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11, 13, 16).

"His new wife follows Him down to earth: 'and the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean' (Rev. 19:14)."

"Let's be very tidy as to whom any passage applies, and thus avoid much unnecessary confusion."

If Revelation 19:11 describes the wedding trip of the newly united bride and groom, must we assume that they are the ones sitting upon the "white horse," who will "judge and make war"? Are the bride and groom also the "armies which were in heaven" which "followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean"? Does it seem that the "armies which were in heaven" is an appropriate designation for the bride of Christ?

It does not seem that any of these suggestions fit the context. The Old Testament speaks frequently of the Lord being "the Lord God of hosts," the Lord of the armies of heaven, i.e., the angels. We know that angels will accompany Jesus when He returns. Couldn't angels, then, be the armies in heaven which are part of the scene in Revelation 19?

We agree fully with your final statement, "Let's be very tidy as to whom any passage applies, and thus avoid much unnecessary confusion." However, it is not always clear to whom a passage applies, and we must be careful that we make harmony in our study of Scripture, and do our best to understand what the Scripture writer is saying, not read our interpretation into his words.

As for the passage in Luke 12:35-37, which you suggest applies to "the Jewish people who have been converted and are meanwhile leading a large number to Christ," we fail to see any reference of this nature in Jesus' words. It is certainly possible that Jewish people may be included in those who are ready and waiting for their Lord, but is there anything that suggests that this passage applies only to Jews?

We must also remember, when the Bible speaks of the Israelites, that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6), and also that many times references are made to

those who are "Jews indeed" (by training and commitment) as distinct from Jews by birth (by blood descent). Paul said in Rom. 2:28-29, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." This suggests an Israelite nation which is considered to be chosen people of God, who may or may not be Jews by right of birth. They are Jews because of being "circumcised at heart" and are seeking the approval of God, not of men.

In the Book of Revelation, chapter 17 describes the fall of Babylon, and the Lamb (Christ) showing His authority over Babylon, and "overcoming them," "...for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." This indicates Christ on the scene conquering the nations of earth. Chapter 18 tells more of the fall of Babylon and the resulting worldwide cataclysm. Then chapter 19 follows with, "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven..." and the wedding feast is described in the verses that follow. Wouldn't it seem strange that if Jesus is on earth during chapter 17 and 18, that suddenly He is seen in chapter 19 as being in heaven when the passage connects with the words "after these things"? Does He return to heaven for the wedding after He has been conquering on earth? Furthermore, chapter 19, verses 2 and 3 continue to show Christ's victory over the evil powers of earth, right at the time the "voice of much people in heaven" is heard.

Jesus is coming to reign on the earth, not in heaven. ♦

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 19**

**CITIES**

1. Bethlehem and Jerusalem (Luke 2:4 and 2 Samuel 5:5-9)
2. Jebusites (Joshua 15:63)
3. From Dan to Beersheba (Judges 20:1)
4. Luz (Genesis 28:19)
5. Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7)
6. Athens (Acts 17:15, 22)
7. Gaza (Judges 16:1-3)
8. Antioch (Acts 11:26)
9. Bethesda (John 5:2)
10. Tarsus (Acts 22:3); Bethsaida (John 1:44); and Cana (John 21:2)

**NAMES AND THEIR MEANINGS**

1. Jesus (Matthew 1:21)
2. Moses (Exodus 2:10)
3. Mara (Ruth 1:20)
4. Abraham (Genesis 17:5)
5. Judah (Genesis 29:35)
6. Jacob (Genesis 27:36)
7. Israel (Genesis 32:28)
8. Cephas (John 1:42)
9. Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23)
10. Barnabas (Acts 4:36)

**COLORS**

1. White (Job 6:6)
2. Red (Proverbs 23:31)
3. Green (Genesis 30:37)
4. Black (Song of Solomon 5:11)
5. Gray (Psalm 71:18)
6. Blue (Numbers 15:38)
7. Purple (Mark 15:17)
8. Scarlet, white, red, crimson (Isaiah 1:18)
9. Brown (Genesis 30:32)
10. Silver, yellow (Psalm 68:13)

**LAVY**

1. Peter (John 21:15)
2. David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1)
3. Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17)
4. John (John 19:26; 21:20)
5. Jesus (John 15:13)
6. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:22, 28)
7. Keep my commandments (John 14:15)
8. Abraham (Genesis 22:1-2)



## About Forgiveness

(Continued from page 20)

Are we entitled to forgiveness? Surely that is the case with respect to God's forgiveness if we seek it according to His terms. But as to another human's forgiveness, I can seek your forgiveness for my sin against you, and you may simply refuse. But if you refuse, you cannot say you are a



*Merely  
forgetting  
that someone injured  
you does not count as  
forgiveness.*

Christian. If someone acknowledges their offense and seeks your forgiveness, you are obligated as a Christian to forgive them. They have presented you with a moral claim of sorts by acknowledging their offense.

On the other hand, if you are too quick to forgive you may not be letting the reality of the offense sink in. For forgiveness to work there has to be a "taking in" of the offense. For instance, a battered wife who is sorely lacking self-respect may be disposed to constantly forgive her husband even though he doesn't acknowledge wrongdoing. Such a victim thinks the wrongdoer is entitled to forgiveness no matter what. But one must first recognize the nature of the offense, and only then is he or she in a position to forgive, and not sooner.

Can you forgive someone if they have not asked to be forgiven? If the wrongdoer does not seek forgiveness, and the offense becomes a pattern of wrongdoing, there is a moral dilemma. In order for forgiveness to be

complete, the wrongdoer needs to acknowledge the wrong. With the battered wife situation, repeated acts of forgiveness will accomplish little until her husband comes to grip with his sin. Only then can there be real, genuine forgiveness.

Forgiveness seems to be partly voluntary and partly involuntary. We don't feel forgiveness automatically. True forgiveness has some sort of emotional commitment in the matter, not just the mere utterance of words. It is a delicate matter if someone seeks your forgiveness but you feel hard-hearted about it. You can't just force your mind to conjure up the appropriate state of heart. To truly forgive, you must be forgiving in heart.

It is important to distinguish forgiveness from forgetting. Merely forgetting that someone injured you does not count as forgiveness. Forgetting is an involuntary, unconscious phenomenon, while forgiveness is voluntary.

**Forgiving can be very difficult to achieve.** People see that they ought to forgive, and work hard at being able to forgive. Sometimes one's heart is moved easily; other times not. Egocentricity can stand in the way of forgiving because there is a tendency to feel superior in the aftermath of being wronged.

If you have a very great investment in yourself **this investment will be threatened by forgiving another or accepting forgiveness.** To forgive you must relinquish this feeling of superiority—or a fear of being vulnerable to further disappointment and injury. These are powerful forces. Hence when we forgive (or accept forgiveness) it's not simply an expression of generosity of spirit, but it's overcoming one's investment of the ego. Genuine forgiveness is nonegotistic—hence it's a remarkably beautiful virtue.

Likewise, for the recipient of forgiveness it's often difficult. Pride

stands in the way of accepting it. To seek forgiveness means that you at least have to genuinely acknowledge wrongdoing. An important component of **forgiveness is the overcoming of resentment.** After you forgive someone, if it's true forgiveness, you overcome resentment, and this captures the idea of a welcoming back, as in the Prodigal Son parable. Welcoming back means a restoration of the status quo as it was before the rupture occurred. It means a heartfelt gratification that the other person is back in the fold, as it were.

Forgiveness requires a certain amount of maturity. It seems part of human nature to damage things that we value. By forgiving another you undo damage and restore a relationship—quite often on a more mature level. When the relationship is restored it usually has an **entirely different** quality—it is restored while recognizing the evil that was there—and it has a new character and depth.

The profound value of forgiveness is that something that was damaged can be made whole again; a relationship once damaged can be restored through forgiveness. Hence this is a virtue of considerable importance. It's also significant because in forgiving you take a step toward overcoming your ego.

**It's easy to deceive ourselves regarding forgiveness.** A dose of healthy skepticism is always in order on the question of whether you have or haven't truly forgiven someone (or accepted forgiveness). It is tested over time.

At its core, forgiveness is mysterious—we can't with any degree of assurance itemize the factors that enter into forgiveness. But we do know that someone who is disposed to forgive tells you something about his generosity of spirit and his commitment to faith; the one who refuses to forgive shuns the Celestial gate. ♦

*Those who testify by the yard and live by the  
inch ought to be kicked by the foot. —B.P. Carroll*



*If today is cloudy,  
Tomorrow may be fine.  
No one has failed who kept  
A happy state of mind.  
The longest journey taken,  
Starts with a single mile,  
And one-day-at-a-time can change  
The worthless to worthwhile.*

**F**ellowship with Christ demands *following* Christ.

**H**oliness is the *ONLY* pathway to happiness.

**C**onquering yourself is the first step toward changing your aspirations to eternal certainties.

**L**ife is a quarry out of which we are to mold and chisel and complete a character.

**I**f you fear people will know it, don't do it.

*I know a little secret,  
Here's what it's all about;  
If my lips are always smiling,  
They haven't time to pout.*

**R**emember, cheerfulness is one of the few things that you may squander to advantage.

*What good did it do to be grouchy today?  
Did your surliness drive any trouble away?*

*Did you cover more ground than you usually do,  
Because of the grouch that you carried with you?*

*If not, what's the use of a grouch or a frown,  
If it won't smooth a path and it just puts you down;*

*If it doesn't assist you, it isn't worthwhile,  
Your work may be hard, but just do it—and smile!*



**B**udget your time carefully: it is one thing you can't replace.

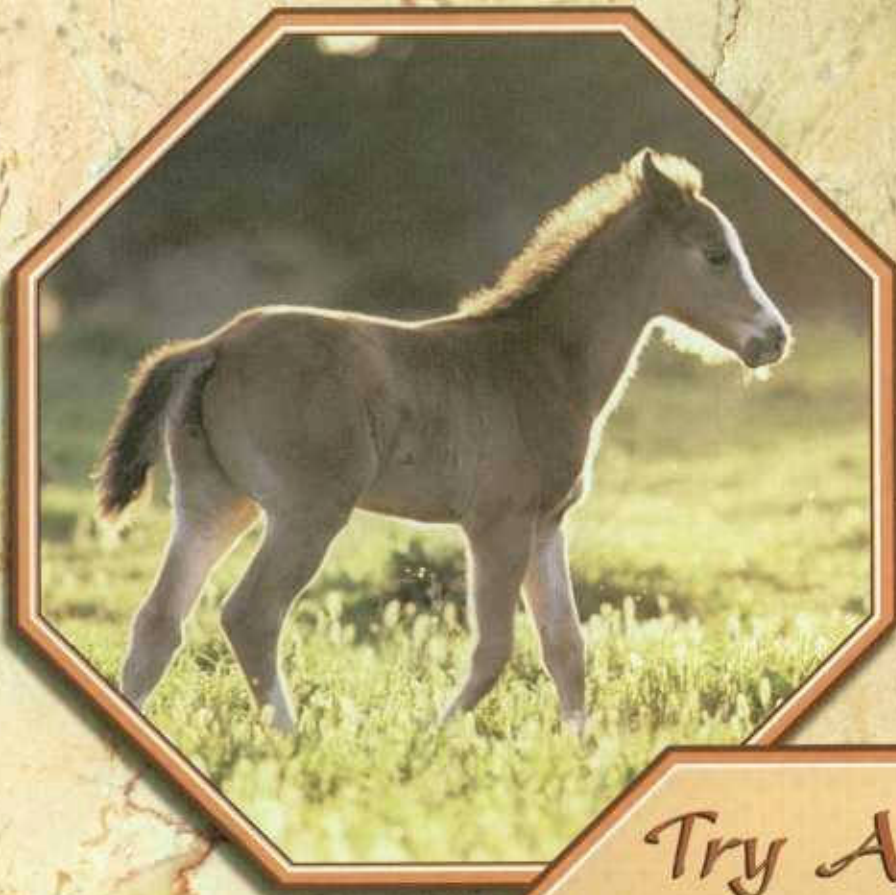
*If we make the most of today, it will be easier to make the most of tomorrow.*

**T**he temperamental individual has been described as nine-tenths temper, one-tenth mental.

*Unless a tree has borne blossoms in the spring it is vain to look for fruit in the autumn.*

**G**od can give Himself to us only in the measure that we give ourselves to Him.





## *Try Again*

*Have you thought, when feeling weary  
With the trials of the day,  
Of the thousand wasted chances  
Which the hours have borne away?*

*Have you thought about the blessings  
That surround you all the time,  
And that grumbling in their presence  
Is a weakness—nay, a crime?*

*Have you thought of all you're missing  
While you waste time and complain,  
And what fortune may await you  
If you only try again? —Selected*