Megiddo Message

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GOD IS GOD and RIGHT IS RIGHT

V e live in an age of relative values. Each of us is an individual, we are told, and able to make our own judgments of right and wrong. There are no absolutes. Each one is free to decide for himself.

This type of freedom is not of God. God never planned that His people be free to think and believe and do just as they please according to their own judgments. When God called Israel to be His nation, He gave them statutes and laws to obey. "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you," was the rule. And every area of life was affected.

Christianity is not and never has been a religion of tolerance. Jesus did not tolerate and excuse wrong. While it is not our task to regulate the lives of others, neither must we condone evil. If we do not oppose it, we support it. Wrong is wrong, and as surely as we condone it in others we shall be ourselves influenced by it.

While we are not commissioned to war against sin in the world, we must look to ourselves. We must be intolerant of our pride, whether we are singing a hymn in church or walking down Main Street. We must be intolerant of our dishonesty, whether we are reading our Bible or transacting business. We must not harbor feelings of wrath, whether we are condemning a friend's misdeed or reprimanding our child. We must be intolerant of our selfishness, whether we are giving our time to the work of the Lord or to our brother. We must be intolerant of wrong wherever it is discovered.

Is this mixing religion and business? Certainly! And why not? If we are to have a religion that lives and grows in us, that religion is going to get mixed up in everything we do and every choice we make. It is going to get so mixed up in us that in every area of life, whether we eat, or drink or whatever we do, we will do it to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31). For, right is right, and God is God.

Is this intolerant? Yes!

When Wendell Phillips, the 19th century American reformer, went out one day to plead an unpopular cause, it is said that as he left the house, his wife said, "Wendell, don't shilly-shally!"

We need that warning today. Don't shilly-shally. Don't play with evil. Stand for your convictions. The Lord wants people with the faith, conviction and integrity to stand up for Him and not waver.

The cause of God is nothing to be ashamed of. Woe upon us if we are ever ashamed of it! It may be unpopular at the moment, but if *"God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31). Right will triumph in the end.

So, fight the fight with all thy might God is God, and right is right! ◆

CERTISIAN Christian

"Whatever is true, whatever is Chonorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is Covely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise,

think on these things" – The Apostle Paul (Phil. 4:8).



ave you ever advised someone to take a certain course of action, and their reply was, "I'll think about it"? What did Paul mean when he said *"Think on these things"*? Was he giving take-it-or-leave-it advice, or was he seriously telling us what to do? Each term Paul used is a quality of life that is known only as it is *lived*.



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MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

WE BELIEVE...

- in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to

heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.

- in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ★ in ourselves as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.

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 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.

Like A Christian

Chinking is such a part of us that it is hard to think about. Whatever we are doing, whether we are conscious of it or not, we are thinking. At work or at rest, when we are driving our car, or on the job, or at home with our family, whether we are working or reading or relaxing, if we are awake we are thinking. The question is: What are we thinking about?

It is easy to think about trivia, feelings, petty nothings. But God calls us to serious thinking. In fact, a large part of being a Christian is learning to keep a controlled, healthful environment in our minds where the Word of God can live and grow, direct and control.

All of us are aware of how much difference our thoughts can make in the way we feel. Wake up in the morning with a song in your heart, and you feel equal to anything the day might bring. Then some unbidden thought flashes into your mind, and—suddenly everything looks gray and drab. The music is gone.

What has changed? Actually, *nothing*. Everything is just as it was an hour before—*except that thought*. The duties of the day have not changed, nor have your resources or anything on which you depend. But everything *looks* and *feels* different. All the world seems different because of the tyranny of an intruding thought.

None of us can know real peace of mind until we master the art of controlling our thoughts.

So fundamental are our thoughts to our success that we would do well to give them more of our conscious attention. In other words, think before we think. Why? These familiar lines say it well.

> Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny!

Think!

What does the Bible mean when it tells us to think? In one sense it may mean to consider, as in making a decision, to think through the consequences that are likely to follow our choice, and choose accordingly. Why think? Because "to think" or "not to think" is a life-or-death matter. Haggai said it repeatedly to the people he was sent to warn: "*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways*" (Hag. 1:7). Or as

bow often we have stumbled in our Christian walk because we did not think! another translation has it, "*Give careful thought to your ways*" (NIV).

There is a children's rhyme which tells the fate of a mouse who got caught in a trap "because he didn't think." How often we have stumbled in our Christian walk because we did not think.

And the problem is not new.

Had king Saul *thought* the matter through, he probably would not have disobeyed the command of the Lord and offered the sacrifice which Samuel the prophet was commissioned to do (1 Sam. 13:8–11).

Had Uzzah *thought* of the command in the ancient law, not to touch any holy thing, he would not have disobeyed the command of God by touching the ark (2 Sam. 6:3–7), however much it jostled.

Had Moses *thought*, he probably would have been more attentive to the command of God and not have struck the rock at Meribah when he was told to speak to it (Num. 20:8–12). This time the consequences were severe. Because of this transgression he was not permitted to enter Canaan. Thinking—or not thinking—made the difference.

The first and greatest commandment, as cited by Jesus, includes a command to think: We must love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind (Mark 12:30–31). The apostle Paul commissions us to take captive every vagrant thought and make it obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:4–5). These are Divine commands and they have been written to be obeyed.

How seriously should we take these commands? Is it really possible to be that much in control of our thoughts? What about all those thoughts that just come and go in our minds, of which we are hardly conscious?

Choose, Choose!

Is it possible—desirable—even necessary—to choose the thoughts we entertain?

Let us ask a different question: Do we leave the door of our house open to every vagrant that might chance to wander in? Isn't it just as wise and important to choose our thought-company?

When an artist creates a lovely painting, he does it by a careful process of selection. Certain features of the landscape he rejects; other aspects he enhances, and the finished product is a work of art. If to create a painting requires disciplined selection, how can we hope to paint beautiful pictures in our mind without carefully selecting our subjects?

Watch the musician who with seeming ease performs the work of a composer. Don't be fooled: behind those moments of near perfection are hours upon hours of grueling, monotonous work. If a musician has to practice to produce such music, shall we hope, without effort, to create harmony in our minds?

There are two tasks which at first seem equally difficult: the mastery of our speech, and the mastery of our thoughts. But they are not equal. If it is difficult to set a watch upon our lips, it is more difficult to set a watch upon our thoughts. Why? Because speech has social consequences, which are a great deterrent. If you speak your mind, you may lose your position, your good name, or your friend. But your thoughts can grow in the dark—as vicious as you please—without visible effects. It is this secrecy that makes thought mastery so difficult.

Yet God calls us to do it—which means that it can be done. How could Jesus have said, "Blessed are the pure in heart," if it were not possible? For no one can be pure of heart who is not able to grapple successfully with his thoughts. And by our thoughts we are going to be judged. When Jesus comes, "the thoughts of many hearts" will "be revealed" (Luke 2:35). And doesn't the great Apostle say, "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things"? (Phil. 4:8).

It would be mockery to command this if it were not possible. It may be difficult, as fine things often are, but the clear voice of the Word of God says it is something we can do.

A Scottish preacher of a century ago was asked how one can accomplish something so difficult as to control his thoughts. He replied: "You must summon up the resources of your will. You must resist beginnings. You must fill your mind so full of higher interests that when the devil comes and clamors for admission, he will find there is not a chair for him to sit on." Like A Christian

JINK

Let there is another dimension to our thought life which we should consider, and that is the task of keeping an eternal perspective.

We live in a secular world, as secular as ever was found in ancient Greece or Rome. History records the age of faith, and the age of reason. Our age has neither.

When the apostle Paul was writing to the Church in the proud, secular city of Corinth, after comparing this world's wisdom and the knowledge of God, he made this broad, sweeping statement: "We have the mind of Christ." Someone from outside might have thought Paul was boasting. What could he mean, saying that he had Christ's mind? Was he playing God, and thinking himself infallible? Not at all. To have the mind of Christ means looking at life from Christ's point of view, to have His values, His ambitions, His desires, His appreciations. It means thinking God's thoughts, in contrast to thinking as those who do not know God or His purposes.

Actually, the believer and the unbeliever live in two different worlds. The one who does not know God has set his heart on what he can see—a home, a

Keep an Éternal Perspective

family, a job, more money, more leisure, more education, more "things." These goals may be good in their way, but to the believer, one who has caught a glimpse of what God is offering, they are too small, too limited, too temporary. The Christian appreciates what he can enjoy in this world, not as an end in itself but rather a means to a greater end. His talents, abilities, skills, even his money and possessions are all capital which he is investing, as it were, in a heavenly bank. In the words of the apostle Paul, Christians are laying up "treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Tim. 6:19 NIV). Real value, as they see it, is not in this world but in the world to come.

The apostle Paul described the eternal perspective when he wrote, "These little troubles (which are really so transitory) are winning for us a permanent glorious and solid reward out of all proportion to our pain. For we are looking all the time not at the visible things but at the invisible. The visible things are transitory: it is the invisible things that are really permanent" (2 Cor. 4:17–18 Phillips).

This world is not a goal to reach but a highway to travel beyond.





 De live in a secular world. Even much that goes for religion has a secular hue. A current author Bob Hostetler has described the modern turn toward secularism. He writes,

"A dignified white building stands near my home. Stained glass windows adorn each side. A cross rises from a single bell tower at its front, and the cornerstone declares the date this structure was dedicated, more than 100 years ago, 'to the glory of God.'

"But it's not a church. Not anymore, at least. It's called 'The Choir Loft' and it houses a business that sells fabrics and craft items. The structure is strong and striking, but it no longer functions *Christianly*."

Then he comments: "That building illustrates what has happened among Christians in this century. Many still look and act and speak like Christians, but inside—in our minds—few of us function any different than non-Christians."

Is it not a serious indictment of the Christian faith? In the sixties a writer named Harry Blamires observed the same trend. "There is no longer a Christian mind," he wrote. In other words, we may think as Americans or Canadians, Kenyans or Laotians. We may have a Midwestern or Southern frame of reference. Our thinking may be colored by our background. We may think like liberals or conservatives. But how few of us think "Christianly," i.e., like Christ?

What is the difference between the secular and the sacred mind? To think secularly, is to think within a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth. To think *Christianly* is to see all things as related, directly or indirectly, to our eternal destiny.

In the view of Scripture, to have a secular mind is to think within the limits of our mortal life and the goals, pleasures, and satisfactions this world can give. To think like Christ is to open ourselves to the length and breadth of the universe,

Seçular or Sacred?

and the timespan of eternity—the difference is phenomenal!

Is our mind secular or sacred? Does Christ recognize us as belonging to Him or to the present world system?

The Benefits of Christ-like Thinking

If we can learn to think like Christ, everything we do will show our love and respect for Him. Didn't Jesus Himself say that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, and all our *mind*? Didn't Paul say we should be transformed by renewing our minds? (Rom. 12:2).

What are the benefits of thinking like Christ?

1. The Christian point of view sees current events fulfilling God's purposes. Thinking like a Christian gives us a set of lenses for our mind that makes everything around us make sense. Instead of seeing a myriad of happenings as generally destructive and without purpose, we can see the hand of God bending everything toward the Second Advent of Christ and His Kingdom, which is now imminent. We will see Bible prophecies fulfilling just as foretold, the nations talking peace while preparing for war. We will observe the tremendous increase in knowledge, along with the general breakdown in law and authority, as confirming prophecies in His Word. Even the trend toward secularism was foretold by the apostle Paul, that in the last days people would be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4).

We might compare the heavenly viewpoint to that of a director of a large drama production. The individual actors may know and perform their parts to the best of their ability. But they must follow the instructions of the director if the production is to be a success, and sometimes they must act in a way that, in their limited view, makes no sense—because only the director knows how the whole fits

Every day has purpose because it is one more precious opportunity to prepare for eternity. together. Only the director knows both the beginning and the end, and the intentions of the author of it all. Just so we, in serving Christ, cannot expect to have insight into every part of our lives or our world. All we see is one small portion of the whole. But we have been given a book—the Scriptures—from which we may learn about this drama. And the more we study it, the richer and fuller will be our knowledge, the more we will trust the Director,—and the less we will criticize and complain.

2. The Christian viewpoint gives meaning to life. "Our society," says one, "has very little grasp of true pleasure. People live for the weekend, but the weekend leaves them feeling empty and unfulfilled."

Thinking Christianly is an antidote to the boredom, depression, and cynicism that pervade the world around us. For the Christian every day has purpose, because every day is one more precious opportunity to prepare for eternity. And since every day is a day for which we shall have to give account to our Creator, every hour must be redeemed.

3. The Christian viewpoint makes us able to deal with hardship. Thinking Christianly will also give a new perspective to life's struggles and misfortunes. One who has the mind of Christ will be better equipped to endure the afflictions of life with a sense of worth and dignity—because they will see their lives as having a goal and a future. Temporary troubles will be just that—not a dismal end but only a minor inconvenience, after which they can enjoy pleasures beyond anything they can imagine.

The Christian viewpoint does not mean that life is easy, but that it is manageable—because it is the means God has provided to obtain something better.

One who sets his heart on the things this world can give (the secular viewpoint) will be distressed when they are gone. But one who has set his heart on the heavenly realities cannot be disappointed, because what this world cannot give it cannot take away.

Identity of the Christian Mind

How can I know whether or not I have a Christian mind?

1. *The Christian mind acknowledges the power of God.* All around us are people who deny the miraculous, who think that the best in man is God and the most

powerful force in the universe is the human mind. If they cannot duplicate it, it didn't happen.

But have they thought about the countless things that happened—obviously—before we came along, in which no human hand was involved? Where did all the stars and galaxies come from? Who has even come near to discovering—or creating—life?

Recall the words of the Lord to the ancient prophet concerning a proud city of long ago: *"Thence will I bring thee down."* God is patient. Only a little while, and He will show who is in control, and the *"loftiness of man shall be humbled."*

2. The Christian mind directs all service to Christ. "Most conservative Christians today," says a current analyst, "separate their thinking into sacred and secular, spiritual versus material." The Christian view is that of Romans 12:1–2 (NIV) in which Paul urges Christians to offer their bodies "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God"—which, he says, is their spiritual worship, to be transformed into Christ's nature.

Serving Christ cannot occupy just a little compartment of my life, it must be my *whole* life, every day, every hour. When I'm doing my job, I'm serving Christ. When I'm driving home, I'm serving Christ. When I'm eating dinner, I'm serving Christ. If I shop in a store, I must do it as serving Christ. Whatever I see, or hear, or handle, I'm serving Christ. When I relax and pick up a book to read, I must be still serving Christ.

There is no room for a sacred/secular separation. There is just no part of my life that serving Christ does not touch.

3. The Christian mind recognizes God as the only source of truth. One of the great tensions between the secular mind and the Christian is the issue of truth. The secular mind asserts that each individual is a judge of truth. "You must decide what's right for you," it says, "and I must decide what's right for me." The Christian mind says "No," that God is the inflexible standard of truth. Said Jesus, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Truth is something dictated by God, not a decision made by majority vote.

The willingness to acknowledge God as the only source of truth and to condemn what He calls evil is the hallmarkof the Christian mind. Serving Christ must be my whole life. If I'm driving my car... or eating dinner...or doing my work...or relaxing in an easy chair, I'm serving Christ.



How To Have a Christian Mind:

- 1. Develop a strong desire for the mind of Christ.
- 2. Submerge yourself in the Word of God. Read the Scriptures to learn them, love them, live them.
- 3. Let Scripture rebuke you.
- 4. Cultivate habits that encourage Christ-like thinking.
- 5. Set goals to keep your mind active in Christ-like thoughts.

How do we arrive at the point where we can say with the apostle Paul, *"We have the mind of Christ"*? If you want a Christian mind, you must go after it.

nristian

How?

1) The first step is to want the mind of Christ with a deep, serious, sincere desire; to want it so much that we go after it with a passion. We want the mind of Christ to direct us because that is the only way to lay hold on the glory Christ is offering. And we want that glory! We want that immortal body, that incorruptible crown, that eternal happiness, and we want it with all that is in us. We want it so much that we are willing to pay the price—any price, if only we can have it.

2) The second step is *submerge yourself in the Word of God*. Read a key passage of Scripture every day. Read it as something new, something fresh, something wonderful. Read it, and keep it with you all day.

There is no way to get Christ-like thoughts in our minds by reading the newspaper.

Read the Scriptures to learn them, love them, live them. Approach them daily with a new sense of unfamiliarity. Do not anticipate what is said but catch the surprising perspective, as new insight that challenges you to think.

3) Let Scripture rebuke you. It is the only way to improve. As Paul wrote, "Examine yourselves...test yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5 NIV). We want to be right above all else, to be right in God's sight. And the only way to get right is to be constantly checking our thoughts and behavior, opinions and statements in the light of Scripture, to keep looking for the marks of a Christ-like mind. It is so easy to retrograde to our own thoughts and call them Christ's. It is so easy to hold to our own notions and think them sacred.

4) Cultivate habits that encourage Christ-like thinking. When we are fresh

and alert, it is easier to think right. And when we are working, we should focus our minds on what we are doing. But what do you do when you are tired? Do you relax and do nothing? Worse yet, do you turn on the radio or TV and let it pull your mind downward? Someone has said that we are most vulnerable when we are tired. So plan in advance for such times, and when the time comes, work your plan. Someone has suggested using low-energy times, like moments after work, for physical exertion. The important point is to have a plan and execute it. Do something that is mentally challenging or constructiveanything to avoid temptation, and replace old habits with new ones that Christ would approve.

Developing i Christian

5) Finally we need to *set goals to keep our minds actively engaged in Christ-like thinking.* Choose a topic—a Bible text, a character you admire, a trait you want to develop—and think hard about it. The next day review your progress, and keep alert. Share your thoughts with a trusted Christian friend, and hold each other accountable for your thought-life. You will be surprised at the progress you can make.

Yes, practice, practice, practice thinking like a Christian. It is the only way.

How did Paul summarize it? *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if any-thing is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things"* (Phil. 4:8 NIV).

If we are going to be wise, spiritual people, we must keep renewing our minds in things high, things holy, things heavenly. Then, if we become like Christ in thought and character, when He returns He will recognize us as one of His family and will invite us to share the riches of His Kingdom, world without end. What recompense for thinking right!





Oh pilgrim of hope, do you suffer defeat In the conflicts of life's rugged way? You may victory gain if you guard well your thoughts: Have you thought upon these things today... The things that are honest, the things that are pure, And the truth that no earth cloud can dim? As the heavenly Father looks deep in your heart, Does He find it well pleasing to Him?

Your thoughts are the molds which will shape all your life, As one thinks in his heart so is he; Sin's entering wedge is a thought harbored close From which Jesus would want you to flee. The things that are lovely, the things that are just, Dwell on these, we are told in the Word; You have talked of surrender and yielding to Him, Have you given your thoughts to your Lord?

Search me, O my God, bring each stray, vagrant thought In captivity unto the Christ. Cast down ev'ry notion, exalt only truth, Let my mind be Your portal of praise. And when at the Judgment life's book is unclosed, May no pages be marred by sin's blots, Because though the tempter did fiercely assail, I honored You, Lord, in my thoughts! —Selected.



by Russell Hamby

"God is faithful. He will not allow us to suffer more than we can stand, but he will give us the power to stand up to our troubles." —1 Cor. 10:13, paraphrased



Christians survive times of crises through their faith in God. Through prayer and through the Word of God (the Bible), they find comfort and assurance that He will be there for them. Such comfort and assurance is found in the text of 1 Cor. 10:11–13.

What can Paul's message mean to us when our human nature is screaming, "That's all I can stand"?

In the text, Paul offers us a great word of reassurance. A reasonable paraphrase of 1 Cor. 10:13 might be: *Every trial that you endure is a part of human experience, but God is faithful. He will not allow us to suffer more than we can stand, but he will give us the power to stand up to our troubles.*

Sounds good, doesn't it?

How to Stand It

Recent events in my life have caused me to take a new look at this verse. These words cannot be glibly pronounced. Instead, they demand explanation.

Does Paul really expect us to believe that troubles need not crush us? And does he expect us to take seriously the idea that there is an escape hatch in the prison of our problems?

Please listen as I work my way through this verse again.

Paul begins by saying "that no temptation has seized me except what is common to man." The word translated "temptation" means "trials." The translation "temptation" certainly fits the context. Paul is addressing the struggle with sin. Yet it seems there is more to the idea than temptation to sin. Furthermore, our trials, troubles, and problems often leave us open to the temptation to sin. Sin and suffering can become a vicious cycle.

One thing here is very clear. Paul is emphasizing the universal nature of trials and suffering. No matter what you, me, or anyone is experiencing, someone has been through it before. This is an important understanding. Most often when we are having a difficult time, we feel isolated. We tend to think that "No one knows how I feel—no one has suffered as I am suffering." We see these same sentiments reflected in the words of the prophet Elijah. After escaping from Jezebel, he hid in a cave. Here he offers the mournful cry, *"I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away."* However, just as Elijah was not alone in his suffering, we need not feel alone.

Yet the idea that we are not alone in suffering may offer but little comfort. This truth can be expressed with insensitivity to our plight. There are those who would tell us: "I don't care about your problems. You had just as well face the fact that life is tough, so don't expect any sympathy from me." And there is another equally thoughtless response: "I don't care about your problems. I've got problems of my own." Neither response is Christian, but both are commonly heard.

This is most certainly not Paul's recommend. Instead, Paul's words express real compassion: "You are not alone in your trials, others know how you feel." This is a very important principle. Psychologists have discovered the therapeutic value of support groups. Drug and alcohol and marriage counseling is most often conducted by those who have been through such experiences.

Even though Paul does not explicitly say so in this passage, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we are not alone in our suffering—even Jesus knows how we feel: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our*

weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15 NIV).

Now we come to the question: Did Paul really say that God will not allow us to suffer more than we can stand?

Many find this hard to believe. Some people are unable to stand up to the stresses of life. The inability to cope is manifested in several ways. Some people develop physical illnesses. For example, it's a well known fact that people who have experienced major stress are more likely to develop a serious illness. Stress weakens the body, lowering the resistance to disease. Some people develop emotional problems. Christians are not immune to these same difficulties. Some Christians even develop poor spiritual attitudes. When troubles come, they stop praying and fellowshipping with other Christians. When they need God the most, they turn away.

Yet, on the other hand, some people endure tremendous stress and bounce right back.

We live in a pressure-cooker world. The stress that many people experience at work is overwhelming, and amazingly, some people seem to thrive on it.

Some people endure tremendous stress in their personal lives. I have known people and I'm sure you have known people who have suffered one tragedy after another, yet never lost their zest for life.

So—how is it that some people cope with the trials of life and others do not? And how is it that some have the power to stand up to their troubles and others do not? There is no simplistic answer. Despite what you might hear from the radio and TV evangelists, being a Christian will not eliminate suffering from your Christian life. People of faith do have problems.

Even Paul does not specify what the avenue of escape will be. But he does suggest two important things:



1) God has an answer for our problem. It may not be the answer we want. It may not come as soon as we would like. But God does have an answer.

2) God's answer is worthless unless we accept it. God does not force His answer upon us. We must accept it.

My own difficulties have not caused me to reject this verse. They have caused me to appreciate it even more. I know that in Christ there is strength to overcome whatever comes my way. God understands. God cares. God can deliver. \blacklozenge





"In 1 Lamuel 7, we read about a revival in Mispeh, where Lamuel drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day, then as people asked him for continual crying on their behalf, he offered a burnt offering. What is drawing and pouring water before the Lord?" ___.9.9.

Water had a significant meaning to the Israelites that may not be obvious to us who take it for granted. Water was not to be found just anywhere and was therefore extremely valuable. Without it one cannot live. To pour it out, especially while traveling across the vast desert, was to pour out one's life. When it disappeared into the desert sand it could not be recovered.

Verses 2-4 of 1 Samuel, chapter 7 inform us that the Israelites had deserted the Lord. Then they began to turn to the Lord, but not with their whole heart. They had not broken their ties with the gods of their neighbors. Samuel told them "If you're turning back to the Lord with all your hearts, you must remove your foreign gods and your idols of Ashtoreth. You must give yourselves fully to the Lord and serve only him. Then he will save you from the Philistines" (NCV). After years of halfhearted devotion to God, they complied with Samuel's instructions. "The Israelites put away their idols of Baal and Ashtoreth, and they served only the Lord" (NCV).

At the request of Samuel all Israel gathered at Mizpeh where they, "in a

great ceremony, drew water from a well and poured it out before the Lord. They also went without food all day and confessed that they had sinned against the Lord. So it was at Mizpah [or Mizpeh] that Samuel became Israel's judge" (v. 6, NLT).

Water means *life*. And when they drew water and poured it out, they were, in effect, declaring their allegiance to God. It was as if they were saying, We have put away Baal and Ashtoreth and have entrusted our lives to You. *"Our*

lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again" (2 Sam. 14:14 NLT). They were showing their weakness and dependence on God. It meant that they had a complete change of heart.

"Could Lamuel as a Levite, though not a priest, offer a burnt offering away from the tabernacle?"

It may seem that making sacrifices away from the tabernacle is not allowed according to Leviticus, chapter 17. Perhaps this is what you have in mind. But let us look at the passage carefully before drawing conclusions. Verses 3-4 read, "Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord in front of the tabernacle of the Lord-that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people" (NIV). There was reason to require this. The Israelites had been sacrificing to goat idols. The purpose of

requiring them to bring their sacrifices to the tabernacle was to put a stop to this practice. To be seen sacrificing in the open fields by another Israelite might discourage, or lead his countryman astray, thinking that he was sacrificing to goat idols. This would bring disfavor to Israel in the sight of God. Verses 5 and 7 explain, "This is so the Israelites will bring to the Lord the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields.... They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves" (NIV). The next two verses seem conclusive, "Say to them: 'Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the Lord—that man must be cut off from his people.'" It seems from the wording of this verse that the ordinance pertained to individual sacrifices, not national sacrifices: "Any Israelite or alien living among them...that man must be cut off."

How long was this ordinance to last? It was to "last forever unto them throughout their generations" (Lev. 17:7). The word forever is from the Hebrew word owlam, which can refer to no longer than one's lifetime. Example: "slave forever"-The Abridged Brown-Driver-Brigs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament. The phrase, "throughout their generations," comes from the Hebrew word dowr which is defined: 1) period, generation, habitation, dwelling; 1a) period, age, generation (period of time); 1b) generation (those living during a period); 1c) generation (characterized by quality, condition, class of men); 1d) dwelling-place, habitation-Enhanced Strong's Lexicon. The command was given around 1490 B.C. It is thought that the incidence in the



7th chapter of 1 Samuel occurred around 1112 B.C., a span of more than 300 years. It was given for a specific time, that is, during the time of the ones living when it was given (1a and 1b), or during a time characterized by certain conditions (1c). So, it is possible that, according to almost every definition given above, that the command had ceased by limitation. At the time the command was given, there was no reason why anyone could not bring their offering to the tabernacle. They were living somewhat as one huge community. This arrangement would end after the wandering and result in problems regarding personal sacrifices. God would make other arrangements.

After settling in the land, some 50 years prior to the incident in the 7th chapter of 1 Samuel (c. 1161 B.C.?), an angel appeared to Manoah and his wife. The passage reads in part: "Then Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, 'Please stay here until we can prepare a young goat for you to eat.' 'I will stay,' the angel of the Lord replied, 'but I will not eat anything. However, you may prepare a burnt offering as a sacrifice to the Lord.' (Manoah didn't realize it was the angel of the Lord.)" (Judg. 13:15-16 NLT). This seems to indicate that the command not to offer a burnt offering away from the tabernacle was no longer binding. The angel told Manoah that he could offer the goat as a burnt offering to the Lord right where he was at the time.

"Then Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and offered it on a rock as a sacrifice to the Lord. And as Manoah and his wife watched, the Lord did an amazing thing. As the flames from the altar shot up toward the sky, the angel of the Lord ascended in the fire. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell with their faces to the ground. The angel did not appear again to Manoah and his wife. Manoah finally realized it was the angel of the Lord, and he said to his wife, 'We will die, for we have seen God!' But his wife said, 'If the Lord were going to kill us, he wouldn't have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering. He wouldn't have appeared to us and told us this wonderful thing and done these miracles'" (Judg. 13:19–23 NLT). The angel said it was all right to offer the sacrifice to the Lord on the rock where they were. Then, by ascending in the flame, he showed his approval.

Therefore, we can only say that it was appropriate for Samuel to offer a burnt offering away from the tabernacle.

"Was Lamuel a priest?"

You seem to indicate that Samuel was not a priest. According to the Holman Bible Dictionary, the Bible Knowledge Commentary, the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, and other sources, Samuel was both priest and judge. There are several who disagree that he was a priest since he was not from the Kohath family from which the priests were chosen. A priest was a Levite, but all Levites were not priests. But, as a child, we find him wearing a linen ephod which priests wore (1 Sam. 2:18, 28). This does not mean he was a priest, but it does seem to indicate that he was thought of in a priestly manner at that early age. And after the death of Eli, the high priest, we find him filling the role of priest (1 Sam. 7:9, 17; 13:8; 16:2). If he was not an official priest, he did serve in that role. Was not the principal function of the priest to appear before God as the reconciling mediator on behalf of the people? Also, Saul was reproved for imposing upon Samuel's offering (1 Sam. 13:8-14). But whether he was officially a priest or just acting in that role, he was one of God's great men, who exercised his duties in a most exemplary manner.

Perhaps you are thinking that Samuel, if not a priest, should not offer a burnt offering away from the tabarmache Lace no reason why this

tabernacle. I see no reason why this would be the case. Anyone could offer a burnt offering away from the tabernacle just as Manoah did. Or as David did when he purchased the threshing floor from Araunah, built an altar, and sacrificed oxen as burnt offerings there. We know that his offering was approved because *"then the LORD answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped"*. Nor was this something David decided to do on his own, *"the Lord had commanded through Gad"* (2 Sam. 24:20–25, 19 NIV).



"A related question though not confined to Pamuel's times: The people were called to bring their offerings to the tabernacle at the three major pilgrimage feasts, but people then had to make a list of offerings they are going to bring with them to the tabernacle for the next feast or could they go to a local Levite or a local priest and ask them to make offerings for them? E.g. One lamb etc. for such and such guilt committed on a date, and some flour and oil for such and such gratitude, then add them up for the inter-feast period and bring them to the tabernacle or could they resolve the Levitical matters locally? How about sanctifying the unclean? You could not wait until the next feast. Ihank you very much."

Let us quickly review the major feasts and offerings.

Abib or Nisan [our March or April]: This first feast of the Jewish year was actually two in one; Passover and the feast of unleavened bread in commemoration of the angel visiting every Egyptian family and slaying the firstborn, but passing over the homes of the Israelites. It was also to commemorate their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Iyar [our June] was the feast of Pentecost [fifty days after the feasts of Abib]: for offering firstfruits of their crops after the wheat harvest.

Tishri [our October] included several observances: Feast of Trumpets or New Moon was a time for commemorating the Jewish (civil) New Year. On the 10th of Tishri was the Day of Atonement. It was a day of confession for sins and repentance. The high priest made a sin offering for all the people. Five days later was the Feast of Booths in observance of the wandering in the wilderness.

Only once a year the children of Israel assembled for a sin offering. It was a statute unto the Israelites *"to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year"* (Lev. 16:34). It also seemed that the substance of the offering depended very much on the occasion.

Sin offerings could be made at any time during the year for individuals. For example, when a woman gave birth she was to wait a certain number of days and then *"bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons,*

one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering" (Lev. 12:1–8 NIV). As for offerings regarding sores, etc. the requirement was "two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old, [and] three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil" (Lev. 14:10 NIV). So during the time of the Levitical priesthood, the offering was specific. Also, since they all lived in a community, there was no problem going to the priest at the tabernacle.

However, after settling in a wide area on both sides of the Jordan, a journey to the place of the tabernacle became more difficult. Therefore, to meet the needs of the people there were fortyeight cities where priests abode (See Num. 35:1–8; Josh. 21:4, 13–19). It was the priests who made sin offerings for individuals. So, in answer to your question, it seems that the people could make explation for sins or uncleanness locally after they had settled in the land.

Whenever considering sacrifices, we should always remember their purpose. Until the time of Christ it was a discipline, as well as a foreshadowing of things to come. They were for thanksgiving, for appreciation of God's providence, and to recognize His sovereignty. They were also a teaching medium: only the best could be given, indicating that we must always give our best to God. It was a giving of life: we must give our life to God, nothing withheld. It was not the sacrifices that God really wanted, but the whole person, the consecrated mind and body, the total obedience. As the scribe said to Jesus, "There is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifice:" These words were in keeping with the requirements for salvation because Jesus replied, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:32-34). David declared, "You are not pleased by sacrifices, or I would give them. You don't want burnt offerings. The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God, you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin" (Ps. 51:16-17 NCV).

Paul summed it up very well when he said, "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is" (Rom. 12:1–2 NLT). ◆

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. (Rom. 12:1 NLT)



FREE, FREED OR FREEDOM

- 1. What will make us free? (John 8:32)
- 2. If made free from sin what do you become? (Rom. 6:18)
- 3. What makes us free from the law of sin and death? (Rom. 8:2)
- 4. How are we "freed from sin"? (Rom. 6:6–7)
- 5. Under what rule or Empire were the Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem and so regain a measure of freedom? _____
- 6. What will all the faithful be free from? _
- 7. Where does it say, *"to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free"*?
- 8. Who obtained freedom for her father's house from death by a scarlet line?
- 9. Who paid a great sum to obtain his freedom? (Acts 22:28; 23:26)
- 10. Finish the verse "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the ______."(1 Cor. 7:22)

NATIONALITIES

What was the nationality of the following Bible characters?

- 1. Ruth
- 2. Candace
- 3. Darius
- 4. Rameses
- 5. Cyrus
- 6. Titus
 7. Sennacherib

CHRIST

- 1. Of whom did Christ say that they loved *"the uppermost seats in the Synagogues"*?
- 2. Who said that in the Judgment day a man shall give account of every idle word he has spoken?
- 3. Who did Christ say are His brother, His sister and His mother? _____
- 4. Give the sentence from Revelation which ends, "and their works do follow them." _____
- 5. What is Christ's saying about the coming night? (John 9:4) _____
- 6. In what book is the saying about the Lamb's book of Life? _____
- 7. What two masters did Christ say we cannot serve? _____ and _____
- 8. In what book does Christ call Himself "*Alpha and Omega*"?
- 9. After opening the eyes of the man blind from birth what did Christ say to him?
- 10. Complete Christ's question: "Is not the life more than meat _____."
- 11. Complete Christ's saying, "A man's life consisteth not ______."

LIBERTY

- 1. Complete the verse: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty
- 2. What prophet tells about proclaiming liberty to captives? ______
- 3. Who said we are free to be servants (slaves) of God?
- 4. Who said, "I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts"?
- 5. Finish: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is ______
- 6. Complete: "a man is a slave to _____
- 7. Fill in the blanks: "So _____ ye, and so ____ as they that shall be _____ by the law of _____."
- 8. As believers we look forward to being "_____ from the bondage of _____ into the glorious _____ of the children of God."
- 9. What does James call the mirror that perfectly pictures the human heart? ______
- 10. On what occasion were the Israelites to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof"?

Lesson Three THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Bible Text: Acts 2:5-13 NIV

5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"

8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?

9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome

11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

13 Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

We hear in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. -Acts 2:11 by RUTH E. SISSON

AM I HEARING THINGS?

READ ACTS 2:5–13

When Jesus sent power to His disciples on the day of Pentecost, the first evidence of the presence of that power was the gift of languages or "tongues." At Pentecost, this gift served a singular purpose. We read that there were gathered "God-fearing Jews from every nation...each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?" (Acts 2:5–11 NIV).

The news flashed across the city, as Luke puts it, and a *"multitude came together."*

Imagine an international conference being held today. Delegates from a score of nations, all having their translators beside them, suddenly discover that they can understand each other perfectly. Wouldn't it cause some excitement, even with modern technology? People would be asking, "Is this possible? Am I hearing things?"

Those holding the floor on the day of Pentecost were not representatives of the Roman court, nor even educated Jews from the Capital city. They were Galileans, men lacking any official distinction, who were being understood by everyone in their own tongues. They spoke, and everyone present heard and understood. *"We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God"* (Acts 2:11).

What had happened?

This needed some explanation!

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

1. What was the purpose of the gift of languages on that day of Pentecost?

(Mark 16:20).

The gift of tongues was not given to make the disciples feel good or look impressive. It was a gift designed to catch the attention of those present and to let them know that the disciples were indeed speaking for God.

What was the response? One hundred percent success! "Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:12 NIV).

They were all *"amazed"*—literally, dumfounded.

What was the cause of the unusual behavior of these people? Some derided. *"These men are full of new wine"* (2:13). There are always some ready to slander.

"Others mocked." The world has always had its mockers. They mocked Jesus, they mocked the believers. It is prophesied that in the last days there will be "mockers" who doubt the promises of God and the predictions of His Word (2 Pet. 3:1–4).

Peter stood up to answer the scorners. "*Drunk*?" he shouted. "*How* can these men be drunk? It is only nine o'clock in the morning." And, taking the floor, he proceeded to tell all who would listen that Jesus was the Messiah. It might not have been what they wanted to hear, but they had asked—and Peter had the answer.

Peter's Pentecost Sermon

READ ACTS 2:14–21

Peter's Pentecost sermon is among the most powerful in Scripture, ringing with Divine authority, citing Scripture upon Scripture to substantiate it. Carefully he explained who these people were, and what was the source of their power, noting that the event that day was a fulfillment of prophecy—if only they had read the Scriptures they could have known about it!

A PROPHECY FULFILLED

"This is that!" said Peter. The Holy Spirit power that Joel had prophesied was upon them!

Prophecy was being fulfilled. Again and again in recent months they had seen prophecy fulfilled in the life of Jesus. It was still happening. *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel."*

Never before had there been such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, not even among the prophets. Occasionally God had raised up one and given him special power, but never anything like this! Scores of people in one place were proclaiming the mighty works of God in languages they had never learned!

The event was without parallel in the past, there would be a still greater fulfillment in the future. The present outpouring of power benefited only a few people. In the time of the end, according to Joel's prediction (Joel 2:28–32), God promised to pour out His Spirit "upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17–18).

Then Peter, to identify the time when this greater outpouring would be fulfilled, added this description: "And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come" (Acts 2:19–20).

3. What great event will accompany the next and greater outpouring of Holy Spirit power? (Acts 2:20).

Did you know...

Peter, Peter ...?

¹ Was this Peter the same man who only a few months earlier had denied that he even knew Jesus? Now hear him proclaiming boldly to all who would listen that this Jesus is the one sent of God. Hear him as he shouts, *"you put him to death... God raised him from the dead."* And many of those listening were the same people who had been present when He was crucified.

0 = Insight

When is the "great and notable day of the Lord"? Was it the day of Pentecost? Were these prophecies fulfilled then? No, these prophecies await fulfillment at the second and greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit when Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom. As Jesus Himself indicated (Matt. 24:29–30), a greater Pentecost is yet to come.

And in that day, *"It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2:21).

A closer look

What Is Hades?

Hades is the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew term *sheol. Sheol* was the place where the bodies of the dead were buried, in other words, the grave. Its literal meaning was "a pit." Peter is saying simply that Jesus was put in a grave when He died, but that death could not hold Him.



assembled Jews (Acts 2:22)

Bible Text: Acts 2:22-35 NIV

22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

25 David said about him: "'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope,

27 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day.

30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.

31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand

35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."' $\ensuremath{\sc }$

- 4. What group of people will receive the greater outpouring? (Acts 2:17–18; Joel 2:28–32) _____
- 5. What specific benefits did Isaiah associate with the greater outpouring

of power? (Isa. 35:5-6) ____

Blood, Fire, Smoke

What is the meaning of the prophecy, "I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord come"? (Acts 2:19–20).

The Bible uses the terms "heavens" and "earth" to refer, in a figurative sense, to the ruling authorities of earth and those ruled over (see Isa. 1:2, 10), in other words, the political entities of earth. The ancient prophet said, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth"—literal heavens and earth would have no power to hear, or respond to the message. But the rulers being addressed, and those over whom they ruled could do both.

In the prophecy Peter cites (Acts 2:19–20) is a similar use of heavens and earth, along with associated terms (sun, moon). What is the meaning of these descriptive words (blood, fire, smoke, darkness)? They are symbols describing the convulsing and disintegrating of anything associated with the human system of government, anything in which the former generations placed their confidence, making way for the new and infinitely superior authority of Christ. This will bring about the "great and notable day of the Lord."

THIS IS FROM JESUS!

READ ACTS 2:22–35

Then Peter told them the truth about Jesus, the same Jesus they had all known (remember he was speaking in Jerusalem, the same city where only a few months earlier Jesus had been crucified.) He didn't need to tell them; they knew.

But what they would be slow to believe was the resurrection of Jesus. So Peter led them quickly to the core of his topic and the evidence underlying it. **Point #1: You knew Him, heard Him preach and crucified Him (Acts 2:22–23).**

Peter made clear that Jesus was a real Person from a real town and had done real signs and wonderful miracles among them. They had heard Him speak and watched His life.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22 NIV).

Peter went right on to speak of Jesus' cruel death "by wicked hands" (hands of those outside the law, i.e., Roman soldiers). He said, "You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." It was all current events, which no one could argue.

But notice how quickly he went on to the message of the resurrection. *"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him"* (Acts 2:23–24 NIV).

Point #2: David prophesied His death and resurrection (Acts 2:24–31).

Why wasn't it possible for death to hold Him? Because God raised Him, just as was prophesied. Peter quotes from Psalm 16: 8–11. "David said about him: 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence'" (Acts 2:25–28 NIV).

The central point of Peter's message is the resurrection. God would not leave (abandon) Jesus in hell (Greek, *hades*, the grave), nor would He "*see corruption*."

Obviously David had not been speaking of himself. David died and was buried. But being a prophet of God, David wrote about the Messiah, that though He would die His body would not decay.

Point #3: "We are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

Peter says, "We saw Him!" Jesus did not appear to the world at large after His resurrection, but He certainly made Himself known to His followers. Were these people dependable witnesses? Can we trust their word? We certainly can! Peter himself was one of them. And would he be preaching here at Pentecost if not for the resurrection, he who had denied he even knew Christ? The believers had nothing to gain by proclaiming a lie—especially when we realize it aroused official opposition and even threatened their lives! Who would *die* for a lie? But when the message is backed up by miracles, how can anyone dismiss it?

Point #4: The Holy Spirit power that day was a gift from Jesus! (Acts 2:33–35).

Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit, now they could see it. Wasn't this enough to be convincing? If Jesus was dead, He could not have sent it. They had it, so He must be alive, and doing just as He had promised!

Then, too, He could not have sent it if He had not ascended to heaven. To support this statement, Peter quoted David again, this time from Psalm 110. This prophecy could not possibly have applied to David (see Matt. 22:41–46).

- 6. Why did Peter place so much emphasis on Jesus' resurrection?
- 7. Suppose you were a very loyal Jew living in Jerusalem and hearing Peter's sermon. How would you describe your reaction to his message?
- 8. Peter wrote in his Second Epistle, *"We have not followed cunningly devised fables"* (2 Pet. 1:16). What evidence did he give in his Pentecost sermon to show it was not a fable? ______
- 9. How can we be sure David was prophesying of Jesus' resurrection in Psalm 16:8–11?_____

Insight
 "David did not ascend to heaven"... but Jesus Did!

In prophetic language (Ps. 16:7-11) David foretold that Jesus would die, and be resurrected. He also foretold that Jesus would ascend to heaven and be seated at the Father's right hand (Ps. 110:1). Peter made a contrast between Jesus-who was right then alive at the Father's right hand—and their ancestor David, who was "both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us to this day" (Act 2:29-35). Note the Peter also said "that David is not ascended into the heavens" (vs 34). This is in line with the teaching of the Bible that the dead sleep in the grave until the time of the resurrection (Job 17:13).



Resurrection in the Old Testament?

Some people contend that people in Old Testament times did not believe in a resurrection of the dead. But look at these passages:

- 1 Psalm 16, which Peter quoted, is clearly a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection.
- 2 Daniel prophesied that "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).
- 3 Job said of his own personal convictions: "I know that my redeemer lives...even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25–26 NASB).
- 4 David said of himself, "Because I have done what is right, I will see you. When I awake, I will be fully satisfied, for I will see you face to face" (Ps. 17:15 NLT).
- 5 Isaiah said of his personal hope, "Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy" (Isa. 26:19 NIV).
- 6 Hannah prayed, "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up" (1 Sam. 2:6 NIV).

What shall we say? The resurrection has been the hope of God's people from the beginning! It is still our very real hope today.



Did you know...

Voluntary Sharing

Was sharing in the Jerusalem church compulsory? Peter made it very clear only a short time later (Acts 5:4) that no one was under any compulsion to sell or give anything. Whatever was given was to be in a spirit of joy and love, following the example of Jesus. And the joy abounded. We read that they "took their food with rejoicing" (delight and great joy).

There should be no jealousy, no criticism, no wrangling among Christian believers, but only joy.



What Goals?

The only really safe place to lay up our treasure is in heaven! We must hold the things of this world with a loose hand, using them to aid us in gaining the treasure that cannot be taken away. It's too easy for us to get so involved in the things we can see and touch that we often forget they are only a means to a far greater end.

Every successful career or business has set for themselves goals, short-term goals and long-term goals. Periodically these goals are assessed. Are they being met, if not, why not? We must do the same in our spiritual lives.

Our long-term goal is to be perfectly wor-

The Bible says that those who heard Peter were "pricked in their heart" (2:37). Their conscience was stabbed. Peter said, "God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36). What was their response?

Some of them were convinced, and said to Peter and the other Apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

Peter answered by calling upon them to repent, change the direction of their lives and their fundamental attitudes, away from sin and self and toward God. "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call"* (Acts 2:38-39 NIV).

Repent...be baptized...be forgiven your sins...receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The first message was always "Repent." Repentance is a change of heart and mind, a total redirecting of one's life. Along with repenting they were to be baptized. Water baptism was part of the commission binding upon the apostles. It was a sacred rite by which they broke with their former life, were released from the guilt of their former sinful way of life, and joined the fellowship of the believers serving God.

Did Peter's sermon get results? The results were astounding. Three thousand were added to the Church!

All Things In Common

These new, zealous believers took another step: They pooled their goods, so that they could all share in their new Christian fellowship. Those who had little now had sufficient, and those who had more than sufficient still had enough. And *"every day they met regularly in the temple courts, daily they regularly frequented the temple with a united purpose"* (Acts 2:46). It was a voluntary system, and the Apostles were present, performing *"many miraculous signs and wonders."*

What a boost for the young Church!

At this time there was apparently no opposition or persecution. Common people who did not know Christ saw the believers worship, their good works, their joy, and were attracted by what they saw. This is why it is recorded that the Lord kept adding (together, in the Church) day by day those who were being saved. \blacklozenge to be continued

thy to live in the Kingdom. We know we have many things to overcome before that goal can be attained.

Each day we should set up smaller goals for ourselves—set aside devotional time for reading and meditation; apologize for a wrong done; to be more patient; to not procrastinate; to be strictly honest—and the list goes on.

Each day we need to assess our progress and strive to do better than the day before. That way we keep our focus and we can correct the wrong before it becomes an overwhelming problem.

In the midst of all this striving for perfection, we gain a peace and security the world cannot know. Though we are actively involved in life around us, we are not dependent on it for security. We know that it will soon pass and a far better order of things will be put into place. Without this perspective the world would be a very scary place.

How thankful I am for the knowledge of God's plan. It really gives a perspective to what is happening in the world. We know that God will take care of His own. And we know the only thing we are responsible to change is ourselves. That task is great enough!

We pray that God will bless each one at this time and the lessons received will aid in the task to change the old for the new and godly way, that our goal of perfection may be that much closer to being attained by this time next year is my prayer.

P. F. Texas

Consider the bottoming Consider the conside

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Ver the years, morning glories have taught me many things about life. Here are a few of my favorite lessons.

by BARBARA CRUM

"Bloom where you're planted."

You see, morning glories thrive even under the worst circumstances. Too much rain...poor soil...suffocating summer heat—nothing seems to stop them from reaching for the sky.

Mine even flourish out by my mail box where the salt and sand left by winter road crews would doom less tenacious plants. Their example inspires me to make the best of every situation I face, and always ask the Lord for guidance.

"Keep trying when adversity strikes."

I have witnessed a patch of tiny morning glory seedlings wither and droop as if the plants weren't even capable of beginning their upward climb. Several things could cause this—a soggy spring, or an errant weed trimmer. Or maybe I just clumsily stepped on them with my garden boots.

Nonetheless, within a few days or weeks, the loyal morning glories are as spirited as ever, spreading their vines and tendrils far and wide to every object within reach. Seeing how they hold on during times of tribulation or mishap, how could I do anything less in my own life?

"When things look the worst, hold on—it will be all right."

A few years back, we rebuilt the deck on our house. Unfortunately, before we stained it, I grew impatient and planted morning glories around the base.

By the time we were ready to stain the deck, the plants were already clinging to the railings. But they had to go. We tugged, pulled, snipped and clipped the plants until there was nothing left.

Or so we thought.

Then one morning a few weeks later, I happened to walk past the side of the freshly stained deck. Peering out cheerfully from the bottom edge of the deck was a lone blossom–a fortuitous survivor of the massacre.

With only a few sparse leaves surrounding it, that single morning glory looked as priceless as a pearl in a bed of seaweed.

Thanks, morning glories, your lessons have not gone unnoticed. Each day, I now make sure that I keep growing and blooming in my spiritual life, just like my favorite garden flowers! ◆

Elijah Still to Come?

"I happened to come across your website, because I am interested in the Rochester community. But your 'Prophecy For Today' section puzzled me. The 'Prophecy' said something to the effect that 'God has been silent, but soon the prophet Elijah will come...'

"I understand what you mean about God being silent, although I wouldn't put it in those words because I believe God is continually making Himself known to us, but my main concern is about Elijah. Didn't Jesus say that for those who can accept it, John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come: a voice crying out in the wilderness making the path straight for the Lord? Isn't that right? So what is this about Elijah coming again to prepare the way for the Lord?

"I would appreciate your thoughts and comments. Thank you."

Jesus did say in Matthew 11:14, when rehearsing John's mission, "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." And in Matthew 17:12–13, Jesus said likewise, "Elias is come already, and they...have done unto him whatsoever they listed," adding that "the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." But in the verse immediately preceding (Matt. 17:11), Jesus said this: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things," indicating a prophecy with a fulfillment still future.

Here are two directly opposite statements, both by Jesus. In one of them Jesus says Elijah (meaning John the Baptist) *has* come, and in the other He says Elijah *shall come*. How shall we understand Jesus' words?

We have two alternatives. We can say that Jesus must have been mistaken in either one statement or the other; or we can suggest that the problem lies in our understanding of His terms, that He referred to two different persons, both of whom He referred to as "Elias," and each as the herald of a different "coming."

We believe the latter to be true, that Jesus was indeed speaking of two different men as forerunners of His two different comings. John the Baptist was forerunner of His first advent just as Elijah will be forerunner of His second.

Why did Jesus refer to John the Baptist as Elijah (Greek form Elias)? An angel tells us how. In Luke 1:17, it was prophesied before his birth that John the Baptist would go before Him [Christ] in the "spirit and power of Elijah," i.e., with the "same zeal and courage against sin" (Harper's Greek Testament). John the Baptist was not Elijah, but he was to go before Christ at His first coming in the "spirit and power of Elijah," with the same devotion, the same ideals, the same zeal, the same courage against evil. Elijah put his life on the line when he denounced Jezebel. John the Baptist did similarly when he denounced Herod because of his marriage to Herodias. Elijah escaped (narrowly) with his life; John the Baptist was thrown into prison and soon beheaded.

John the Baptist not Elijah?

There are several reasons why we do not believe Jesus said that John the Baptist was literally Elijah or that he had fulfilled Elijah's role so completely that the real prophet Elijah need not come.

1. John himself plainly testified that he was not Elijah. When he was asked, "Art thou Elias?...he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No" (John 1:19–21).

2. John came announcing Christ's first coming just as prophesied, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias [Isaiah]" (John 1:23, quoting Isaiah 40:3–5). He did not come as

was prophesied of Elijah, "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," for there was nothing great or dreadful about Christ's first advent, nothing to compare with the greatness or dread that will accompany His second coming when there shall be a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (Dan. 12:1), when He shall come "taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:7-9). "All the proud" and "all that do wickedly" were not destroyed at Christ's first advent-as they were forecast to be at the coming which Elijah announces (Mal. 4:1-2).

3. John the Baptist was already dead when Jesus said *"Elias truly shall first come"* (Matt. 17:11), therefore John could not possibly be the *"Elijah"* Jesus referred to as still to come. Elijah the prophet of old was *not* dead—he had been miraculously translated, taken up *"by a whirlwind"* to some other habitable realm in God's great universe.

4. The angel, describing John's work before he was born, said of his mission: "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Matt. 1:17).

Malachi foretold the mission of Elijah, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5–6).

Notice the significant difference between the two prophecies. The angel speaking of John made no mention whatever about it preceding a *"great and dreadful day of the Lord"* (Mal. 4:5), nor did he mention the final result: *"lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"*(Mal. 4:6b).

Why would the angel omit such

important statements as these if John the Baptist were Elijah? Christ's first coming was not the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Nor was it the time when Elijah would *"turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers* **lest I come and** *smite the earth with a curse"* (Mal. 4:6).

No, Jesus spoke of two men. First, in Matthew 17:11, He spoke of Elijah the prophet who shall be the forerunner of Christ's second coming, even the *"great and dreadful day of the Lord"*; and then, in Matthew 17:12, He spoke of John the Baptist (called Elias, as the disciples "understood"—Matt. 17:13), who had already served as forerunner of Christ's first advent.

God's Silence

At the present time, God is silent. No one living has heard any audible voice or seen any open Divine intervention. The Bible supports this by indicating that the time will arrive when His silence will be broken (see Psalm 50:2–3).

But we do not mean to suggest that God is inactive. He is still working, still performing miracles (though not openly), still guiding and directing, still forwarding His plan. But it is all behind the scenes, so to speak. As it is so aptly said, *"The just shall live by faith"* (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

The idea of God being silent is supported by Scripture. It speaks of His intervention as a time when He breaks His silence. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence. A fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him" (Ps. 50:2–3).

We read also of His silence: "And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?" (Isa. 57:11). The phrase "have not I held my peace" is translated from a single Hebrew word chashah, which is defined as: "to be silent, quiet, still, inactive; ... to show inactivity, be inactive; to make silent, make quiet, cause to be still" (Enhanced Strong's Lexicon.) The NASB translated the verse: "Of whom were you worried and fearful when you lied, and did not remember Me nor give Me a thought? Was I not silent even for a long time...?"

Using the term in its strictest sense, it could be argued that God has never been silent (in the sense of inactive). But He has certainly shown inactivity or been thought to be inactive by those who wished to disregard Him.

Through the years covered by the Bible, there were periods when God was working actively and times when He was not. During the time of the kings, God spoke through His prophets, delivering messages, warnings, and sometimes open judgments. During the time of Jesus and His apostles, God was working openly. At times He sent power to the disciples, making it possible for them to perform superhuman wonders, so that it could be known that they were Divinely certified.

After the Apostolic Age, after the fall of Jerusalem, when the Bible was complete, God no longer worked in this

Answers to Questions on page 17

FREE, FREED OR FREEDOM

- 1. The truth (John 8:32, 36)
- 2. A servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:18)
- 3. The law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2)
- That henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. (Rom. 6:6–7)
- 5. The Persian Empire, King Cyrus (Ezra 4:1–13)
- 6. Death, sorrow and pain (Rev. 21:4)7. Isaiah 58:6
- 8. Rahab (Josh. 2:13, 21; 6:22–25)
- 9. Claudius Lysias, chief captain in charge of Paul (Acts 22:28; 23:26)
- 10. "Lord's freeman"(1 Cor. 7:22)

NATIONALITIES

- 1. Moabitess (Ruth 1:22)
- 2. Ethiopian (Acts 8:27)
- 3. Medianite (Daniel 5:31)
- 4. Egyptian (Gen. 47:11)
- 5. Persian (2 Chron. 36:23)
- 6. Grecian (Gal. 2:3)
- 7. Assyrian (2 Kings 18:13)

CHRIST

- 1. Pharisees (Luke 11:43)
- 2. Jesus (Matt. 12:36)
- 3. "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 12:50)
- 4. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13)
- 5. *"The night cometh, when no man can work"* (John 9:4)

way. That is why it is called a time of silence. He is working, but silently.

We find ourselves living very near the end of this time, near the time when He will openly manifest His power again, when Jesus will return and take over the administration of planet Earth, and *"all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."* It is said of this time that *"The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake"* (Joel 3:16). This is the time when His silence will be broken.

During this time of His apparent silence, when God is not "making Himself known" in any *open* way, His angels still encamp, He still *"hears the prayer of the righteous,"* He still guides and administers the affairs of earth in such a way as to bring about His purposes (Ps. 34:7; Heb. 1:14).

We eagerly await the end of His silence. \blacklozenge

- 6. Revelation 13:8
- 7. "God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13)
- 8. Revelation (Rev. 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13)
- 9. *"I am the light of the world"* (John 9:5)
- 10. "And the body than raiment?" (Matt. 6:25)
- 11. "In the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15)

LIBERTY

- 1. "Wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1)
- 2. Isaiah, chap. 61:1-2
- 3. Peter, in 1 Peter 2:16, (NLT): "You are not slaves; you are free. But your freedom is not an excuse to do evil. You are free to live as God's slaves."
- 4. David (Psalm 119:45)
- 5. *"there is liberty"* (2 Cor. 3:17)
- 6. *"A man is a slave to whatever has mastered him"* (2 Pet. 2:19 NIV)
- 7. "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." (Jas. 2:12)
- 8. We look forward to being "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21)
- 9. the perfect law of liberty, (James 1:25)
- At the beginning of the year of Jubilee, every fiftieth year, (Lev. 25:10)

leclaration Dependence

e hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are incapable of living as their own masters; neither do any of us have power to extend our lives beyond that which is allotted us. We are unable to save

"Yet we have within us a desire for fruitfulness, for meaning and fulfillment. The great Creator has set eternity in our hearts, and built withourselves.

in us a willpower capable of transcending ourselves and our low surroundings and reaching even to His levels of thought. "But we need guidance. We need the help of a Higher Power to save

us from ourselves. We need help from above. We hereby declare our only hope to be this—that we may find favor with the God who created us, and thereby merit His eternal blessings. We therefore, the people who are gathered here today in His Holy Name, do hereby declare our dependence upon Him, with a firmer resolve that we shall show ourselves indeed worthy of our privileges, that sin shall no longer reign in us but that we shall henceforth be His, and shall recognize our right to take no liberties with anything He forbids, but to live wholly within His will, to do always and only the things that are pleasing to Him, and thus ultimately to find freedom from the bondage of mortality. "In humble recognition of God's graciousness to us, and His handiwork all about us, we do hereby declare our dependence upon Him and

pledge ourselves to a life of faithful obedience."

Signed _____

T he best Christian is not the one who talks most about God but the one who really walks with God.

Life is like a band—we need not all play the same part, but we must play in harmony.

Today

will this day try to live a simple, sincere and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, and love, exercising economy in expenditure, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity in every duty and a childlike trust in God.

t's not the talented people who serve the Lord best, but the dedicated ones.

A Simple Prayer

Lord, take Your candle and go through every chamber of my life from its topmost turret down to its deepest vault. Light with Your own light the dark recesses in it and show me things as they appear to You.

When Jesus chose His disciples, He selected busy men, but not too busy to put first things first.



Growing Habits

"When I was a little boy," remarked an old man, "somebody gave me a cucumber in a bottle. The neck of the bottle was small, the cucumber was large. I wondered how it got there. Then out in the garden one day, I came upon a bottle slipped over a little green cucumber. Then I understood. The cucumber had grown inside the bottle."

"Often I see men with habits, I wonder how any strong, sensible man could form such bad habits. Then I reflect that they are like the cucumber in the bottle. Likely they grew into them little by little, and now they cannot easily slip out of them."

Let's take a serious look at our own habits. It is easier not to let them be formed, than to break them once they are formed.



When there is no evil within, no evil will come out.

Don't pray to escape trouble. Pray to do the will of God in every situation.

If you are a Christian, you can expect folks to criticize, but you ought to live so nobody will believe them.

he miracle of a transformed life is the best evidence of the Gospel's power.

 $H_{appiness is a by-product of achievement.}$

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.

Knowledge is boundless...human capacity is limited.

He is free whom the truth makes free, and all are slaves beside.



You can't paint black and not get black, No matter how hard you try, You may paint with care, but the stains are there, And stay when the paint is dry. You can't fool around where the sinner's found, Make friends of the foolish kind, But it leaves some taint, like the mark of paint, On your heart or your soul or your mind. You may say you can, and you may think you can, That you'll keep your own hands clean, A mark that you have not seen, For sin is a thing that will always cling, Though you only meant to play; That is hard to wash away. You can't paint black and not get black, You can't fool around with sin, It will leave its trace on the human face, Its mark on the heart within. By the words you use and the friends you choose, You are made for the years to be; You may think they'll not, but they'll leave a blot, For the rest of the world to see.

Anon