

Megiddo Message

Vol. 87, No. 8
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*This is the day the Lord has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it.*
—Psalm 118:24 TLB



Are You A People Pleaser?

A 15-year-old girl says, "I want to look just like my friends. I don't care what they do, I just want to look like them." A typical teenage view, it is by no means limited to teens.

All of us are born people-pleasers. We are unreasoningly conscious of what others think of us, whether positive or negative. Instinctively our opinions are framed by these criteria in this order: 1) What *others* think; 2) What *I* think; 3) What *God* thinks.

Depending on the issue, this type of thinking may not be destructive. Take a simple issue: Why do I mow my lawn? My first instinct tells me to say that I like a neatly groomed lawn. My second reason might be that my neighbors mow theirs, so I know they appreciate seeing mine well groomed. (Besides, who wants to be the owner of the only unkempt lawn in the community!)

What does this tell me? That if I look at the issue objectively, I probably act first on the basis of what *others* think of me and second by what *I* think. (If I lived where no one ever would see my lawn, would I mow as diligently?) Is there any right or wrong issue here according to God's law? Probably not, unless I let the care of my lawn crowd out more important concerns.

Now take another situation: Should I put time and money into additional education? If my first real reason is that I want to be like others, that I want to do it because my peers are doing it and I do not want to be left behind, that is the wrong motivation. If I am doing it to be of greater service—to others, to my church, to my employer, to myself—then I have a reason which may be justified. Should God's opinion be in the picture? Most definitely, because my time (and money) belongs to God, and I must give account for how I use it. If my desire for education has no purpose but to keep up with my peers, and does nothing to give me spiritual benefit, how can I justify it? But if I am learning something which is necessary and useful, I should be able to do it with a clear conscience.

So what is my order of thinking? What is first in my life? If I am most concerned about my spiritual welfare, my first question should be, What pleases God? What will benefit me eternally? And only *after* that do I consider what *I* would like and what others may think of it.

This order of decision making becomes especially important when direct moral issues are involved. For example, what do I tell a 14-year-old who wants to go to the dance because "everyone else is going"? If my first criteria in making decisions has always been what others think of me, where is the consistency in telling him that he should not attend the dance because his school friends will be there?

When pleasing people becomes our basic motivation, when our first concern is "What will so-and-so think of me?"—without regard for what is right or wrong, we violate our loyalty to God.

To try *not* to please people would make life unnecessarily complicated. But in pleasing others, I must remember that I answer to God, that my time is His, and I am accountable to Him for the use I make of it.

This means that, all other issues being equal, my decisions must be made according to priority. And in re-ordering priorities, inevitably I will please some people and offend others. Are there any Scriptural guidelines?

Jesus' command must be prime: "*Set your heart on his kingdom and his goodness, and all these things will come to you as a matter of course*" (Matt. 6:33 Phillips). And Paul the apostle, writing of our duty to one another, says, "*We should please others. If we do what helps them, we will build them up in the Lord*" (Rom. 15:2 NLT). Put these together, and we have a primary duty to God and also a duty to others. Paul says also, "*Let us have real warm affection for one another as between brothers, and a willingness to let the other man have the credit. Let us not allow slackness to spoil our work and let us keep the fires of the spirit burning, as we do our work for the Lord*" (Rom. 12:9-11, Phillips).

Then there is the inescapable duty to ourselves. But as we do right by ourselves we help others also. As Paul wrote, "*Make these matters your business and your absorbing interest, so that your progress may be plain to all. Persevere in them, keeping close watch on yourself and your teaching; by doing so you will further the salvation of yourself and your hearers*" (1 Tim. 4:15-16, NEB). Both benefit!

Every decision I make must relate first to God's approval. Is anyone upset? I have only pity for them, because my first commitment is to God. This means I want to have a very small concern for what others think of me and a very great concern for what God thinks of me. Said Jesus, "*How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?*" (John 5:44 NIV).

This principle is central to the successful Christian life. But it promises total benefit, now and future. When we please the Lord, we upgrade the quality of our relationships with others. Proverbs 16:7 says: "*When the ways of people please the Lord, he makes even their enemies live at peace with them*" (NLT).

So what is the best order? First, what does God think? What I think and what others think can follow along. The first question is the one Jesus must have asked, for He could say, "*I do always those things that please Him [the heavenly Father].*" Can we say this? ♦

WHO IS YOUR HERO?

Everyone needs a hero. Whatever our ideals, passions or pursuits, whether we are young or old, rich or poor, our hearts cry out for a hero to follow. Even a Plato needed a Socrates to inspire him. An Alexander the Great had to have an Aristotle.

Who is your hero?

Finding the "ideal" authority

As children, the first authority we recognize is our parents. As we mature, our peers begin to take on more and more the voice of authority, especially if our parents are not conscientious. Sometimes a child matures to respect the authority of the "gang" and rejects the authority of parents, police, and society.

College and university students sometimes reject the advice and philosophy of parents and home and take that of a favorite professor or of some school of thought that appeals to them. Then, out of school, that authority becomes the "rules of the game" in their chosen profession or line of business.

Hero: A person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his or her life: a person noted for special achievement in a particular field

—Webster

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MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

WE BELIEVE...

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

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

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

- ♦ in the promise of God, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

THE HERALD AND THE KING

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

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

But keen, discerning people soon discover that each succeeding hero has feet of clay. Parents are imperfect. The gang is no wiser than oneself, the professor proves to be all too human, and business ethics are selfish and narrow. So the search for authority—the ideal authority—continues.

The same search for a hero can extend into religion, and some turn away disappointed. Others find the authority they need.

Choosing a hero

When one chooses a field, he or she very often—consciously or subconsciously—chooses a hero. If you want to be an artist, you might choose for your hero a Rembrandt or a Norman Rockwell. If to be a scientist is your dream, you might choose an Einstein. If your heart leans toward being an actor or actress, a musician or politician, you find one who is outstanding in that field and make that one your ideal. Against great odds you may fulfill your dreams. You may even go on to be among the world's greatest.

Then, only a little while later, you are caught by the brevity of life. Perhaps you gave little thought to the issues of life and death. Now you are old. Suddenly, you realize death is inevitable for you, too. Who can help you now? Where is your hero? As you realize that you must follow your hero to the confines of eternal darkness, you might wish that you could reconsider your choice of a hero.

But did you know that life doesn't have to end in defeat, not if you choose the right hero?

What makes a hero?

True heroism is not the fickle fame or fortune that society may heap on an individual one day and take away the next. True greatness is an inner quality expressed in courageous love and caring, giving and sacrifice. It may or may not be recognized or acclaimed, for when virtue is fundamental, it speaks for itself.

The true hero lights a torch that illuminates an ideal and makes life worth living—not only for oneself but for all whose lives he touches. The life of a great hero is a beacon showing others how to make the wisest and best choices.

Who?

Does your hero have qualities that win your admiration?

Are these qualities you wish for yourself?

Are they qualities that you can see yourself attaining? If you can answer yes to these questions, then look closer at



Daniel

Date: Sixth Century BC

Place: Jerusalem until his mid-teens, then Babylon

Born into an upper-class Jewish family, Daniel was taken from his homeland with a group of captives while still a teenager (probably no older than 15 years of age) to the land of Babylon. In Babylon he was pushed through a highly concentrated course in the foreign culture, and quickly emerged as a man of outstanding ability. Chosen early to be advisor to the king, before his career ended Daniel had been advisor to two Babylonian kings and two Medo-Persian kings.

But most important, Daniel was a model of integrity, flawless to the core. A lifelong worshipper of the true God, he held to his faith against any and all opposition. His loyalty to God superseded every other loyalty, at the same time making him more loyal to his superiors.

Even though Daniel spent his entire lifetime, from early youth, in foreign lands, he never compromised his loyalty to God. Through him God revealed the future, and he was highly honored for being able to interpret

dreams and visions, but always Daniel gave all credit to his God, saying, "*There is a God in heaven that reveals secrets.*"

When he was very aged, he was still serving the king (at that time King Darius, the Mede), but jealous comrades who could find no fault in him deceived the king into issuing a decree that only the king could be worshipped. Daniel was caught, because he remained loyal to God, and thrown into a den of lions. But God delivered him, and he emerged unharmed.

Daniel went a long way for an ideal. In youth he resolved not to defile himself with the king's rich food, and at an advanced age he resolved to continue his daily prayers to the God of his fathers. His stand was not an easy one to take, but this is how Daniel lived by his highest ideals, and down through the centuries have come the ringing words: "Dare to be a Daniel."

Before God he bowed the knee; before men he stood erect and unafraid.

What is the lesson for us? Dare always to do right, and God will honor that kind of conviction, just as He has in the past. If you are faithful to God, He will be faithful to what He has promised.

*Dare to be a Daniel,
dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm,
dare to make it known.*

*Choose your hero carefully,
one who will demand the highest
achievement you can obtain.*

HEROES of GOD

Moses

Time: 15th Century BC

Place: Egypt, Midian, Wilderness of Sinai

Occupation: Prince, shepherd, law-giver, leader of the Israelites

Recognition: meekest man (Num. 12:3)

According to Stephen in the New Testament, Moses' life divides into three 40-year segments. The first 40 years he spent in Egypt, being taught by his mother and the Egyptian schools. The second 40 years he spent alone in Midian, learning the lessons of life in the solitude of the desert. The third 40 years he spent leading the Hebrew people through the desert from Egypt to Sinai, being taught by the trials, discouragements, and tests



which he personally received from his God and from his people.

Moses was an outstanding example of a personality shaped by God. When God first called him to lead His people out of Egypt, Moses said he couldn't do it.

But he cooperated and served, and his character grew.

Moses was God's man for a time of crisis.

Moses grew in character as he worked with a stubborn, rebellious and God-forgetting people. His task was to bring them through to Canaan, to be God's instrument in any way God chose, to transform them from a horde of undisciplined slaves into a self-respecting, independent, and God-honoring nation. Moses did all in his power to make it happen.

What can we learn from Moses? That when God gives a task, He gives also the strength and the ability to do it.

HEROES of GOD

Joshua

Time: 1500s Century BC

Occupation:

Slave, military commander and successor of Moses as leader of the Israelites.

It is an enormous privilege for a young man to serve an apprenticeship under a man of surpassing strength, goodness and knowledge. They are wise who recognize the worth of such tutelage and make use of the opportunity.

Joshua recognized his opportunity and



allowed the lessons of his fellowship with the great man of God Moses to mold his life and spirit. Joshua is the very image of the faithful servant and loyal officer.

Inevitably, Joshua learned to rely on his hero and leader and draw into the fabric of his own personality the traits of Moses' character.

Brave Joshua, faithful to the God whom Moses served, developed into another hero for us to pattern after.

Taking the torch which burned so brightly in Moses' hand, Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. He had learned his lessons well.

Joshua's challenge to us is, Take that torch and run, all the way to the Promised Land!

this person and let this person's words and deeds live in you.

If you are satisfied with something you can see or experience in this present life, then choose a hero who best fits that course. But if you aspire to goals beyond this world, you must choose a hero who has "been there" and "done that." You must set your goals high, higher than any you see around you. After all, what is wealth when you die? What is honor? What is acclaim? Of what benefit is the highest recognition when you lie lifeless in the tomb?

To set your goals on anything in this world is to live and die and be forgotten, because all must be left at the mouth of the grave. Why not set your heart on the great wealth that you can have on the other side of death? Why not choose the one and only Hero who can bring you forth from the grave and crown you with happiness, riches and honor?

There is one such Hero, and He beckons you and me to follow Him. Accept His challenge and your life will become worthwhile. He will lead you through the dark valleys to the tallest of mountain peaks. He will lead you in danger and safety, in sorrow and joy, and in pain and comfort, in death and life. His hand is always outstretched to bring you through.

The Greatest Hero

This Hero never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family of His own. He never went to college. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness as we define it. Yet He is the greatest Man that ever lived. Though He lived 2000 years ago, today He still lives, not just in the hearts and minds of His followers but as a great individual, glorified at the Father's right hand and soon to return as King. You know His name: Jesus Christ.

This world judges the greatness of men and women by their wealth, by their influence, their achievements, their inventions,

great writings, military might or discoveries. But Jesus was great for a reason far surpassing the greatest accomplishments in science, literature and invention. He was great because of the selfless, self-sacrificing life He lived. It was a

life that will give life to us if we follow it to the end.

Jesus stands on the highest mountain peak beckoning us to follow. Is the summit too high for us? Christ has given the command: *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matt. 5:48). He is not saying that we must live perfectly from start to finish but that we must "grow" into holiness (Eph. 4:15), that we must become pure even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3), following the example of Christ as dear children of God (Eph. 5:1-2).

As we look at Christ and what the Scriptures tell us of Him, we see a character of majesty. His goodness draws us; His courage challenges us; His purity guides us; His love penetrates us; His optimism lifts us, His faith shines as a beacon ahead of us. And as we listen, can't we hear the echo of His words as still He calls: *"Follow me"*? In other words, do as I do.

Our Hero's profession in life was higher than that of one who pours his energies into pursuing the knowledge of this world. Christ was intense in His profession. He was seeking the highest knowledge that could be gained, knowledge taught by His heavenly Father. Into seeking this knowledge He poured His very life. Succeeding, He could say to others: *"Learn of me."*

So closely did Christ do the will of His Father that if we look to Him and know Him, we will also know the Father, for He taught only those words which the Father taught. Because He was made like us and battled every human tendency we battle, Jesus has gripped the hearts of men and women across 2000 years, and they have found in Him a Savior and a Pattern. He has brought men and women from despair to radiant hope; from defeat to victory; from immorality to purity; from cruelty to kindness; from wayward wandering to purposeful living. He has changed homes of strife to homes of peace.

When He returns He will come *"in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes"* (Isa. 40:10 NLT). He will come bringing the reward—first to a few, and then, in the end, to an innumerable host that will fill the earth with His glory.

Following Christ

Have you decided to follow Christ as your hero? Then you have determined that He is going to be your guide, your mentor in life. You have also discovered that Christ was well versed in the Scriptures, even at 12 years of age! Paul followed Christ, his hero, and wrote to Timothy, *"You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood...All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to*

HEROES
of GOD

Elijah

Time: Ninth Century BC

Place: Palestine, east of the Jordan River, then called Gilead

Occupation: Prophet and teacher

Elijah was a great prophet of the Lord, noted for his sudden appearances and bold denunciation of wickedness. He also performed many miracles.

Elijah's very name affirms his faith. Elijah means *"My God is Jehovah."*

Because of his firm stand for his God, this dynamic Israelite prophet found himself in conflict with the standards of his time. Under threat of death, he delivered God's message to the rebellious and apostate Ahab, then king of Israel, telling him that because of his nation's rampant wickedness and idolatry,

there would be no rain in the land until he gave the word. A three-year drought followed. When the drought had become a national crisis, Elijah challenged the priests of the false deities to meet him on Mt. Carmel in a contest, to show whose God could bring rain and end the drought. Even with the most desperate incantations the false priests were powerless to bring rain. At the end of the day, Elijah offered a simple prayer to the God of heaven, who promptly answered with a deluge of rain.

So dedicated was Elijah to serving his God that the Lord took him up by a whirlwind to some other world, from which he will return one day, to prepare the way for the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

We would do well to emulate Elijah's faith, courage and zeal. If Elijah could be true to God during a time of rampant idolatry and rebellion at every level of his society, what excuse have we for the least unfaithfulness today!

To acknowledge a Christ-like quality in someone, then make it your own, is to make Christ your hero. You are that much more like Him.

HEROES of GOD

Hannah

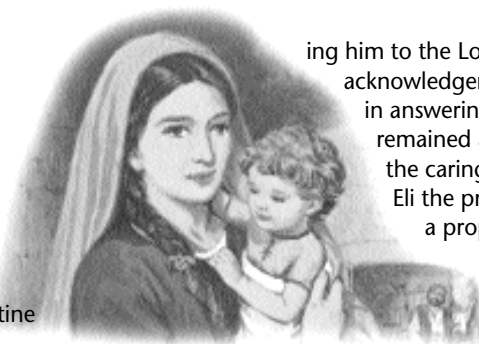
Date: Early 1100s BC

Place: The region of Mount Ephraim in Palestine

Occupation: Wife of Elkanah, mother of Samuel, and prophetess

Hannah, childless for many years, made a request of the Lord for a child. She vowed to the Lord that if He would give her a son she would, in turn, dedicate that child to Him.

The Lord blessed her with a son, and Hannah fulfilled her vow by bringing her small son (Samuel) to the sanctuary at Shiloh, present-



ing him to the Lord with a grateful acknowledgement of His goodness in answering her prayer. The child remained at the Temple under the caring and watchful eye of Eli the priest. Hannah then sang a prophetic song as her heart rejoiced, not in Samuel, but in the Lord. She looked beyond the gift and praised the Giver. She rejoiced in the salvation of the Lord and in expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ, who would bring salvation to His people.

Gratitude, trustworthiness and faith, all deep characteristics of Hannah's character, are qualities for us to emulate. For we, too, have made a vow to God, and we must keep it.

make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do" (2 Tim. 3:15-17 NLT).

Bible heroes

Did Christ have heroes to admire? I think He did. From a very early age He studied the Scriptures, and learned of its heroes. He saw their strengths and made them His own. He saw their failures and determined to avoid their error. So great was His success that He could say, *"I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me"* (John 8:28). Doesn't this mean that He received instruction from the Father?

James recommended that we follow the heroes. *"My brethren,"* he wrote, *"take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience"* (5:10). Paul could even point to himself as an example to follow. *"Brethren, join in following my*

example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Phil. 3:17).

We don't have a monopoly on Christ. There are many heroes from whom we can learn. Did they please God? So can we. Did they overcome the sin in their nature? So can we.

The writer of Hebrews was so impressed with the heroes of old that he devoted a whole chapter to them (Hebrews, chapter 11). Look closely at these heroes and analyze their character, their weaknesses and their strengths. Then answer these questions:

- What one characteristic stands out more than any other among these heroes?
- What can I do to add this feature to my character?
- Can I see any character flaw in them that is similar to mine? What is it?
- What sources were available to them to help them overcome?
- How did they respond to these sources?
- How can I apply what I learn to my life to help me overcome my character flaws?

Faith was the hallmark of the heroes of God. But no matter how much one may wish otherwise, faith is not cheap. It requires considerable investment of time and energy because faith is the reward of hearing, study, and application. We may claim faith, but did you know there is a dead faith? That means it is so shallow that when it is tested it will be shown to be just what it is—no faith at all. James tells us, *"faith without works is dead"* (James 2:20, 26).

Like any other specialized skill, it can only be developed by practice, by obeying the One in whom we place our faith.

Someone asked, "Why do I keep saying these bad words? I try not to." The answer is that we are creatures of habit. If you are accustomed to swearing and cursing, it will surface when least expected, no matter how much you wish to

*Read Hebrews 11 thoughtfully,
and I believe you will agree: to
follow Christ is to study the lives
of those who followed Him.*

keep it a secret. Christ tells us to put away these things. If we follow His example there will be no stain of these ungodly habits on our record, but it will take practice. Start practicing right now, and soon your record on this point will be clean. All God asks of us is that we *"stop doing wrong; learn to do right"* (Isa. 1:16–17 NIV).

Modern heroes

If we look about us we may find some heroes today who have features that are Christ-like. Mark that one who is ready to forgive, who is kind, longsuffering, self-sacrificing and learn from him. Look for the good and make it your own.

One modern hero from whom we can benefit is our own founder, the Rev. L. T. Nichols. His honesty, his attention to detail, his untiring determination to understand the Scriptures resulted in a monumental accomplishment from which many have benefited. His life is a legacy which we would do well to observe. Much can be learned from his care and effort to share his knowledge and faith. He spoke of God and to God as to a dear friend with a ready ear. First, last, and always his aim was to save himself and all who were willing to hear and obey his Hero, our Lord and Master.

Above all he was seeking the true Bible message, without the bars of human thought. Through sleepless nights he persevered, relentless, if only he could learn the true teachings of the Word of God. He welcomed challenge. If he was wrong on any point he wanted to know it. Whenever he found himself in error he was ready to change.

He did find error. Perhaps the greatest error he found was how to acquire salvation. As soon as he discovered that in order to be saved one must obey all the commandments just as Jesus taught, he discarded the popular teaching on the subject and devoted the rest of his life to trying to persuade others to do as he did—to learn and apply the teachings of the Bible to his own life. His faith in

HEROES of GOD

Timothy

Time: 1st Century AD

Place: Lystra, a city in Asia Minor (now Turkey)

Occupation: Minister of the Gospel, fellow-laborer with the Apostle Paul

When the Apostle Paul set out on his first missionary journey, and passed through the city of Lystra, he probably had no idea that a youth who heard him preach would in just a few short years become his devoted assistant and faithful minister of the Gospel.

The youth's name was Timothy, a child of godly heritage through his Christian Jewess mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. He had been quite literally cradled in the things of God. *"From a child"* he had known the faith.

When young Timothy first heard Paul preaching, he was captured by the great Apostle's

faith, devotion, and courage. Brother Paul was Timothy's hero! He would be like him!

In just a few years, he had joined Paul, and even though very young, he was ready to face the most difficult task, the most arduous journey, the most severe testing with his father in the faith.

In his New Testament letters, Paul mentions no one more frequently than Timothy, and speaks often of him as his son-in-the-faith, one who could be fully trusted to do as he himself would do. Did people look down on him and reject his message because he was young? Paul challenged him to make them look up to him because of his example of faith, courage, love, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

Wouldn't we like to see Timothy meet Brother Paul?

When you face a challenge that seems beyond you, remember loyal Timothy, loving Timothy, faithful Timothy. He was a young believer who took his religion very seriously. You can, too, and reap the same eternal benefits.

HEROES of GOD

Ruth

Time: Early 1300s BC

Place: Country of Moab, east side of Jordan and Bethlehem in Judah.

Because of a severe famine in Israel, Naomi, with her husband and two sons, had left their home in Bethlehem of Judea and had relocated to Moab. While in Moab, Naomi's sons married Moabite women. Soon after, Naomi's husband and both her sons died, leaving Naomi alone with her two daughters-in-law.

When the famine was over, Naomi wished to return to her homeland. Would her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, go with her? When she asked them, their quick response was that they wanted to go with

her. But Naomi wanted to be sure. Life in Israel would be very different from the life they had always known in Moab. Were they sure they wanted to go? Did they really want to leave their families and their accustomed form of worship for a totally strange land and culture?

Orpah turned back at the thought, but Ruth insisted, *"Don't ask me to leave you and turn back....Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God....May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"*

Because of her unflinching dedication to Naomi and her God, Ruth was soon embraced by her new family in Israel, and gleaning in the fields of Boaz to support Naomi and herself. She became the wife of Boaz, the great-grandmother of David, and was among the ancestors of Jesus.

What devotion! Is your faith so intense that you will follow Christ wherever He leads?

God was complete. There could be no turning back.¹

¹ To learn more about the life and work of Mr. Nichols, send for our booklet, *An Honest Man*.

HEROES of GOD

The Apostle John

Time: 1st Century AD

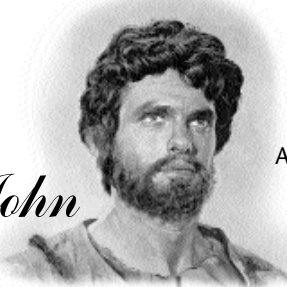
Place: Bethsaida in Galilee, Ephesus, Patmos

Occupation: Fisherman, teacher and apostle

Known as: "Disciple whom Jesus loved"

When Jesus called the two sons of Zebedee to follow Him, He was opening the door to a lifelong career for James and John. For James it was a very short career (Acts 12:2). For John it was very long. Likely the youngest of the Twelve, John was also, as far as we know, the last to die. Among his latest assignments was the honorary task of writing the book of Revelation, one final direct communication from Jesus.

We are deeply indebted to John as the author of five New Testament books (the gospel of John, three epistles, and Revelation). His writings show that he was a man



who thought deeply about what he believed, and did his best to comprehend the scope of Jesus' ministry and its meaning in eternal terms.

Along with the rest of the apostles, John was Jesus' constant companion during His swift-moving three year ministry. With Peter and James he belonged to Jesus' "inner circle," the privileged three. John had the singular distinction of being called "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*."

But John was not a born saint. Like everyone else, he had to grow in character. By nature intolerant, vindictive, and hot-headed, he easily fell into competing for first place when the disciples were trying to decide "*who should be the greatest*" (Mark 10:35-37). But one reading his writings can also feel his eagerness to learn and his strong desire to become like his Lord. So deeply impressed was he with Jesus' example of love that he made it the subject of his First Epistle, pleading, "*Dear friends, let us love one another; for love come from God*" (1 John 4:7 NIV).

Would we choose John for our hero? Right now is the time to become more like his Master and ours—in every loving word and deed.

The Hero: Christ

As we look through the pages of history at the heroes who have come and gone, we see many great men and women. But as we stand and gaze with our eyes fixed upon the farther shore, a single figure fills the horizon. He is the Savior, our Hero. Soon He will return and all the great heroes of the past will awake and join the living who are eagerly looking for Him.

It is impossible to express the greatness of our Hero, and for good reason—our minds are not able to comprehend His greatness. As the apostle John wrote, "*There are...many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written*" (John 21:25). There is just no greater than He. "*God...has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*" (Phil. 2:9-11).

The libraries of the world are full of books about Him. The Bible is a perennial best seller. Each year new books appear, telling of Jesus and His greatness. The Christian world try to express Him in symbols, the most common being the cross. But He is far greater than that.

What can I do to proclaim His greatness? How can I tell the world that He is my Hero, my Savior, my King? There is only one way: by following Him implicitly, by making my life imitate His. I want His character to be mine, His holiness, His purity, His patience, His peace.

Let us seek God's help in an all-out effort to be like our Hero. One day at a time, one moment at a time. Then someday we can live with our Hero—and *be* heroes too!

*Marching like the heroes,
Comrades of the strong,
Lift we hearts and voices,
As we march along.*

*So we sing the story
Of the brave and true,
Till among the heroes
We are heroes too!* ◆

*Study the lives of great men
or women and learn their
treasured secrets. Let their lives
give life to you.*




Go to the Geese


W

hen King Solomon wrote, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (Prov. 6:6), he was telling us to let the animal kingdom teach us spiritual lessons.


What can we learn if we "go to the geese"?

 It is said that geese fly in a "V" formation because each bird in the string creates an "uplift" for the bird following, making it possible for the bird to travel 70% further than it could if it flew alone.

We can apply this principle to our lives. Don't we all need the "lifting power" of association with others? People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.


 If a goose falls out of formation, it feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

If we have as much sense as a goose we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

 When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back into the formation and another


goose takes the lead. No one bird is always in the lead.

We need to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. We do not need to always be the front runner. Sharing the lead, sharing the responsibilities is better for all of us. None of us is the "boss," but we all need to be willing at times to accept our share of the responsibility, to buck the headwinds of criticism and help those who are following.


 The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Is our honking always encouraging to those who hear it? Where there is loving, Christ-like encouragement, there is peace and harmony, and production is greater. Everyone benefits. The power of encouragement (to stand by one's core values and encourage the heart and core of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

Instead of criticizing, let us encourage each other—like the geese.

 When a goose gets sick or wounded, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. The geese will stay with the disabled goose until it is able to fly or dies, then they will launch out to join another formation or catch up with the flock.

Are we as concerned with the problems of others as are the geese? Do we stand by each other in difficult times as well as when things are calm?

 It is said that the most characteristic feature of the geese is their closely knit family life. Geese mate for life, and the little goslings are faithfully tended by both parents. The family migrates as a unit to and from the winter grounds, the young remaining with their parents until the beginning of the new breeding season.

If we go to the geese, as Solomon told us to "go to the ant," we learn that marriage is for life and that we must work together, teaching our children in the ways of Christ and doing everything in our power to keep the family unit intact.

The next time you look up and see a flock of geese flying in the "V" formation and hear their familiar honk, thank your Heavenly Father that in His wisdom He is teaching you to take lessons from these lowly creatures. Our Lord has told us: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. 6:26).

Yes, go to the geese, consider their ways and be wise. ♦

Wholehearted Devotion To God

A discourse by the Rev. L. T. Nichols, written about 1900

We wish to say a few words to encourage and invigorate our minds, and to enable us to become so stimulated in the inner man that we will enter the work before us with renewed strength and growing energy. Our devotion to truth must be so deep that we will make all we have and are subservient to the will of God.

Who is in reality becoming thus invigorated and energized? In answering this inquiry, we look not for words only, but for words backed up by unmistakable works of righteousness, works that will show that we are indeed fully engaged in the work of the Lord.

The nearness of the coming of our Master should cause us to enter into this inquiry with greater longing to know our real standing before God. It should cause us to have a growing desire to know ourselves just as God sees and knows us.

A new leaf must be turned by everyone who expects to hear the sweet voice of

our Master saying to each faithful one, Come and enjoy sweet rest with me in our eternal home:¹ Thou hast been faithful in a few things;² thou hast searched thine heart;³ and driven iniquity far away;⁴ thou hast purified thine heart from all evil; thou hast become morally perfect.⁵ I will now do the rest: I will make thee ruler over many things;⁶ I will make thee free from every physical ailment,⁷ from every sorrow,⁸ from every danger,⁹ and fill thee with immortal vigor;¹⁰ I will give thee every conceivable pleasure to be enjoyed forevermore upon the delightful plains of eternity's shores.¹¹ Because thou hast delighted in me,¹² and guided thy tongue aright,¹³ I will now delight in thee¹⁴ and set thy tongue at liberty to evermore ascribe all honor and praise to the high and lofty One who sits upon the throne of eternity.¹⁵

***Think of hearing angels saying,
"His wife hath made herself
ready." I would rather have this
one pleasure than all the
pleasures of the world combined.***

To be found ready to engage in this future work of Jehovah should so inspire our inmost soul that we will do everything in our power that will assure us of being ready when that glorious time has arrived. It should cause in us such a longing anxiety to remove all obstacles, great or small, that may lie in the way of our entering the blissful shore of Jehovah's glory.

To have a right to the tree of life—what a blessing!¹⁶ To have a right to enter through the pearly gates and compose a part of the happy throng that will glow with grandeur and beauty, that will thrill with praise to the Creator as we meet and greet and partake of the beatitudes of the future—such blessings are too wonderful for the human heart to comprehend.¹⁷ They are beyond, yes, says Paul, they are "*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*"¹⁸ No wonder Peter styles them "*exceeding great and precious promises.*"¹⁹

How they swell the goodness of God into a fathomless ocean; yea, like space unending in every direction. To think of basking forevermore in such wonderful sunshine of bliss with more than ecstatic joy should keep our hearts filled with constant gratitude and deep-settled devotion to the mighty and everlasting God.

Our devotion to God should be so pure, of such sterling quality, so unmixed with lesser considerations, that we will ever be found reverentially bowing in meek submission to His sovereign will.²⁰

Our devotion should be such that we will lovingly, willingly and joyfully throw

away our hard hearts and no longer refuse to obey His voice.²¹

Our devotion should cause us to draw near to the Omnipotent One who has offered us every future blessing upon such easy terms. He asks only that we seek the good and refuse the evil.²² He asks only that we perform those things which will make us noble in His sight, that will make us more joyful now, and in the end secure for us the endless beatitudes and triumphant joys of the angels. In that wonderful age, each move, each turn, every moment will increase our joy as we onward progress upon the unending plain of eternity, as we are introduced, perhaps by a Gabriel, to new worlds on high, and are permitted to view their glory and participate in their celestial joy. As we stand filled with joyful astonishment and happy amazement we will be led to exclaim in the language of the Revelator: *"Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?"*²³ As soon as the grand sentiment in that song of Moses and the Lamb has been joyfully uttered, we shall hear a response from the angel choir on high, saying, *"Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."*²⁵ What a right, what a pleasure to sing those sweet words in glory, and to hear such a response as this!

As we form a part of this holy throng and begin to realize their nobility of action, their majestic appearance, their sublimity of thought, their stateliness of being, their loftiness in every way, our hearts will begin to well up with increased adoration to the high and lofty God. It will be spontaneous, gushing forth in tones both clear and loud, speaking forth a joy no mortal ever knew, as the words are repeated by all: *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.... Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*²⁴ Who would not like to form a part of this happy company? We can if we will.

John heard in advance that grand Hallelujah Chorus that shall fairly rend the heavens at the marriage feast of the Lamb. He heard *"as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the mar-*

*riage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."*²⁵ Blessed be God! We can prepare ourselves so as to be worthy of hearing those wonderful words safe in glory. It seems that we would become so absorbed in Divine things that our mind would be lost to the low and groveling around us.

Devotion to God's everlasting truth will afford much more joy and happiness than this poor fleeting life with its meager, short-lived comforts can possibly give. Think of hearing angels from on high saying, *"His wife hath made herself ready."* I would rather have this one pleasure than all the pleasures of the world combined. The pleasures of this world will soon end, but the pleasures that we gain by obedience to the truth will never end. They will not only last for eternity, but they will ever be on the increase, multiplying continually.

Wonderful promises! Think of drinking to our fullest satisfaction from the river of God's pleasures. *"For with thee is the fountain of life."*²⁶ What a promise! What a thought! What a comfort!

We shall be paid amply for our little labor in life before we get half through chatting with good old Noah, who worked at the ark according to the instructions given by the angel while he preached the message of righteousness, for we read that Noah was a *"preacher of righteousness."*²⁷ What a pleasure to listen to him tell how he pegged away at the old ark with hammer, saw, and trowel, and between spells preached the same old blessed Gospel of righteousness. And how few he succeeded in getting to render obedience to the righteousness he preached!

The Psalms plainly set forth the necessity of devoting one's entire attention to Divine things. Note the grand opening: *"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."*²⁸

This calls upon us to give more diligent attention to the Word of the Lord for the purpose of becoming examples *"in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."*²⁹ If we do this, our own selfish goals will sink into insignificance and we will consider the words of the Lord's mouth more than our necessary food,³⁰ *more than thousands of gold and silver.*³¹

These things are worth our whole mind and consideration, our care and utmost attention, in order to be found ready to be born into incorruption and to partake with fullness of joy³² of the river of God's eternal pleasures.

May God help us to this end is my prayer. Amen. ♦

¹(Heb. 4:9); ²(Matt. 25:23); ³(Psalm 4:4); ⁴(Job 11:13-15); ⁵(Matt. 5:48); ⁶(Matt. 25:23); ⁷(Isa. 33:24); ⁸(Rev. 21:4); ⁹(Isa. 11:9; 65:25); ¹⁰(Isa. 40:31); ¹¹(Ps. 16:11); ¹²(Ps. 40:8); ¹³(Prov. 15:2; Ps. 141:3; Isa. 50:4; Job 6:24); ¹⁴(Prov. 11:20; 12:22); ¹⁵(Isa. 57:15); ¹⁶(Rev. 22:14); ¹⁷(1 Cor. 2:9); ¹⁸(Eph. 3:20); ¹⁹(2 Pet. 1:4); ²⁰(Col. 3:2; Ps. 24:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 John 2:15-17); ²¹(Jer. 15:16; Ps. 42:1); ²²(Isa. 1:16-17); ²³(Rev. 15:3-4); ²⁴(Rev. 4:8, 11); ²⁵(Rev. 19:6-7); ²⁶(Ps. 36:8-9); ²⁷(2 Peter 2:5); ²⁸(Ps. 1:1-2); ²⁹(1 Tim. 4:12); ³⁰(Job 23:12); ³¹(Ps. 119:72); ³²(Ps. 16:11).

**We shall be paid
amply for our little
labor in life before
we get half through
chatting with good
old Noah.**

**L. T. Nichols
Born October 1, 1844
Founder of the Megiddo Church**



FAITH in Action



by RUTH E. SISSON

Bible Text: Acts 4:1–4 NIV

1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family.

7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!

9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed,

10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

11 He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone."

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

REACTION

 READ ACTS 4:1–4

Peter's preaching brought reaction from the authorities. Did they hear what Peter was saying? They did, and while the people listened eagerly, the authorities decided to put a stop to it.

Those leading the opposition were priests and Sadducees—the priests opposed because of *where* Peter was preaching, and the Sadducees because of *what* Peter was preaching.

What about Peter's preaching offended the Sadducees? Mainly his teaching about the resurrection (Acts 3:15). The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection (Matthew 22:23), and Peter proclaimed positively that Jesus whom they crucified was *alive*!

So they arrested Peter and John, and locked them up.

1. What was the immediate effect of the preaching of Peter and John? _____
2. Can you give three reasons why the priests and Sadducees—and not the civil authorities—opposed the Apostles? _____

In spite of their arrest, the enthusiasm for the Apostles' preaching ran high. The whole city must have been humming with the news. Just think how you would feel. First you hear the report that the lame man—whom you have seen dozens of times—is leaping and praising God! Then you hear excerpts from Peter's sermon—how outspoken he is against those who crucified Christ. Then you find out that some of your friends—even your own family—have joined the cause of the Apostles! What a stir there must have been, now that the number of new believers was "about 5,000" (4:3–4). Arresting Peter and John did little to squelch the enthusiasm!

A MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN

 READ ACTS 4:5–13

The next day, *“the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family”* (4:5–6 NIV).

What an impressive crowd it was! All focused their attention on two Galilean fishermen. Luke emphasizes the pompous occasion by linking each with the word *“and.”*

Wouldn’t you think Peter and John should have felt intimidated by those impressive surroundings? Who were they but a couple of country born commoners, standing in the nation’s supreme court, facing the richest, ablest, most educated and powerful men in the nation? Wouldn’t you expect them to be shaking in their shoes? No, rather, they stood as those who had an ultimatum to give. The Sanhedrin would have to marshal their defenses. The attitude of Peter and John was that which Paul later put in these challenging words: *“If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom. 8:31).

It was time for cross-examination, and the Sanhedrin carefully framed each question, thinking what the Apostles’ response might be. The new movement was already spreading like wildfire. The last thing they wanted was to put these men on trial and let them give formal testimony to the momentous events that had shaken Jerusalem—and get more people persuaded in the process!

These officials didn’t want to know the facts. All they wanted to know was enough to convict them.

After much deliberating they had their question: *“By what power or by what name have you done this?”*

Actually, they could not have asked a better leading question. Peter answered powerfully. *“Filled with the Holy Spirit, [Peter] said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and everyone else in Israel. It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed’”* (Acts 4:8–10 NIV).

Feel the boldness in his words! What have we done wrong? he asks. Is it wrong to do a good deed? Is it wrong to heal a lame man? (Would you think so if you were that lame man?) Who did it? Jesus did. From Jesus came the power that made this lame man leap. It came from Jesus of Nazareth, a name you know well enough—*“because you crucified him”*—that would offend the Pharisees and the two high priests—*“and God raised him from the dead”*—that would infuriate the Sadducees.

Not waiting for the court to reply, Peter went on with his sermon, seizing an opportunity to deliver his message. He went to the Scriptures, which they knew only too well: *“He is ‘the stone you builders rejected’—a prophecy they all recognized. Were they the builders? Yes, and the stone which they rejected ‘has become the capstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved’* (4:11–12 NIV).

They Marveled

 READ ACTS 4:14–22

The Sanhedrin were shocked—likely speechless—*“when they saw the courage of Peter and John,”* men whom they knew to be *“unschooled, ordinary men.”* They could only marvel at them: how clearly they could see the character of Jesus in these two men! (Acts 4:13).

No higher compliment could have been paid them. Simply by observing them, their enemies identified them with Jesus and *“marvelled.”*

There was no denying that these men had been with Jesus. The priests, the Sadducees, and many who heard the Apostles had known Jesus and were qualified to make the comparison. These men talked like Jesus had talked. Their



A closer look

Who were the Sadducees?

A key Jewish sect in New Testament times, they were wealthy and influential. The high priest was usually a Sadducee. At this time, the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin, the official voice of the Jews. In their beliefs they denied the supernatural, and of course the resurrection. Quite naturally, after Jesus’ resurrection they hated Him, they hated His very name, they hated Him because He was alive. At this point their anger was focused on Peter and John, who were publicly preaching Jesus and the resurrection.



Did you know...?

The Sanhedrin...

was made up of 72 members, the high priest presiding.

Notice that Annas the previous high priest was present, along with his son-in-law Caiaphas. Remember, only a few short months earlier, that unscrupulous pair had led the movement to get rid of Jesus. Now they wanted to get rid of the Church.

At this time it seems that the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees made up a powerful minority.



Insight

The “New” Peter

Was this the same Peter who a few months ago had trembled when a young girl questioned him about his acquaintance with Jesus, and Peter had denied his Lord with oaths and curses? Was this the man who was frightened lest he, too, be arrested and crucified?

Was this the man who, just then, heard the cock crow, and looked up to see His Lord being led to trial—and fled out into the darkness?

What had happened? The resurrection! Only the resurrection of Jesus could bring such new boldness, faith and thrust power to Peter.

Now Peter was indomitable. The stone (Cephas) had become a rock.

“Should we obey you, rather than God”

— Peter and John,
Acts 4:19 paraphrased



A closer look

“They perceived that they...had been with Jesus”

Can people who see us recognize that we have been with Jesus, that we belong to Him? Can they tell by our truthfulness, our courage, our faith, our steadfastness?

Can they tell because we are becoming more and more like our Master?

What a challenge to live so that Christ's life shines through us!



Insight

By Whose Authority?

It is the duty of Christians to “be subject to the powers that be,” because *“the powers that be are ordained of God”* (Rom. 13:1). Jesus taught, *“Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,”* even though the Caesar might be a Nero, or a Tiberius or another despot. But He also added, that we must render *“unto God the things that are God's”* (Matt. 22:21).

When the ruling authority interferes with one's rendering to God what belongs to Him, the believer's first obligation is to firmly but respectfully refuse to obey the dictates of the human authority, and to accept whatever punishment is assigned, even to imprisonment or death. In that way the Christian is being *“subject to the powers that be,”* and not violating the law of God.

loyalty was to the same God whom Jesus had proclaimed and defended.

And who was there, close by, but—the poor lame man who had been healed! The lame man dared to stand with his new friends even when they had become prisoners, hoping he could help the situation, hoping his presence might do something to release them. He could easily have vanished into the crowd and not been seen again. But he wanted to be with the Lord's people. Were they at risk of being persecuted? He was not afraid to suffer with them. If in any way he could help with their defense, he was ready.

3. Who showed themselves strongest in character at the trial?

Who was the defense? Who was the offense? _____

4. Why did the lame man stay near the Apostles? _____

What personal risk was he taking by being with them? _____

What qualities of character did he show? _____

The rulers were in a dilemma. They had expected an easy victory over these nobodies, but instead, the nobodies had taken control of the situation and the powerful Sanhedrin had to figure out what to do next. *“So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ‘What are we going to do with these men?’ they asked. ‘Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it’”* (Acts 4:15–16 NIV).

It was all out in the open. The miracle was the talk of the town. Everybody knew the particular beggar who had been healed—they had seen him begging at the temple gate for years and years! Now he was as well as anyone. How could *he* be silenced?

The simplest thing would have been to deny that the man was healed—but nobody would have believed them. They had a big problem. The people were definitely on the side of Peter and John, and were not ready to be told otherwise.

The Sanhedrin got the point and decided to *“let them go.”*

The best (or worst) that they could think of was to threaten the two men, in hopes of frightening them into silence. *“Don't preach any more in this name Jesus,”* they ordered.

Were Peter and John frightened? They answered with the same boldness with which they had delivered their sermon: *“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:19–20 NIV).

If the authorities thought they were stifling the young Church by commanding the men to be quiet, they were in for a surprise. Peter and John asked, in effect, Who do you think we should obey: a human authority or the God of the universe?

5. What Old Testament person showed the same qualities of character that these Apostles had? _____

6. Think of a situation in your life where you had the opportunity to say, *“I must obey God, not man.”* _____

7. What evidence did the Apostles have to affirm that they were doing right? _____

“They came to their own company”



READ ACTS 4:23–31

Where did the Apostles go when they were free? They went to their own people and held a prayer meeting (4:23–24). Reporting all that the chief priests and elders had said to them, the whole group *“lifted up their voice to God with one accord”* and prayed.

What did they pray for? Not for escape from these experiences, but for power to meet them, to go on preaching, and take the consequences.

Their prayer was answered immediately. We read, *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly"* (Acts 4:31 NIV). Could anyone doubt that God was with them?

"They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." Now not only Peter and John were ready to speak with boldness, but all who were present! Their courage was contagious!

Sharing with One Another

 READ ACTS 4:32-37

As well as defending the Gospel and preaching Jesus and the resurrection, the Early Church in Jerusalem had practical issues to address. Some of their people were in need, through no fault of their own. Some were hungry.

What was the solution? Could those who had plenty stand by and see their needy brothers and sisters and not offer to help?

They could not! Even without a direct command, these intense believers seemed to take charge of the situation. They felt intensely responsible for one another. They had a deep desire to share and share alike.

And so they designed a system of pooling their resources, that all might have sufficient.

Who started it? The instigators must have been those who had extra. They realized God had blessed them, and they wanted to help their brothers and sisters in Christ.

What does this tell us about these early Christians? They were ready to apply their faith to everyday needs. They were ready to give of themselves and their substance to help the cause. For by helping fellow believers they were supporting the Apostles.

The Bible mentions only one hearty supporter of this movement, but he is enough to show us the spirit of the Church. His name was Jose, whom the Apostles liked to call Barnabas, meaning "Son of Encouragement." This devoted brother from the Island of Cyprus voluntarily sold his land and brought the proceeds to the Apostles. Was he offering his own personal support to the cause in which he believed? There was no question about his sincerity.

We are not told, but perhaps he moved from the island of Cyprus to Jerusalem so that he could be the Apostles' right hand helper.

1. When a believer gives, what does God value most? (2 Cor. 9:7) _____
2. What would be the most likely problem arising from the use of a common treasury? _____ What would have been the Apostles' solution? _____
3. What else do we know about Barnabas from the Bible record? (see Acts 11:25; Col. 4:10) _____

There is no evidence that selling one's goods and giving to a common treasury was any more than a local, voluntary plan. We know only that it was practiced in Jerusalem, and perhaps as a need arose, people sold property and brought the money to the Apostles, and it was distributed to those in need. Joining the Christian cause did not require one to dispose of his property and give the proceeds. But when one was both willing and able to give, the Apostles accepted the gift and left it with God to bless. ♦

Bible Text: Acts 4:32-37 NIV

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Jose, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.



Take heed

Be an Encourager!

The Church in every age needs more Barnabases, those who are willing to encourage and lend a hand. Everyone may not have property to sell and money to give, but everyone can be an encourager.



Insight

Communal Living?

How did it work to have people sell their property and bring the money for general distribution? Only because the Apostles were receiving the money and distributing it (Acts 4:35). And the Apostles had special power from God and could know who was honest and who was not. Without that power, the administrators could easily have ruined the system and the Church. God was looking out for His people.

The original Greek does not say that all who had property sold it, but rather suggests that as there was need there were those who sold their property and provided for the need. Clearly these early believers were all out for God and His people. Even persecution did not discourage them.

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"

So he answered and said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

"Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

"Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

"So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

"On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'

"So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"

And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." —Luke 10:25–37

Three Attitudes on Life

Thoughts on Jesus' Parable, "Who Is My Neighbor?"

Jesus' parable in Luke 10:25–37 describes at least three attitudes toward life.

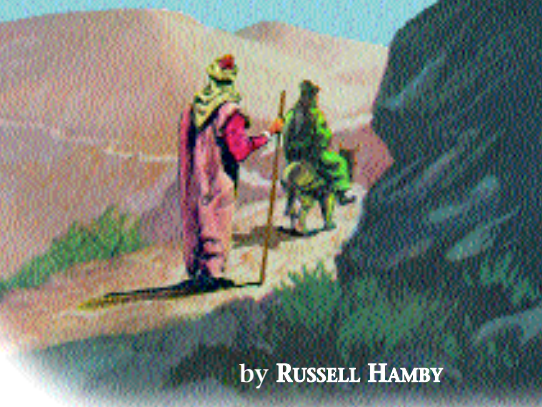
The first attitude is *"I'll take from you."* This attitude is illustrated by the robber in the parable. He as much as said, "If you have anything I want, I'll take it."

We all know the robber's way of life. He is saying in a veiled way, "It doesn't make any difference how it affects you or how it hurts you. I will get my way. You are nothing but a means to an end for me. I manipulate, abuse, and use people. I cheat, steal, or lie. I will take whatever I want."

A second attitude toward life reflected in this parable is, *"I will ignore you."* This is seen in the response of both the priest and the Levite. If the priest happened to be traveling to the temple to do his two-week tour of duty there, he knew he could be defiled if he touched the man who was lying by the road, especially if he discovered the man was dead. To touch a corpse was one of the worst kinds of defilement that a Jewish person could experience. He couldn't take the chance of touching the man. It might keep him from doing his sacred functions.

So the Levite and priest both passed on the other side of the road. They said by their actions that they had more important obligations. "I'll just go on my way," each said. "I don't have time for this." In other words, they closed their eyes to the problems around them. The impression that remained in their conscience was "I didn't see you!" If you don't see, your conscience is clear.

A third attitude is expressed in the words, *"I'll help you."*



by RUSSELL HAMBY

Notice the personal involvement of the Good Samaritan in this situation. He puts himself at some personal risk just by going to the side of the hurt stranger.

The Samaritan made personal sacrifices to assist the wounded man.

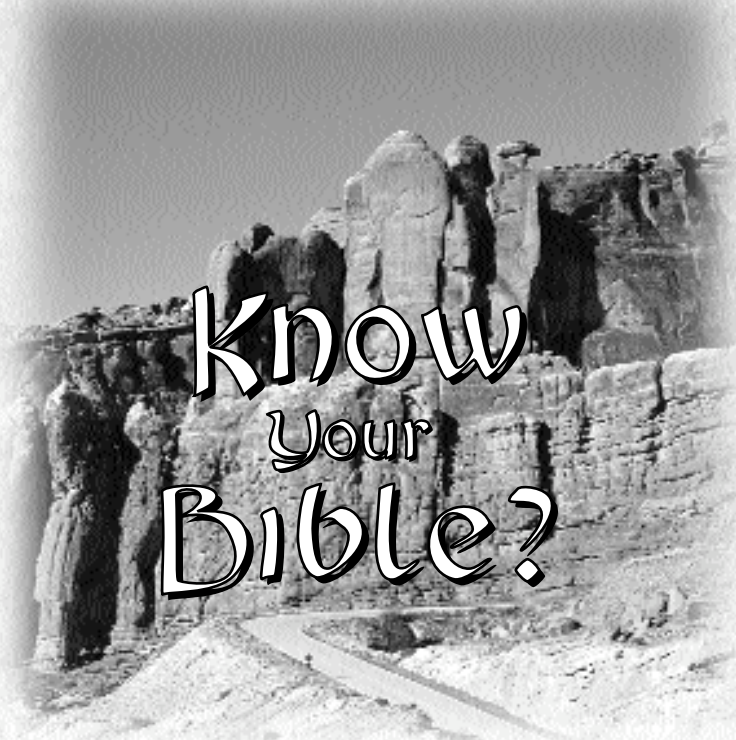
The Samaritan also took the risk of being misunderstood by his Jewish neighbor. The neighbor and his family might think that the Samaritan had defiled himself by touching him. The family of the victim might even seek revenge on him. His act of kindness would not make any difference.

So, to ask the question "Who is my neighbor?" is the wrong question. That very question attempts to set limits. To know who our neighbor is actually moves us beyond geography and space. Our neighbor, in Jesus' view, is one who is seeking to live within God's sphere of concern.

To know our neighbor is not to have concern for a person because of his area but because of his desire for spiritual help. Our neighbor is not determined by proximity but by spiritual need.

The Good Samaritan in this parable showed the spirit of Jesus Christ and His ministry. How different was the attitude of the religious teachers of his day!

Since Jesus is our Example, shouldn't we "go and do likewise"? ♦



Know Your Bible?

TRUST

1. Who trusted God to deliver him out of the hand of the Philistine?
2. Who said: *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."*
3. Who proved his trust in God by overcoming his enemies with three hundred men and God's help?
4. Who displayed trust in God in leading a band of Hebrews on a perilous journey from Babylon without a military escort?
5. Who had complete trust in God's overruling providence, when he kept on praying in spite of the king's decree?
6. Who believed Jesus could help them, and cried: *"Thou son of David, have mercy on us"?*
7. Who displayed great trust when he obeyed God's strange orders for besieging a walled city?
8. Who said, *"A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust"?*
9. Who showed his absolute trust in his willingness to sacrifice his only son when he thought God commanded it?
10. Who had faith that, though he died in a strange land, his bones would one day rest in the Promised Land?

VERSES TO REMEMBER

1. *"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, _____"*
2. *"Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, _____"*
3. *"Exhort one another daily, _____"*
4. *"Follow me and I will make you _____"*
5. *"One thing I know, that, whereas I was _____"*
6. *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord _____"*
7. *"We are laborers together with God: _____"*

WHO SAID IT?

1. Who promised his people, *"The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace"?*
2. Who said, *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down"?*
3. Who said, *"The axe is laid unto the root of the trees"?*
4. Who said of the religious leaders of his day that they said, *"Peace, peace, when there was no peace"?*
5. Who said, and to whom? *"The Lord searcheth all hearts"?*
6. Who praised the man that *"swaureth to his own hurt, and changeth not"?*
7. To whom did the Lord say, *"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward"?*
8. *"Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another"* was said to a mighty king by _____?
9. *"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"* was said to _____?
10. What is the prayer of David that begins, *"O Lord, open thou my lips"?*
11. Where does it say *"He loadeth us with benefits"?*
12. Where is the verse about the *"finest of the wheat"?*
13. What verse of a Psalm speaks of God's pity on His children? _____

FROM THE PSALMS

Complete these Psalms:

1. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, _____."*
2. *"In thy presence _____."*
3. *"Lead me to the rock _____."*
4. *"_____ all ye lands."*
5. *"O thou that hearest prayer, _____."*
6. *"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness _____."*
7. *"As far as the east is from the west _____."*
8. *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, _____."*

LESSONS FROM PAUL

1. What did Paul call *"the first commandment with promise"?*
2. What is Paul's saying about *"respect of persons with God"?*
3. To what did Paul compare the coming of *"the day of the Lord"?*
4. Who said, *"I have planted, Apollos watered"?*
5. Who said *"Let God be true, but every man a liar"?*
6. How we should walk *"redeeming the time"?*

answers on page 22

This article, written by Mr. Flowerday in 1976, is still timely today.

As another political campaign nears its climax, it seems appropriate that we review our relationship to our country and our politics.

We are citizens of a good land; we are inheritors of a great nation. We are grateful. God has blessed us far above what we have deserved, providing abundantly for our physical and spiritual needs. Our country rates first in many areas, ranging from the number of automobiles produced each year to the number of Bibles printed.

But unfortunately, our country is not all that it might be. It is not even all that it was. Our leaders realize it. Our educators, businessmen, philosophers and political scientists are aware of it. Thoughtful persons everywhere see it. During my own lifetime I have observed a shocking change in attitude in both the political and social climate. Economically, politically, morally and spiritually we are fast approaching the point of bankruptcy.

What can be done? Are we complacently to stand back and watch the avalanche progress? Is there nothing that we—you and I—can do? What is our duty?

Many people feel in all seriousness that every one should support some political front. Choose better people for candidates to public office, they say, and give them your support. Let your voice be heard. Isn't this the principle upon which

***The politician must
please the people who
elect him; the Christian
must please God.***

our nation was founded? Isn't this what democracy is all about, the voice of the people speaking out for what they feel is right? Join with others who also want to see a return to higher principles in government and speak out. After all, they say, isn't it the silent, non-committal, acquiescent majority who are responsible for the present situation?

This may well be the answer on a national scale. But our first concern as Christians must be individual, not national.



**I
Vote for
JESUS**

*by Kenneth E. Flowerday
Pastor, 1958–1985*

Should we as serious Christians involve ourselves in trying to improve the politics of our nation?

Our answer is no.

This may be shocking to some who are sincerely interested in the good of the nation and want to see it continue for the advantages it gives to the cause of Christ. Refraining from all

political involvement may seem to them like a betrayal of the very foundations of the faith upon which we stand. But before you draw too many conclusions either pro or con, I urge you to consider a few pointers found in Scripture.

To be sure, there is no verse of Scripture which says, "Thou shalt not engage in politics." But it does make some very definite statements and gives some examples from which we may learn. Consider just a few of these.

The Example of Jesus

First, there is the example of Jesus. Jesus was not a politician, or even a dabbler in politics. There is nothing in any of the Gospels that suggests that He was involved in any political maneuver, or that He supported any political personage, or debated any political issues of His time.

We can be certain that His non-involvement was not the result of a lack of incentive. The people of His time clamored for a man who could relieve them of the iron yoke of Rome. Jesus understood their feeling, and He knew the circumstances that had caused their oppression. He even had the capability to do something about it. But He refused to play their game. He refused to have any part in it. He did nothing that could be interpreted as politically motivated.

Jesus stated His relationship to the government when He answered His questioners: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). Pay your legal obligations, live as good citizens under law, respect authority and that is enough. Let the "children of this world" mind the affairs of this world. Your calling is to a higher allegiance.

This is what Jesus taught and practiced. His first and whole interest was to please His heavenly Father. "I do always those things that please him," He could honestly say. And He told His disciples that as the Father had sent Him, "so send I you." Involvement of those early Christians in the politics of the

first century would have meant the end of them. Involvement in the politics of the twentieth century is no less threatening to us, and no less destructive.

The Example of Paul

Secondly, neither Paul nor any of the other Apostles had anything to do with politics. Simon the Zealot *had* had—the Zealots were a radical group in Palestine who were working to overthrow the Roman power. But Jesus would have none of this. Jesus did not even approve of the Apostles' striving among themselves "*which should be greatest*" in the kingdom of God! How could He have tolerated the least seeking for greatness in the kingdoms of men?

Paul could easily have been political material. Among the Jews he was highly qualified—"circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3: 5-6). He had the makings of whatever the world might need—statesman, lawyer, judge or president—he could have qualified above many. But he said, "*What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*" (Phil. 3:7-8). He had caught a vision of something so much greater, that everything of the present seemed to shrivel into worthlessness. How could he think of working to please men, as every politician must do? As he wrote, "*Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*" (Gal. 1: 10).

Paul gave one clear guideline for all our dealings with the present cosmos. He wrote: "*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*" (2 Tim. 2:4). The analogy is obvious. As the soldier cannot get involved in civilian affairs, so the Christian cannot entangle himself in the politics and social affairs of his time. His God-given task must take top priority. Paul could say of himself, "*This one thing I do*"—and that one thing had nothing to do with politics.

The Example of Amos

Amos is another man who might have been political material, had that been his interest. He spoke with power against the oppression and evils of his day. But Amos was not a politician—he was a prophet. He called for no demonstrations; he made no promises of what he himself could or would do for the people. He did no campaigning for himself or his party. He sought no public office. He was already elected—elected of God, and he delivered the message God gave him to deliver. And that was all.

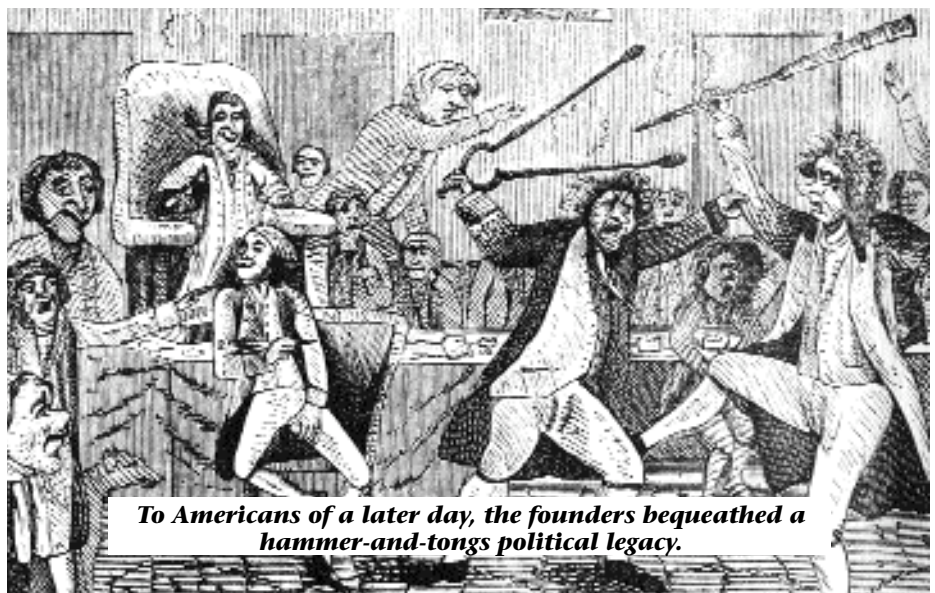
What about all the good that might possibly come from our political support at some crucial point? The apostle Paul has the answer: We must never do evil that good may result (Rom. 3:8, NEB). It is our duty to do right just as far as we know, and trust God with the results. If some good cause is hindered by our lack of support, the results—whatever they may be—are in the hand of God, who doeth all things well. Do we not feel He is fully competent to direct the affairs of this world as He sees fit? Nothing can happen that will hinder His cause. Nothing can happen

against His will. It is He, the "*most High*" who "*ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will*" (Dan. 4: 17). All authority finds its ultimate source in God; He will triumph in the end.

Politicking condemns itself so far as the Christian is concerned in yet another way. The politician must please the people who elect him; the Christian must please God. The best politician must at least occasionally seek popular approval and conform to popular opinion; the Christian must obey the injunction: "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2:5). The politician must win popular support; the Christian never enjoyed this. Even in the first century the Christian community was accounted as "*the offscouring of all things*" (1 Cor. 4:13), a "*little sect everywhere spoken against*," and "*the fewest of all people*." Any group described as such could hardly expect to be accepted in political circles.

The very basics of politics are contrary to Christian principles. The political campaign is grounded in strife, competition, and rivalry, all of which Paul lists among the "*fruits of the flesh*," or traits of the lower nature. He says:

The slander and abuse which accompany political campaigns are a disgrace to the name of the nation.



To Americans of a later day, the founders bequeathed a hammer-and-tongs political legacy.

"Now the works of the flesh are plain:...enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." And Paul says, *"I warn you,...that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* (Gal. 5: 19–21, RSV). How often the political campaign degenerates into a battle of personalities, of wit, of who-can-promise-the-most lecturing. And the slander and abuse which accompany the campaigning are a disgrace to the name of the nation. Yet the cycle is repeated again and again. And is not the person who supports such activity guilty along with those who actually commit the misdemeanor?

There is yet another danger: Is the sincere Christian safe in supporting even that which looks innocent? How can he be sure that there is not some carefully concealed intrigue, deceit or double dealing? He may support a candidate in good faith—and the future may disclose another picture. No wonder the Psalmist said long ago: *"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help"* (Ps. 146:3).

If after considering the foregoing you still feel some duty to lend support in political affairs, ask yourself the following questions honestly in the fear of God:

Can I, as a professing Christian, obey the command to *"keep...unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27) and voluntarily work among those whose principles and values are those of the world?

Can I *"come out from the world and be...separate"* (2 Cor. 6: 17) and support political activities which are the very backbone of this present world?

Can I say with Paul that *"Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour"* (Phil. 3:20–21, ASV), and then spend my time and interest toward the governing of an earthly nation?

Can I live *"soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Tit. 2:12) if I place myself among people who are neither sober, righteous or godly?

Can I *"walk honestly"* among those who have no strong

scruples against dishonesty—when it is more convenient? Can I say I have *"renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully"* (2 Cor. 4:2) if I join with those who have not made this profession?

Can I say I love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength—if part is for politics?

Can I say with Paul that *"I am crucified with Christ"* if I am giving myself to human goals and human interests and human standards?

Paul could say of himself and his co-workers, *"We have conducted ourselves in the world...in the holiness and sincerity that are from God"* (2 Cor. 1:12, NIV). Can I say this of myself?

The Apostle set the standard for all time when he wrote to the Thessalonian brethren: *"Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands,...that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing"* (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Or as translated in the New International Version, *"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands,...so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders."*

All present government—however good or bad—is only temporary. We have committed ourselves to a cause and a government which, once established, will be worldwide and eternal, with justice, equity and prosperity for all. Our whole interest is there—in the *"world to come, whereof we speak."* It is coming. Our whole effort now is to prepare ourselves for a place in it when it arrives. For this reason we say with Paul:

"We...are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transfigure the body belonging to our humble state, and give it a form like that of his own resplendent body, by the very power which enables him to make all things subject to himself" (Phil. 3: 20–21 NEB).

When King Jesus is on the ballot, I want to be ready to give Him my full support. Won't you do the same? ♦

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 19

TRUST

1. David (1 Samuel 17:37)
2. Job (Job 13:15)
3. Gideon (Judges 7:7, 22)
4. Ezra (Ezra 8:22)
5. Daniel (Daniel 6:4–23)
6. Two blind men (Matthew 9:27)
7. Joshua (Joshua 6)
8. Boaz (Ruth 2:8–12)
9. Abraham (Hebrews 11:17)
10. Joseph (Hebrews 11:25; Gen. 50:25)

VERSES TO REMEMBER

1. *"And a thousand years as one day"* (2 Pet. 3:8)
2. *"Than that shouldest vow and not pay"* (Eccl. 5:5)
3. *"While it is called Today"* (Heb. 3:13)
4. *"Fishers of men."* (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17)
5. *"Blind, now I see"* (John 9:25)
6. *"The Lord our God is one Lord"* (Deut. 6:4)

7. *"Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* (1 Cor. 3:9)

WHO SAID IT?

1. Moses (Ex. 14:13–14)
2. Nehemiah (Neh. 6:3)
3. John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1, 10)
4. Jeremiah (Jer. 6:14)
5. David to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 28:2, 9)
6. David (Ps. 15:4)
7. Moses (Ex. 14:15)
8. Daniel to Belshazzar (Dan. 5:17)
9. Adam (Gen. 3:17, 19)
10. *"And my mouth shall show forth thy praise"* (Ps. 51:15)
11. Psalm. 68:19
12. Psalm 147:14
13. Psalm 103:13

FROM THE PSALMS:

1. *"And renew a right spirit within me"*

(Ps. 51:10)

2. *"Is fulness of joy"* (Ps. 16:11)
3. *"That is higher than I"* (Ps. 61:2)
4. *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord"* (Ps. 100:1)
5. *"Unto thee shall all flesh come"* (Ps. 65:2)
6. *"And thy paths drop fatness"* (Ps. 65:11)
7. *"So far hath he removed our transgressions from us"* (Ps. 103:12)
8. *"Slow to anger and plenteous in mercy"* (Ps. 103:8)

LESSONS FROM PAUL

1. *"Honor thy father and mother"* (Eph. 6:2).
2. *"There is no respect of persons with God."* (Rom. 2:11)
3. *"A thief in the night"* (1 Thess. 5:2)
4. Paul (1 Cor. 3:6)
5. Paul (Rom. 3:4)
6. *"Walk circumspectly,...redeeming the time"* (Eph. 5:15–16)



GRUMBLE WEEDS

Daddy to Mama.

He didn't have to wait long to find out. By this time, Cindy was pulling weeds around the chrysanthemums. "My time is worth far too much to be out here pulling these old weeds," Cindy grumbled. "Think of all the *constructive* things I could be doing!"

It was a warm fall afternoon, and Mama, Daddy, and Cindy were pulling weeds in the flower beds around their house. The vote had been two to one, with Cindy voting against the whole thing. Mama and Daddy seemed actually to be happy, as they talked about the privilege of doing things together, and how nice it was to make the place look pretty. But pulling weeds wasn't Cindy's idea of a good time. She leaned on the fence feeling most unhappy, until Daddy told her she was to come and help. Slowly Cindy sauntered toward the forsythia bush, feeling more sorry for herself at each step.

"Why do weeds grow in September?" she grumbled as she started by the forsythia bush.

Then Cindy moved near a clump of iris, and grumbled that the weeds looked nicer than the iris. "We should pull up these ugly old iris plants, and let the nice green weeds grow," she muttered.

Near the pansy bed, Cindy grumbled again. It was too hard to get between the little plants. "Why don't these plants grow bigger? Then they would choke out the weeds," she complained again.

Then there were weeds around the roses, and Cindy grumbled about the thorns. "Ouch! Ouch! Ugly old rose bushes! Who wants such things!" she grumbled. "At least these nice green weeds don't have thorns on them."

When she was pulling weeds near the lilac bush, Cindy grumbled about how hot it was. "The sun is just too hot for us to be doing this hard work," she murmured. "When I die of a sunstroke, someone will pick all these old flowers and put them on me. Then they'll be sorry I worked so hard."

Daddy almost laughed out loud at that one. But he didn't, because he was trying to think how he could teach Cindy a lesson. Cindy's grumbling was getting worse all the time.

"Wonder what she will grumble about next?" whispered

Daddy quietly left his weeding and went over to the forsythia bush where Cindy had started. Then he walked from place to place where Cindy had weeded, looking carefully, but saying nothing.

Cindy stopped weeding to see what Daddy was doing. Each time she heard him softly say, "Hmmm," Cindy grew more and more curious.

"Did I miss a lot of weeds?" Cindy asked at last.

"Well, let's say you planted a lot of weeds," said Daddy. "And I am thankful for the weeds you pulled. But it is these other weeds that concern me."

"Others?" asked Cindy, coming over to where Daddy was standing.

"I don't see any others," said Cindy. "Where are they? What do they look like?"

"They look a little different, but they're really weeds. Bad weeds. They're called *grumble weeds*!" said Daddy. "Every time you pulled a healthy green weed, you planted an ugly old grumble weed."

"But I don't see any, Daddy," said Cindy.

"You won't see them," said Daddy, "unless you *learn* to see them. But you planted them, and they are growing. And they will keep growing until you pull them up." Cindy looked at Daddy. She was even more perplexed.

"Let's go over to the forsythia bush, and I will show you what I mean. Right there is a grumble weed! It's the 'Why do weeds grow in September?, Rather ugly, don't you think?'"

Cindy looked a little ashamed. "Well I really don't see why weeds have to grow in September," she said.

"Neither do I," said Daddy. "But God allows them to grow in September, so we just have to pull them up if we are going to have a nice flower bed."

Daddy moved along the flower row to where the iris were

planted. "Now let's see what this old grumble weed is by the iris. Oh yes, this is the 'We should pull up these ugly old iris plants and let the nice green weeds grow' grumble weed."

"Well, the iris aren't very pretty now," Cindy apologized.

"But they certainly were this spring," said Daddy. "Remember the pretty bouquet you took to Sunday School?" Cindy didn't say anything, but she looked sheepish. Cindy knew Daddy was right.

Over by the pansies he stopped again. "Here is another grumble weed, the 'Why don't these plants grow bigger' kind."

Daddy went over to the roses. "We have another grumble weed here. Oh, yes, it is the 'nice green weeds don't have thorns' grumble weed."

Cindy could hardly stand it. Daddy hadn't missed anything she had been saying, and now he was repeating it all back to her. She had thought her grumble weeds quite nice when she had been planting them. But now, as Daddy reminded her of them one by one, they seemed ugly. Not at all like the nice, lovely flowers.

"Now here by the lilac bush we have a giant grumble weed," said Daddy. "I know it's one you really enjoy. It's the

'nobody loves me anymore' variety, sometimes called the 'flowers for my funeral' type."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, pleeeeeease stop!" Cindy shouted. "It sounds terrible when I hear you say these things."

"It must sound worse when the Lord hears these grumble weeds you've planted," said Daddy.

"The Lord?" said Cindy, looking surprised. "He heard, too? I'm so sorry. He doesn't like grumble weeds, does He?"

"No, He does not. Here is what He says about them," Daddy quoted a verse from the Bible found in Philippians 2:14: "Do all things without grumbling and arguing."

"Well, if God doesn't like grumble weeds, then I don't either, so I'd better start pulling them," said Cindy emphatically.

She went back through the flower bed and pretended to pull out each grumble weed. "There, all the grumble weeds are gone now," said Cindy. "The flower beds look so much nicer without them. And it also looks nicer without the other weeds, too!" she added with a grin.

Cindy walked over to her Daddy and put her hand in his. "Daddy," she said earnestly, "I'll never, never plant any more grumble weeds—ever!" ♦



Plan Ahead

The most important and vital question is: Will we have time to make the necessary change from our old nature to become a new creature worthy of perpetuation, especially as we are nearing the end? To renew ourselves inwardly is not automatic but will require much effort on our part to accomplish, so, day by day, may we be more determined than ever to be diligent to succeed.

Human beings could not know all the wonderful thoughts of God, for God's thoughts and ways are so very much higher than man's, and although the Romans changed God's times and laws, and many people have fixed different and erroneous dates for the second advent of our Lord, God will send His beloved Son Jesus Christ, in His own appointed time, and nothing whatsoever could change what God has ordained. God's Word being trustworthy and true, "it shall not return unto him void but will accomplish that which he pleaseth and will prosper in the thing whereunto he will send it."

People are planning ahead in this new "millennium" to make it bright and new, but the things of this world are not for ever, so let us "watch" as we are admonished; and avoid the terrible fate of the five foolish virgins—eternal destruction. Rather let us fol-

low the example of the five wise virgins, taking a good supply of oil with our lamps, keeping them filled, trimmed, and brightly burning, for we do not know the day or hour when the Bridegroom will come, and we want to be ready to go in with Him to His marriage feast when He does come, before the door is shut. We want to be ready to enjoy the wonderful bliss, peace, and joy, which is ahead in God's Millennium—the glorious reign of Jesus Christ for a thousand years.

*"A thousand years of sorrow free
and after all Eternity!"*

B. Boyer, Florida

Seek God Now!

I have been reading and studying Isaiah. Chapter 40 starts with "Comfort, comfort my people says your God." It's a beautiful chapter from beginning to end for those who do His will. It makes us realize how small and unimportant we are if we don't hear His Word, but the end of the chapter gives great hope. Those who serve the Lord faithfully will have their youthful strength restored.

So many friends have died suddenly over the past few months, it has made us think how quickly life comes to an end. Most of them were atheist and never read the Bible, so they didn't know God's will. It's so sad they didn't read Isaiah 55, verse 6, while they had the chance. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." Chapter 38, verse 18 says, "For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise, those who go down to the pit cannot

hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living—they praise you."

The Lord has been so good to us giving us health and strength. But just because our family before us lived into a good old age doesn't mean we will. So each and every day the Lord gives us we must seek Him and try to make ourselves better in His sight.

J. Trehame, England

"If Only I Were Not So Human!"

It is amazing how much physical evidence is being discovered to prove the accuracy of the Bible and its prophecies, yet, even more amazing the number of people who remain scoffers and skeptics!

We all need prayers as these are trying days! Stormy-days spiritual-wise are about and prayers and faith keep us in touch with God, so we don't get discouraged. Prayers give us the spiritual armor we need.

I saw my mother reach the stage where she was far above any hurtful remarks or sarcasm. Have I completely reached this state? I think 98 percent of the time I have, but every once in awhile I get that "old feeling" and have to push it off and away. I wish I were not so human! The old man is always waiting "in the wings back stage" so to speak.

I have been listening to a tape entitled, "Practicing The Presence of God." So I try to keep in mind as I live through each day that I'm being watched, the angels are taking notes. I hope this will help increase my awareness of the fact that I have much to overcome.

Keep your light shining. It is needed—its shadow reaches Maine!

R.Deschenes, Maine

Was the Rite of Circumcision Part of Moses' Law?

"When the Jews were making a dispute over the issue of circumcision and blaming Paul for not enforcing it, why was that considered a transgression of Moses' Law? Didn't the rite of circumcision date back to the time of Abraham? And are those who practice circumcision today doing wrong because Paul did not recommend it?"

—R. K.

You are correct, the rite of circumcision was given to Abraham at the time the angel appeared to him to inform him of the birth of the child of promise (Gen. 17:11). This was long before the exodus and the giving of the law at Sinai (Exodus, chapters 20–32) which is commonly known as Moses' Law. It was not part of the Law added during the time of Moses but it was practiced along with the Law of Moses to some extent, as a token of separateness, a rite that distinguished the Israelites from their unbelieving, pagan neighbors.

It seems that the purpose behind the rite of circumcision was its spiritual significance, circumcising *"the foreskin of the heart"* (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4).

Circumcision was required under the Abrahamic covenant until Christ established the new covenant. Jesus himself was circumcised on the eighth day according to Jewish law in force at that time (Luke 2:21)—the old Law had not been abolished at the time of His birth.

I do not see how we can say that the rite of circumcision was actually a part of Moses' Law, per se. However, the Jews who were among the Gentiles seem to have associated the rite of circumcision with the Laws of Moses (Jewish Law), for they accused the early Christians of teaching the Gentiles *"to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the cus-*

toms" (Acts 21:21). Jesus said that Moses did give them the law of circumcision. *"But you work on the Sabbath, too, when you obey Moses, law of circumcision. (Actually, this tradition of circumcision is older than the law of Moses; it goes back to Abraham)"* (John 7:22 NLT). We might say that it was part of the laws that were being kept by the Jews, though it was not, strictly speaking, part of Moses' law (i.e., this law did not originate during Moses' time).

It might be questioned how seriously the Israelites in Moses' time considered the rite of circumcision, because even during the forty years wandering in the wilderness all people did not continue to observe it. By the time they reached Canaan, the older generation had died, and the children had not been circumcised. So the Lord commanded Joshua to circumcise the males before they proceeded to take Jericho (Josh. 5:2–6).

After all the males were circumcised, the Lord told Joshua that this day He had removed the reproach of Egypt from them (Josh. 5:9). In this case, it seems to have been for a reminder that they were free from slavery. We find a parallel in being free from a former way of life, i.e., slavery to sin. Literal circumcision does not make one righteous, only the circumcision of the heart.

When Paul spoke of the circumcision or the uncircumcision, he was mainly differentiating between those who were natural-born Jews and those who were not. (For example, see Rom. 4:9; 2: 26–27; Gal. 2:7–9; Gal. 6:13; Eph. 2:11; Col. 3:11). He spoke several times also of the uselessness of the rite of circumcision. He said, *"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"* (Gal. 6:15). Again he said, *"We are the circum-*

cision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3)—an obvious illusion to a circumcision other than that of flesh. Again he said that neither circumcision avails nor uncircumcision, *"but faith which worketh by love"* (Gal. 5:6). What was he saying in effect? That one's nationality did not matter, and outward rites or rituals do not matter. God is looking at the heart, at the inner life, at the qualities of character He requires.

Spiritual circumcision was the serious issue, being *"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"* (Rom. 2:28). When it came to obtaining the favor of God, a natural-born Jew had no advantage over a natural-born Gentile.

Now for your last question: Are those who practice circumcision today doing wrong because Paul spoke against it?

Those who were insisting on the practice of circumcision in Paul's day had the wrong motive. They were trying to force Jewish practices on non-Jewish people, and claiming that it was necessary. Paul's point was that circumcised or uncircumcised, all were equal in Christ. It did not change one's status before God or affect one's qualifying for salvation.

As for the practice of circumcision today, we can easily say that if God recommended it, it must have been good. But the situation is basically the same as it was in Paul's day. Circumcision has no effect on our standing with God. It is a matter of health, not salvation. *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"* (Gal. 5:6; 6:15). ♦



**“I am the true vine,
and my Father is the
gardener.**

He cuts off every branch that
doesn't produce fruit, and he
prunes the branches that do
bear fruit so they will produce
even more.

Yes, **I am the vine; you
are the branches.** Those who
remain in me, and I in them,
will **produce much fruit.**

For apart from me you can
do nothing.

Anyone who parts from me is
thrown away like a useless
branch and withers. Such branches
are gathered into a pile to
be burned.

My true **disciples produce
much fruit.** This brings great
glory to my **Father.**

I have loved you even as
the Father has loved me.
Remain in my love.”

—John 15:1–2, 5–6, 8–9 NLT

God-yielded wills produce God-planned lives.

Truth that informs but does not transform is not genuine truth.

One day at a time is all that is required of us, one day at a time to make better than any day before.

Better is he who does than he who talks about doing.

The more humble you become, the more Christlike you will be.

If you would have the lamp burn, you must pour oil into it.

No matter what scales we use, we can never know the weight of another person's burden until we have carried it with their strength.

*A day is full of many hours just waiting for your using.
And there are many ways to spend them
—So be careful in your choosing.*

Have you included God in your plans for today?

A Cure For Fault Finding

*Just stand aside, and watch yourself go by;
Think of yourself as "he" instead of "I".
Pick flaws, find fault, forget the man is you,
And strive to make your estimate ring true.*

*The faults of others then will dwarf and shrink,
Love's chain grows stronger by one mighty link,
When you with "he" as substitute for "I",
Have stood aside, and watched yourself go by.*

*Never get downhearted with the work you have to do
And say that such a mighty task you never can get through,
But just endeavor day by day another point to gain.
And soon the mountain which you feared will prove to be a plain.*



*Be thou with us, Lord, in spirit—
Above us to draw us ever upward;
Beneath us to sustain us;
Before us to lead us;
Behind us to restrain us;
Round about us to protect us.*

There is no danger of getting lost if we stay in the narrow way.

The better our distant vision, the faster we can travel.

God will never save one who is not rich in good works.

Happiness is often the result of being too busy to be miserable.

Sin in the life dries up the springs of joy in the Lord.



You Can Never Tell

You can never tell when you send a word
Like an arrow shot from a bow
By an archer blind, be it cruel or kind,
Just where it may chance to go.

It may pierce the breast of your dearest friend,
Tipped with its poison or balm,
To a stranger's heart in life's great mart
It may carry its pain or its calm.

You never can tell when you do an act
Just what the result will be,
But with every deed you are sowing a seed,
Though the harvest you may not see.

You never can tell what your thoughts will do
In bringing you hate or love,
For thoughts are things, and their airy wings
Are swifter than carrier doves.

They follow the law of the universe—
Each thing must create its kind,
And they speed o'er the track to bring you back
Whatever went out from your mind.

—Selected.