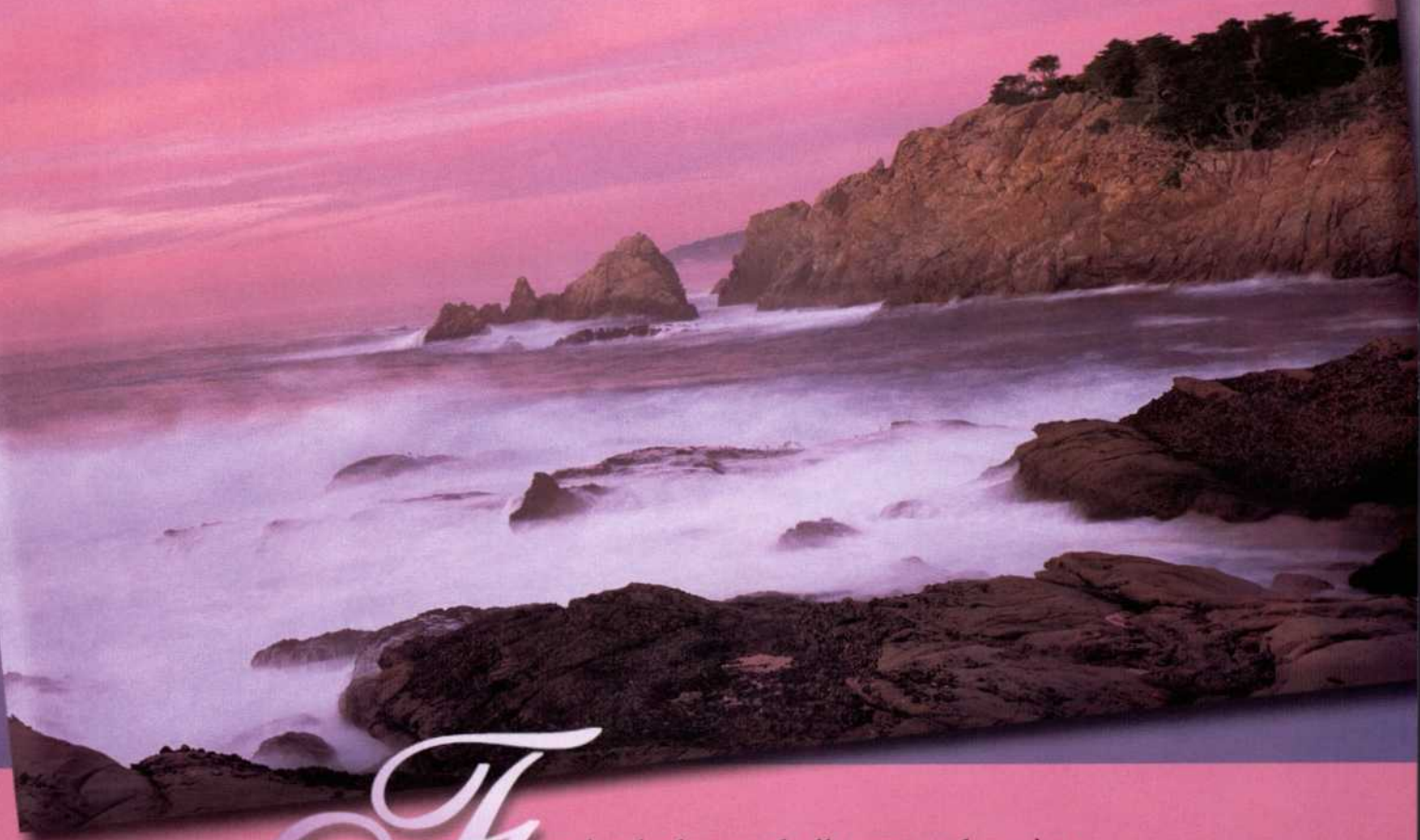


Megiddo Message

Vol. 84, No. 8
September, 1997



*F*or the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noon-day bright,
And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
The kingdom of love and light.

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL TO THE NATIONS

LIVING BY FAITH

The Christian life is a journey. We begin by learning the knowledge of God, what He requires, what He promises, and making a decision to serve Him. But this is only a beginning. The continuation is summed up in the words of the Prophet: *"The just shall live by his faith"* (Hab. 2:4, Rom. 1:17). We must leave the lowlands of sin and move on to significant heights. Yet many times we plan too small and aim too low.

The destination of the Christian is always higher ground, more holiness, more dedication, more self-mastery, more of all the Christian virtues. We might think of faith as a summary term, encompassing the whole life of the believer, his concentration, his effort, his goal. That is how *"the just...live by faith."*

Faith was required of the Israelites from start to finish. It took faith to obey the command of the Lord, to pack up and leave on the day after the Passover meal.

They had no more than begun when they faced the Red Sea, and were being pursued by Pharaoh's armies. By faith, they met and conquered the obstacles of the wilderness. By faith they reached the bordertown of Kadesh-Barnea, the entrance to the Promised Land.

By faith they journeyed, but it was not the faith of the multitude but only the faith of their leaders plus a dedicated few. For of those who left Egypt, only two, Caleb and Joshua, were truly heroes of faith. The rest joined the largest funeral march ever conducted: a whole generation died in the wilderness—because of unbelief.

There are many things we can do without exercising faith. It is possible to build a house without faith. It is possible to take a job without faith. We can meet our needs from day to day, and go on living year after year, without

faith. But *"without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Heb. 11:16).

Real faith is trusting God when there seems to be no reason to trust.

Real faith is that of Caleb and Joshua, in the book of Numbers, trusting God in the face of overwhelming opposition. Ten of the twelve spies were reporting in the negative. *"The cities are fortified and very large....We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we...There we saw the giants...and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight"* (Num. 13:28, 31, 33, NKJV).

There was a lot of truth in those words. The cities were walled, the descendants of Anak were people of unusual stature, who would not give up without a fight. There were real problems, and a seemingly impossible situation. But the tragedy is that the ten spies failed to include God in the picture. They thought only of their own strength, and were indeed *"like grasshoppers"* in their own sight.

Pandemonium broke loose as these spies gave their report to the people. Doubt is infectious, and fear is contagious.

Caleb and Joshua chose to look at the situation by faith. They saw themselves not as grasshoppers but as servants of the great God. *"Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it,"* said Caleb (Num. 13:30). He said, *"Let us go up at once,"* not *"Let's train our people and plan for several months."*

How could the two reports be so different? Because Caleb and Joshua introduced the element of faith. They put God in the picture.

The Israelites saw only the walled cities and giants. Caleb and Joshua saw beyond that to the reality of God Almighty. They knew He was active in their

world—hadn't He saved them at the Red Sea? Hadn't He delivered them from bondage? Wasn't He providing for their every need? What more did they need in visible, everyday evidence? He was just as active in their world as He had been in the world of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So Caleb and Joshua absolutely refused to doubt God.

Why can we not follow their example? Why can we not trust God for the challenges of our lives? For the God that lived in Joshua's day is just the same today.

Caleb won his battles because he first won the inner battle of faith and obedience. He did not allow himself to doubt God. The evidence was in front of him and all around him, and he believed it. No doubt there was an instinct in him which trembled, too; an instinct which said, *"What if...?"* But faith was the winner, because Caleb kept God first.

We need this same inner faith, this confidence that God is, and that He will reward all who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

The will of God is supreme, and nothing that any man can do will overthrow it. *"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,"* and as truly as God lives this earth shall be filled with His glory (Num. 14:21). He will not wait for all to believe. He will accept those who will, and remove those who will not, and proceed to renovate every dark corner of this planet. The result will be a whole new world, where the righteous shall flourish in an abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth (Ps. 72:7).

Faith has power, and faith shall triumph. Let's give up our doubts, and say with Caleb and Joshua, *"With God, it shall be done."* □

MEGIDDO MEANS ...

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

WE BELIEVE ...

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

The Herald and the KING

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

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

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IF THE OUTLOOK IS BAD,...

The Outlook

The outlook is bad. No sane person living in 1997 can deny it. Who is not saddened to see the hard-won gains of the best civilization ever known trampled by those who choose to live on the level of beasts? It is a time of crisis, a civilization crisis from which no nation on earth is immune. Mass media and politics make almost all problems universal. Ours is a planet in peril.

What is the outlook in our own proud nation? Some believe Western civilization is coming "unglued." For all its wonderful benefits to our lives, and all its promise of a bright tomorrow, scientific technology seems destined to crumble in the ashes of a society that abandons ethical and religious values. Says a noted religious analyst, "Who is to say that the 'end of all ends' may not actually be upon us, that tomorrow may not be the very last day, or tonight the last night?" Says Billy Graham: "People ask me sometimes, 'Are we in the last days?' and I tell them 'no.' I don't think we're in the last days; I think we're in the last minutes of this dispensation, or maybe in the last seconds, as God counts time. That Day will come soon."

The late Malcolm Muggeridge, well-known British author, wrote about our civilization, "Let me boldly and plainly say that it has long seemed to me clear beyond any shadow of doubt that what is still called Western Civilization is in an advanced stage of decomposition, and that another Dark Age will soon be upon us, if, indeed, it has not already begun."

Mr. Muggeridge pointed out what is perhaps the most ominous

aspect of the present degeneracy—that it is happening with scarcely anyone realizing it. He illustrated his point with a distasteful experiment conducted in a laboratory. A number of frogs were put into a bowl of water and the temperature of the water was raised very slowly to the boiling point. What was the result? The frogs expired without making any serious effort to jump out of the bowl. All of them could easily have jumped out as the temperature started to rise, but they did not realize what was happening; the change was so gradual. Then Mr. Muggeridge made the analogy. "We are the frogs. The water in the bowl is our habitat. Do we sense the change in our environment? Do we sense it enough to take action and get out of it before it is everlastingly too late? Or will the boiling point come upon us unawares?"

Mr. Muggeridge commented, "It is my own emphatic opinion that the boiling point is upon us now, and that as a matter of urgency Christians must decide how they should conduct themselves in the face of so apocalyptic a situation."

The outlook is dark. Violence, drug trafficking, child abuse, spouse abuse, elder abuse, are reported almost daily in any newspaper. Add the strife between nations, racial and tribal hatreds, corruption in government, crime in the streets—one could go on and on. So much is the result of human mismanagement. Peace does not reign, either among individuals or nations. Righteousness is not the ruling standard of the average home or of the world. Holiness does not beautify the lives of all. Much as we would like to think most people honest,

hardworking, moral and upright, these values are all but extinct. Multitudes are grasping for whatever they can get, without regard for the interests of others. As a result, oppression, cruelty, selfishness, debauchery, lust and greed blot the human picture.

In addition are the really pressing problems of our age, the deeper civilization crisis: the crisis of conscience, the crisis of truth, the crisis of spirit. It shows itself in the breakdown of family life and the unhappy, disillusioned and frustrated children that result. It shows itself in the lack of real leadership. We see it in corruption at the seat of government, corruption in the business world, and injustice in the courts. Authority is challenged at every level. Moral values are counted secondary in the passionate craze for pleasure and monetary gain. Again and again, might overpowers right, and God is maligned or forgotten. Many a serious-minded person is asking, What is it all coming to?

Thank God, these trends have not overpowered all goodness in our world! But the picture is alarming enough. The outlook is dark. Witness the public acceptance of homosexuality, even some churches ordaining homosexuals as bishops. Witness the mounting divorce rate, the spread of pornography, the increasing brazenness of organized crime; the thriving illegal drug trade that is ruining the lives of thousands of our youth; the spread of kidnappings, hijackings, assassinations, bombings, muggings, and assaults; the uncontrollable gambling craze; the frightful increase in lying, cheating, and stealing.

What would be the natural out-

TRY THE UPLOOK

come, were present trends to continue? Some believe it would be a barbarism that would dwarf anything known to the pagans of pre-Christian times.

The outlook is dark.

In times like these, men look for answers to their perplexities. What possible solution is there? At the very least, how is a man to cope with his portion of the problem?

One common method has been called the Band Aid solution. It is comparable to this: You have a broken bone, or an inflamed appendix, or a deep puncture wound, and the doctor says, "I have just the thing that will fix you up," and he applies a band aid to the source of the pain.

The Band Aid solution to the present world crisis is popular. It is the philosophy of "Eat, drink, and be merry," cover the trouble and forget about it. Get all the pleasure you can, because you haven't long to live at best.

Then there are those who escape into humanism, secularism, and mindless superstitions; religions of devils, demons, spirits and the occult.

Science has made life more convenient; but it has neither made us wiser nor morally better. Science makes us more knowledgeable of our environment, but science cannot identify God, or fixed values, or enduring truth. Science is not the answer to the dismal outlook.

Is this world-view pessimistic? Are we being pessimists to see human problems without human solution? Many will say yes. But it is not pessimistic to avoid trouble. It is not pessimistic to heed a warning signal before trouble strikes. It is not

pessimistic to listen to the Word of the Lord and "*Flee out of the midst*" of modern-day Babylon, as the Lord commanded through His prophet Jeremiah long ago (Jer. 51:6).

What is the meaning of the outlook? It was all forecast by God's spokesmen more than nineteen centuries ago. Perhaps we do not realize what this means. Who of us today would venture to describe what conditions will be in the year 3900? Yet this would be comparable to the apostle Paul's describing in the first century what we see today. The accuracy of his words is no less than astounding. Listen:

"In the last days there are going to be some difficult times. People will be self-centered and grasping; boastful, arrogant and rude; disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, irreligious; heartless and unappeasable; they will be slanderers, profligates, savages and enemies of everything that is good; they will be treacherous and reckless and demented by pride, preferring their own pleasure to God. They will keep up the outward appearance of religion but will have rejected the inner power of it" (2 Tim. 3:1-5, Jerusalem Bible).

How could Paul know? Because the mighty God of heaven revealed it to him. The future is as vivid to God as the past is to us. The outlook today is dark, but no darker than we should expect, when we read what has been forecast.

But God be praised!—out is not the only direction we can look. We can also look UP!

The Uplook

The Psalmist wrote, "*I will lift up mine eyes.*" So let us lift our eyes above the welter of fear, trouble, distress and sin around us, to the

realm where God reigns. In the words of Jesus, "*Look up, and lift up your heads*"!

First He described the outlook as we see it today: "*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars [representing the political powers of earth]; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*" (Luke 21:25-26). This is the outlook; this is what we see today. But what does Jesus say we should do? Does He say, "*And when these things begin to come to pass*"—be alarmed, worried,

*The future is as
vivid to God as
the past is to us.*

frightened because of the terrible things going on around you? No. "*When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh*" (Luke 21:28).

The dismal outlook is no cause for fear or alarm. It is a guarantee of the glorious uplook.

The uplook is superb! Never in the history of our planet has it held more of hope and promise than it holds today. Never has it been more sure; and never has its reality been so near. In the midst of darkness,

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the glorious
uplook.**



we have hope, hope that is an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast. The darkness is but for a moment. Look up and rejoice!

The more we look up, the more we see. It is all revealed in the Word of God. There is a new world coming—a whole new arrangement. There will be a new King, new rulers, new populace, new laws, new government; all things will become new (Rev. 21:5).

This new world was the purpose God had in mind when He formed this planet. *"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited"* (Isa. 45:18). He formed it to be inhabited; but by whom? by the bungling mass of unregenerate humanity who now swarm and squabble over its surface? No, indeed. Long ago God took His oath: *"As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord"* (Num. 14:21). God's glory, His people, glorified immortals are destined to inherit this planet. Through the centuries God has been silently working, selecting the best from the vast reservoir of humankind, much as a lumberman might select a few choice trees from a great forest. The rest of the trees, not being usable, are permitted to flourish at will, so long as they do not interfere with the growth of his select trees, in which case the axe of the forester may be used. So God selects from every land and time

those who will make themselves part of His eternal plan by complying strictly with His laws. These will be His managers in the new order. The rest, who demonstrate no strong desire for anything more than the present, are permitted to live as they please, according to the course of this world—and what a course it has been!

But it shall not go on forever; God has decreed an end. A new government shall displace the old, and the new will rest in the hands of fully competent rulers. Christ Himself will be King, and thoroughly qualified for His exalted position. Nineteen centuries ago He came into the world to prove His qualification for the task and to leave us a perfect example. So great was His faith and so intense His devotion to the task that He never had to learn a lesson twice. Now for nearly two thousand years He has been at His Father's right hand, enjoying His well-earned reward and receiving the most advanced course of instruction in Planet Management. Soon He will be departing for His home—He may have left already. He shall come, in like manner as He went away. This was the promise of the angels the day He ascended: *"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11).

Look Up! Jesus Christ Is Coming!

What will come with Him and the new authority? It will be a whole new system. But let us not think that the transformation will take place in a moment, as if by magic. The evil so rampant now will have to be forcefully removed; hearts of men must be purged, a rebellious element eliminated, and all others brought into submission to the new order.

Just as a worthless scrub forest must be cleared away to make room for a bright new settlement, so the jungle of lawless humanity will have to be cleared away before God can beautify the earth and fill it with His glory. This, too, is part of the uplook.

But let us pause to ask: How will it be with each of us then? When the

old systems come crashing down, where will we be? Will we be safe in the Lord's protection, or dangerously entangled with the perishing?

When Christ comes with law and authority to rule, His reward with Him and His work before Him (Isa. 40:10), the ultimatum will go forth, *"Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come"* (Rev. 14:7).

It will be time for human misgovernment to pack up and depart, its day gone forever. A new age is dawning; a new power looms on the horizon, the power of Jesus Christ and His righteous government. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Look up!

A commanding voice is heard: *"Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come."*

This will be no gentleman's request; behind this appeal is force. The time for men to take it or leave it is gone. This is God's cleanup time.

The resistance will be desperate; all nations will gather against Jerusalem to battle (Zech. 14:2). But the work of eliminating the rebellious element and uprooting the evils which have plagued men for centuries will go forward unimpeded. People will quickly learn that they are fighting a power beyond their ability to defy. *"For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many"* (Isa. 66:15-16).

For the first time in centuries, men will find themselves fighting against God. It will be a time of judgment, a time of trouble *"such as never was since there was a nation"* (Dan. 12:1). Imagine Christ arriving today and calling upon the President of the United States, and the rulers of England, France, Germany, Iraq and Japan and all the other national leaders in the world to turn over their authority to Him. It is not hard to imagine that Jesus will meet resistance.

But when they see that their resistance is in vain, that they are steadily losing and the new authori-

ty is gaining, when they see themselves suffering nothing but defeat and the new power having no defeat, they will reconsider. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9).

For the first time in history, war will not result in wanton destruction. In this battle, the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16), none but the wicked will suffer. For "it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel 2:32). For the first time in history, all will be just and right, and the outcome shall be for the good of all. Right shall triumph, and Christ shall reign "from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:8). We know, because we see it in the uplook.

What will be the results of eliminating evil at its source and establishing a new government upon righteous principles? Here the uplook is bright indeed.

The result will be peace, universal peace, eternal peace. With one nation extending from sea to sea, there will be no strife between nations; and strife between individuals will also be gone, for laws of justice and kindness will prevail. The happy result: "quietness and assurance for ever." This is the word

of God's prophet Isaiah: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (Isa. 32:17). "I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness" (Isa. 60:17). It will be a time when righteousness shall "flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (Ps. 72:7).

The present trend will be completely reversed. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks.... Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it" (Mic. 4:3-4). What promises could be brighter! Men will not even study war again—all the army and naval academies in the world will be shut down.

With grand solemnity and joyous hope the prophet Isaiah enlarges this picture of the uplook. Speaking for God he says, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17). "Behold"—look up! Something is coming. "Behold, I create"; it is the same word that describes God's creating work in the first of Genesis; it is all tending to the same glorious climax outlined there, a whole new spiritual creation of men and women who shall live and glorify God forever. It is a creation of select men and women, tried and true, chosen and

**This age of
peril and
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not go on
forever; God has
decreed its end.**

faithful, who will rule with Christ and form the new heavens of that new world. And it is the creation of multitudes of happy inhabitants of this planet, who will also have become pure and holy by the standard of Christ. It will be a creation so wholly new, and which will so completely replace the old that "the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." Not even a trace of distress or anxiety will the former cause. It will be the full reality of all that the prophets of God have foretold; it will be "the world to come, whereof we speak" (Heb. 2:5).

What a time of joy will come with this new creation! Instead of remembering the old, the people of that time will rejoice and be glad in the new. The idea of joy is repeated six times in the next two verses. "But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in

In the Morning



O God, before I tackle the tasks of this day, I ask You to direct, control and guide me through all its hours.

Grant that today I may never even for one moment forget Your presence.

Today I do not want to take any step, or come to any decision, without Your guidance.

Lord, keep my lips, that they may speak no evil, derogatory or discouraging word.

Keep my eyes, that they may never linger on anything sordid or forbidden.

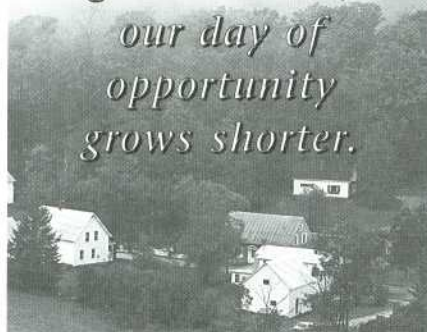
Keep my hands, that I may do my work with diligence, remembering that all my work is for You.

Keep my mind, that no soiled or bitter thought may lodge there.

Keep my heart, that it may be always warm and glowing with thoughts of Your goodness, Your faithfulness, Your love.

I ask your help, that I may begin, continue and end this day with You. AMEN.

As the outlook grows darker, our day of opportunity grows shorter.



that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (Isa. 65:18-19). To create Jerusalem a "rejoicing, and her people a joy" is to create her into that which will be an object of joy. At the center of God's Kingdom will be the happy individual, the human being who made himself into a new creation according to God's pattern, and is then crowned with glory and honor and everlasting life. What joy unspeakable and full of glory will fill each one who merits that blest recompense! They shall come to Zion "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:10). Who does not long to be one of them!

In that day, all people everywhere will rejoice in the Lord their God and joy in His salvation. Not only this, but the prophet Isaiah sees in the uplook that God will rejoice in His people. Imagine the mighty God of heaven rejoicing in our joy! "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). So now, in all their joy He will rejoice. "And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people."

What a time of rejoicing that will be! The presence of such joy means that all the needs of every heart have been satisfied. And "everlasting" joy means that they have been satisfied forever. Never

again shall they know woe, or misery, or suffering, or grief. Never again will they know the pains of sin, or even the pricks of temptation. No wonder the Prophet could exclaim: "Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord...hath redeemed Jerusalem...and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa. 52:9-10).

What a time that will be. "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12). What abounding joy to see trees of the Lord's own planting, spiritual trees of righteousness, springing up everywhere on this broad earth! Truly, "the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying" (Isa. 65:19). Why? For "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

All this is in the uplook! It is glorious beyond description. And these are not fanciful imaginations; these are the sure promises of the Creator, sealed with His Word. "Things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, Jerusalem Bible).

The glory of the uplook changes the gloom of the outlook into a reflection of glory itself. Each sign of breakdown, however immediately painful and menacing in its future consequences, becomes an occasion for hope and renewed optimism; reminding us that God is true and that the glorious things which He has promised will come.

In fact, the restive conditions we see today are more conducive to hope and faith than stability and prosperity could possibly be. Did not Jesus say, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). The present disorders are a solid confirmation of our faith.

The early Christians looked forward through the centuries and

rejoiced. What blissful relief for them to turn aside from the capers of an Emperor Nero and joyously prepare for the Second Coming of their Lord and Saviour! If they, centuries removed from its reality, could rejoice, should not we today? What the uplook did for them it can also do for us and more. "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and"—rejoice! Rejoice that God has given us the privilege of living in this great time, to be alive in such an age; rejoice that we can see beyond the present calamities and look forward to the Day when we may stand in our lot in the Kingdom of the Messiah.

There is no question about the uplook. Christ is coming, His return is breathtakingly near, even at the door. Are we preparing for it as fast as it is approaching?

Along with the outlook, and the uplook, should come the inlook, a deep searching look into our own hearts and characters. Are we in any way—even in thought or desire—part of the present system that is doomed and perishing, or is all our interest bound up in the uplook, the things which are soon to be revealed?

All things do not continue as they were. The day of the Lord is near and hastening greatly. When that Day arrives, it will be too late to choose where we shall stand. That will not be the time for choosing, if we have had opportunity now. That will be the time when we shall discover what we have really chosen, whether or not we realized it before. Now, today, this very day is our time to choose the right side and place ourselves on it. Perhaps Jesus is holding back this very hour to give us one more chance.

But He will not wait forever. As the outlook grows darker, our day of opportunity grows shorter. Oh, let us look up! And if when we look up, when viewing by faith the great wonderful events soon to take place on our planet, we can see our hands becoming cleaner and our hearts stronger, then may we rejoice in His confident assurance: "Your redemption draws nigh." □

Pondering the Word...

And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process?"

—Mark 8:36, NLT

Most of us don't want the whole world, just a part of it. But Jesus makes His point memorable by taking the extreme: What if you were to gain the whole world—and lose your life in the process? What would it be worth?

What poor judgment to forfeit real and eternal values by pursuing momentary satisfactions!

Yet it is the rare person who can see present and future values in proper perspective. Most prefer the things they can see, touch, taste, handle and hold. It feels good for the moment, but it is a shortsighted view.

Never forget that what this world gives it can also take away. Only the rewards that come from God are eternal, because only God can accompany His rewards with life.

While the great achievers of this world are moldering in dust, their accomplishments only so much worthless clutter, those who receive the blessings of God will be just beginning to enjoy an endless repast of "glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:7).

Who would choose to gain the whole world—and lose THAT!

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." —Psalm 90:12

Most people who act wisely in money matters make out a budget and then abide by it. Each amount of income is carefully accounted for and applied to a definite expense, so that all the necessary expenses may be met.

In the same way the Psalmist would have us budget our lives. Remember the rapidity with which the days pass, and the possibility that we may not have enough to meet our need: the preparing of a future inheritance.

In view of this sobering fact, the Psalmist would have us pray, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." In other words, teach us to spend our time wisely, laying up eternal riches.

If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" —Jeremiah 12:5 (NASB)

These are God's words addressed to Jeremiah, and the lesson to Jeremiah is plain and simple: If you can't do well when the going is easy (as it is now), what are you going to do when it gets rough?

Obviously Jeremiah didn't think the going was exactly easy! Those who hated God were prospering, and he—the faithful, loyal servant—was languishing. The priests were against him, the people of his nation were against him—God had even told him not to pray for them. Now the people of his home town, even the members of his family, were against him, and were trying to take his life! Easy...?

Call it what you will, says the Lord, it is going to get worse.

It was God's way of telling Jeremiah, "Get strong." We can imagine Jeremiah saying, "I'll do my best, Lord, I will" as he remembered the Lord's promise when he had just been called to be a prophet: "Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land" (Jer. 1:18, NIV).

It wasn't easy, and it wouldn't be easy. But by meeting the present trials, Jeremiah would be ready for the greater trials when they would come.

These were the potters, and those that dwelt among plants and hedges: there they dwelt with the king for his work." —1 Chron. 4:23

Potters and gardeners were among those employed by the king. Their tasks were perhaps not the most highly praised, but still they were needed, and the potters and gardeners "dwelt with the king," along with all others who served.

We, too, may not have any notable occupation or distinctive service to offer our King, yet we, too, may have the privilege of being in the King's employ and dwelling with Him. No useful occupation, however menial, can bar us from communion with our King. Potter, gardener, janitor, or preacher—we all serve our King, and will all be paid by our King, if we do our work to His glory. □



Candid Thoughts about "Temptation"

When there is no desire within, there will be no temptation without.

He who would not eat forbidden fruit must stay away from the forbidden tree.

By yielding to temptation one may lose in a moment what it took him a lifetime to gain.

Passing the Test

Mark was very poor at spelling. He had always been honest in his tests, but this particular day the test seemed especially hard, and he was stumped by many difficult words. A frustrated feeling swept over him.

It happened that Jane, an honor student, was sitting just across the aisle and a little in front of him. Inadvertently Mark glanced over at Jane's paper, his sharp eyes picking up several words. Quickly he made some corrections on his paper.

The teacher, who happened to notice Mark looking at Jane's paper, was keenly disappointed. She had always thought Mark an honest boy.

The test was complete, and the teacher called for the papers. Mark bowed his head for a moment, then suddenly tore up his paper. He had decided that he would rather get a zero on the test than to cheat.

At the end of the class, the teacher called Mark to her desk. "Mark, I want you to know that I'm very proud of you for what you did today. You passed an exam much greater than your spelling test!"

Better to shun the bait than to struggle on the hook.

You can't keep temptations from ringing your doorbell, but it's your fault if you invite them to dinner.

An elderly southern preacher cautioned his flock: "When you're looking at you neighbor's melon patch, brethren, you can't keep your mouth from watering, but you can RUN."

Temptation usually comes in through a door that has deliberately been left open.

Few speed records are broken by people running from temptation.

When you meet temptation, turn to the right.

No one can be caught in places he does not visit.

When you flee from temptation, don't leave a forwarding address.

If God bolts the door, do not climb through the window.

Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is around us.

When you feel you are free from temptation, be on your guard.

Just in Case

Bobby's mother had told him repeatedly not to go swimming in a certain pond near the park because someone had drowned there and she did not consider it a safe place to swim.

One warm day some of Bobby's friends asked him to go with them to the park. He asked his mother if he could go, and she said he could. But she said nothing about not swimming in the pond.

Happily Bobby went to his room and put on play clothes. On the closet shelf he spotted his swim suit. Quickly he tucked his swim suit in his pocket—just in case....

The morale: If you want to resist temptation, keep out of its way.

Satan is not such a fool as to fish without bait.

Virtue isn't true until it has been tried.

Temptation

HOW WELL DO YOU DO?

❖ What is temptation?

Temptation is something that invites, entices or attracts one to do wrong, especially with promise of pleasure or reward.

"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14).

Our temptation may be a natural appetite or instinct, a fleshly desire, a craving for something God forbids. It is anything that draws us away from God or hinders our life of service to God.

❖ Who experiences temptation?

"Every man is tempted"—no exceptions (James 1:14).

❖ Why are we tempted?

We are tempted because we are human. God created us with animal instincts, which are necessary for survival. But He also equipped us with intelligence, reason and higher aspirations, so that we can discern between good and evil, so that we can control our instincts and rise above the animal level.

❖ What is the end result of yielding to temptation?

Temptation leads to sin, sin leads to more sin, and *"the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23).

"Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:14–15, NIV).

❖ Does God ever tempt us?

No. *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man"* (Jas. 1:13).

God tests and proves, but He does not entice us into evil. In the Bible, the word translated *"tempt"* often means *"to test, prove,"* as when God tested Abraham (Gen. 22:1).

❖ What is the difference between a temptation and a test or trial?

A temptation is an enticement to do wrong, either from within ourselves or from outside. A test or trial is a difficult or contrary circumstance which gives us the opportunity to prove or develop our inner strength and character.

❖ What is the long-term benefit of resisting temptation?

"God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12, NLT).

THE UNIVERSAL PROBLEM

Every One Is Tempted

*Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;
Each vict'ry will help you some other to win;
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue,
Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through.*

Every one is tempted. If a man is alive, he is tempted. If he is living on this particular planet called Earth, he is tempted. If he has a body, he will be tempted through it. If there be a mind to think with, there is temptation through that. If there be a social nature through which to enjoy others, if there be a right ambition to take one's place in life, and do his full share of the fighting, and win one's share of the victory, there will be temptation because of these.

Some people yield to their temptations. They calmly lie down, and without regard to character or long-term consequences, they follow the line of least resistance. Their usual philosophy is, "Let us enjoy ourselves today, for who can be sure of tomorrow?"

Some people play with their temptations. They may make a pretense of fighting, but having thrown that bone to their con-

sciences to be chewed on a bit, they lie down and are trodden underfoot.

Some people fight their temptations. They recognize and resist them. They have learned the meaning of "watch and pray." The "watch" brings into action the human side, the "pray" the Divine side. Their watchtower is never deserted. They have found out the sleeplessness of the tempter and of all his sub-tempters. They lock up the joints of their will, and limber up the joints of their knees, and they fight. They say, "even though we go down, we will go down fighting, and only in the last ditch, and with face outward toward the foe. And when the sword blade snaps we will use the scabbard. But we will *never yield*, not by so much as a half hair's breadth." That's the spirit in which they meet and fight their temptation.

From the days of World War II comes a useful lesson about tempta-

tion. To speed up wartime production a certain large motor plant had given the workers short recesses for relaxation. Most of the employees spent these intervals in the smoking room. In one of the departments there was an assistant foreman who smoked like all the rest. But a change took place. He became a Christian and stopped the filthy habit. Hard pressed by his fellow workmen to explain the change, he quietly answered that he was now a follower of Jesus, and Jesus did not smoke. They laughed. "Wait until things go wrong," they said, "and he gets keyed up like a highstrung fiddle. He'll smoke. You'll see." Time passed, but not once was he seen smoking.

At last he was approached by his foreman. "You used to smoke a good deal. Don't you miss it?"

"Yes," he said, very emphatically.

"How do you manage to keep away from it?"

THE TOAD/FROG APPROACH

How Do You Meet Temptation?

How do you deal with temptation? Here's one common approach, as written by author Arnold Lobel. We quote:

Toad baked some cookies. "These cookies smell very good," said Toad. He ate one. "And they taste even better," he said.

Toad ran to Frog's house. "Frog, Frog," cried Toad, "taste these cookies that I have made."

Frog ate one of the cookies. "These are the best cookies I have

ever eaten!" said Frog.

Frog and Toad ate many cookies, one after another.

"You know, Toad," said Frog, with his mouth full, "I think we should stop eating. We will soon be sick."

"You are right," said Toad. "Let us eat one last cookie, and then we will stop."

Frog and Toad ate one last cookie. There were many cookies left in the bowl.

"Frog," said Toad, "let us eat one

very last cookie, and then we will stop."

Frog and Toad ate one very last cookie.

"We must stop eating!" cried Toad as he ate another.

"Yes," said Frog, reaching for a cookie, "we need willpower."

"What is willpower?" asked Toad.

"Willpower is trying hard *not* to do something that you really want to do," said Frog.

"You mean like trying *not* to eat

"Well, just this way. It is now ten o'clock, and it's the twentieth of the month. From seven till eight I asked the Lord to help me. He did. And I put a dot down on the calendar right near the twenty. From eight till nine He kept me, and I put down another dot. From nine to ten He has kept me, and now I give Him the glory as I put down the third dot. Just as I mark these dots I pray, 'O Lord, help me; help me to fight it off for another hour.'"

That's the fighting spirit for temptation. And it makes no difference what the temptation is, it can be fought and resisted successfully by steady, stiff fighting.

Now I wish you would mark very keenly this: temptation has no power of itself. It must have help from the one being tempted. There is nothing so weak, so ridiculously weak in itself, as a temptation. It can do nothing, absolutely nothing, without the consent of the man being tempted. It can allure, it can sing bewitching songs, it can make the atmosphere around you mighty hard to breathe in, but it can't get inside your life without your consent. And it is as powerless as an infant except it can get inside.

There is only one knob to the door of a man's life, and that is on the inside. That door never opens except as the man inside opens it. Let every tempted man underscore this fact, that it may stand out sharp

and clear. And then he can underscore it sharper yet in the book of his experience that *it takes two to make a successful temptation, and you are one of the two.* Without your partnership the temptation must slink dejectedly away.

Temptation of itself is utterly powerless. If a man yields, of course he is whipped at the start; he gives the chance of victory away without even a decent show of fight. If a man plays with his temptation, as so many do, if he dallies and lingers, if he hangs around the fire poking dry straws in, as so many do, then he is whipped, too. His defeat is sure. He passes the chance of victory on to the assailant without a decent show of fight.

If a man fights, if he is determined to fight, he will win. Such a man will reach out for every bit of help within reach. And there is One standing very near who knows all about temptation, temptations of every sort, who eagerly proffers His help. He is always waiting to help.

We may feel very weak, and the temptation may seem very subtle and very strong. It may come with the rush of a wild storm down the valley. Or it may come with the sly, sneaking subtlety of a snake crawling along in the tall grass waiting to strike its fangs into you when you least expect it.

But the man says, "I want to be right. I want to be good, strongly good. I want to be pure, above all

else to be pure." And so he locks up every joint of his will and reaches eagerly out for the help of the Helper at hand, and he fights. And

*The best time
to fight
temptation is
before it strikes.*

more, he wins. Every temptation so approached and attacked is already defeated.

Every temptation is a chance for a victory. It is a signal to fly the flag of our victory. It is a chance to make the tempter know anew that he is defeated.

How shall we fight temptation? Steady, steady. There's a will within, and a Friend alongside, and a victory just ahead, with the flag high, and the music joyous!

*To him that o'ercometh God giveth a crown;
Through faith we shall conquer though often cast down;
He, who is our Saviour, our strength will renew,
Look ever to Jesus, He'll carry you through.* □

all these cookies?" asked Toad.

"Right," said Frog.

Frog put the cookies in a box. "There!" he said. "Now we will not eat any more cookies."

"But we can open the box," said Toad.

"That is true," said Frog.

Frog tied some string around the box. "There!" he said. "Now we will not eat any more cookies."

"But we can cut the string and open the box," said Toad.

"That is true," said Frog.

Frog got a ladder. He put the box up on a high shelf. "There," said Frog. "Now we will not eat any more cookies."

"But we can climb the ladder and

take the box down from the shelf, and cut the string, and open the box," said Toad.

"That is true," said Frog. Frog climbed the ladder and took the box down from the shelf. He cut the string and opened the box.

Frog took the box outside. He shouted in a loud voice, "COME BIRDS, HERE ARE COOKIES!" Birds came from everywhere. They picked up all the cookies in their beaks and flew away.

"Now we have no more cookies to eat," said Toad sadly. "Not even one."

"Yes," said Frog, "but we have lots and lots of willpower."

"You may keep it all, Frog," said

Toad. "I am going home now to bake a cake."

Have you ever taken the Frog and Toad approach to temptation? Do you think that by placing enough obstacles in the way of the things that tempt you, you can keep from doing what you ought not to do?

It doesn't work. To overpower temptation, we must first WANT to overcome it.

Overcoming temptation means changing our desires from the inside out. As long as we harbor the desire, the temptation will remain.

Victory lies not in removing the temptation but in changing the direction of our desire. □

Are You Ready for the Battle?

"Take up God's armor; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand"

—Paul (Eph. 6:13, NEB).

Put yourself in the apostle Paul's place. How well would you have done?

What held Paul steady in the battles of life? How could he make it against so much hostility, persecution, opposition, imprisonment, plus the struggles with his own nature?

Paul recognized that he was being tested, and he was determined, by an act of his own will, to meet the test head-on. Rather than succumbing to self-pity or giving up when circumstances could easily have led to defeat, Paul chose to view his trials as opportunities to prove that he was striving to live by the principles he taught.

Paul had written to the Galatians not to become weary in well doing, *"For in due season you will reap a harvest if you do not give up"* (Gal. 6:9, NAB). In a lengthy letter to the Corinthians he told them to *"stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"* (1 Cor. 15:58, NIV). In his first letter to the Thessalonians he told them to *"Rejoice ever more..."* (1 Thess. 5:16).

We get tested every day of our lives, and through these testings we have the opportunity to strengthen our own faith and that of others. Hear the Apostle's testimony of triumph: *"We prove we are God's servants by our purity, knowledge, patience and kindness; by a spirit of holiness, by a love free from affectation; by the word of truth and by the power of God; by being armed with the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left, prepared for honor or disgrace, for blame or praise; taken for impostors while we are genuine; obscure yet famous; said to be dying and here we are alive; rumored to be executed before we are sentenced; thought most miserable and yet we are always rejoicing; taken for paupers though we make others rich; for people having nothing though we have everything"* (2 Cor. 6:4–10, JB). Talk about being prepared! Paul was ready for anything.

What was Paul's secret of success? He was fighting *"by the word of truth and by the power of God; by being armed with the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left"* (2 Cor. 6:7). Paul was using all the resources God had given him. There was no need to fear, so long as he made use of what God had provided.

PUT ON THE ARMOR

What was the armor Paul spoke of that was *"in the right hand and in the left"*? What were the *"weapons of righteousness"* that he was armed with?

He wrote about these in detail to the Ephesians.

"Find your strength in the Lord, in his mighty power," he wrote. *"Put on all the armor which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil"* (6:11, NEB).

Dressing for Battle

Paul recommended armour for every part of our body—from head to toe. I need it all, if I am to be a successful Christian, so that I can put it to full use. Yes, if Paul needed it, how much more do I!

The belt of truth. *"Fasten on the belt of truth"* (Ephesians 6:14, NEB). How can I put on the belt of truth? By believing, and speaking, and acting, only what I know to be truth. God is a God of truth, and He wants integrity in me. He wants me to believe and accept and defend only what is fully truth.

The breastplate of righteousness.

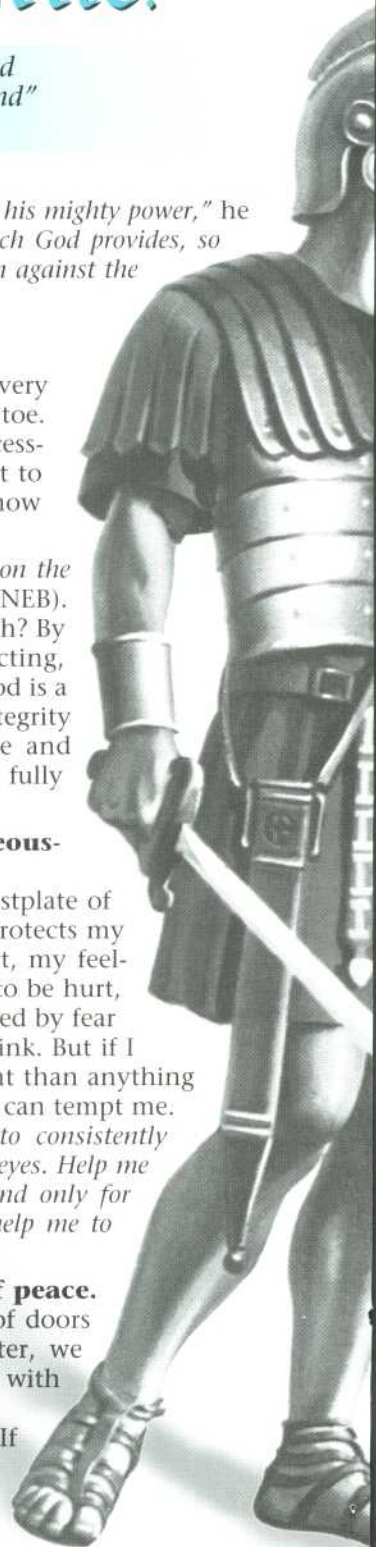
Next, I need to pick up the breastplate of righteousness. This breastplate protects my most vulnerable areas—my heart, my feelings and emotions. It is so easy to be hurt, or to allow myself to be influenced by fear of what another might say or think. But if I am more interested in being right than anything else, nothing that is unrighteous can tempt me.

Lord, I pray, help me today to consistently choose to do what is right in Your eyes. Help me to think right, feel right, and stand only for what is right. If others criticize, help me to stand for the right.

The shoes of the gospel of peace.

Just as we would not walk out of doors barefooted in the dead of winter, we need to take time to fit our feet with the gospel of peace.

Feet need good protection. If our feet are injured, there is little we can do to help ourselves. So God provides shoes to give us a firm foundation on which to stand. He readies us for His work by instructing and teaching us in what we should do and where we should



The HELMET of Salvation

The helmet is for head protection. This suggests that Christ's way of life involves the mind.

When we commit ourselves to God, we commit our minds to Him, to think His thoughts, to pursue His ideals. When we do this, our minds are protected by the helmet of salvation and we can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The BREASTPLATE of Righteousness

Can you say your life is fortified and protected by righteousness—right doing?

Do you stand firm for the right whenever it is assailed, knowing that God is a God of righteousness?

Is it your first thought, your first ambition and your first concern at all times to do and be what is right in the presence of God?

The SHIELD of Faith

Can you believe without seeing? Is your faith in God and His Word a constant and growing thing, your ever-ready defense?

Can you acknowledge what you read in God's Word and then act upon it?

Is your patience growing?

Can you make yourself do what you ought to do whether you like it or not—because your faith is in God?

Are you aggressive in attacking the problems of life, in seeking the good, the spiritual, the true?

The SWORD of the Spirit

Do you have the gospel of Christ with you at all times? Is your life a living testimony of the transforming power of His Word?

Do you feel each day the sharp, keen edge of the Word of God in your life, cutting down anything that is wrong, separating flesh from spirit?

Do you care more about what your heavenly Father thinks of you than what your friends may think?

The SHOES of the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace

Do you know where you are going? Have you set your goals?

Do your feet take you to the right places? Do they travel always the paths of peace?

Do you know your own weaknesses and avoid placing yourself in situations where you know you'll be tempted?

go (Ps. 32:8). When I choose to follow God's plan instead of asking Him to bless my plans, I find my feet do not become bruised and weary from going places He has forbidden. I also find that when I say "Yes" to what He wants me to do rather than to what others tell me I should do, I have peace instead of tension. Whenever I obey His law, I find peace.

The shield of faith. The next piece of armor I must pick up is the shield of faith. *"This shield will stop every flaming arrow of the evil one"* (Eph. 6:16, NEB).

God has given us everything we need to be mighty in spirit, strong in faith. We walk by faith, not by sight, therefore must keep our faith continually strengthened. Every time I nurture my doubts I lower my shield of faith. A soldier can be fatally wounded if he lowers his shield for even a moment. I need the defense of a strong, abiding faith.

I want to build up my faith by reading faith, thinking faith, talking faith. God has provided everything I need—fulfilled prophecies, historical evidence, everything I need to make my defenses strong and sure, if I just apply my mind to them.

The helmet of salvation. This piece of armor protects my mind, and keeps me thinking forward. *"All things that pertain unto life and godliness [come] through knowledge."* There is first of all something to be learned, something to be believed. Picturing the magnificent reward God has set before me helps greatly in keeping my mind on track. It protects me from negative thoughts that would tear me apart. No, the enemies' taunts are all in vain when my mind is protected by the helmet of salvation!

Every morning I thank God that I do not have to be bound by old habits and old thinking patterns. He has given me new thoughts to think, new glimpses into the depths of His Word, and new pictures of the glory to come. With such thoughts swarming my mind, I am safe.

The sword of the spirit. Finally, I must not forget my sword. What soldier would go to battle without a weapon? Here is my first line of defense, and if I ask God's help in wielding it, I know that the enemy cannot harm me. With this sword, I can even take the offensive and be sure that I will win. I know that God does not intend me to turn and run, when He has given me His sword of the spirit.

Even with all this armor, there are times when I feel weak, defenseless, defeated. But praise God, I don't have to be that way. I can turn to God anytime, review the pieces of the armor, get it on, and be ready for battle.

For the fight will come; it is inevitable. But when I am dressed for battle, I say, "LET IT COME!"

God, help me to use every piece of Your armor You have provided. Grant me the courage, the faith, the fortitude, the endurance, to stand against every onslaught of evil, that when the battle is over, I may be still standing. □

SOME GUIDELINES FOR

RESISTING Temptation

by Desiderius Erasmus

Avoid sin for the sake of Christ. But if you cannot do this, try to avoid it at least for your own sake.

If you have frequent and heavy temptations, don't begin to worry that God has forsaken you. Think of it this way: He's a loving Father teaching a future heir or punishing a beloved son. Begin to worry when you don't have temptation.

Be consoled that suffering is common to many great men. Try all the harder, because when you conquer, you'll be in their company. God will not forsake you and "will not let you be tempted more than you are able to bear" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Careful generals set guards even in times of peace. You should be like a general and always look out for the next assault of the enemy. "For he ever goes about seeking whom he may destroy" (1 Pet. 5:8). Prepare yourself for his attack and repulse him when he comes.

Two Dangers

You have two dangers to face: One is giving in; the other is becoming proud after a temptation has been conquered. To be always safe from temptation, remember that Christ will help His followers do all things, because He says to them, "Have confidence; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

After temptation has passed you, or while you are performing some worthy task, give all the credit to God's kindness. If you allow yourself to feel that you

have done this on your own ability and merit, your mind will become filled with prideful pleasure. Keep yourself in check by remembering Paul's words: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received, then why do you boast, as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

It is not sufficient for a soldier merely to repel an attack. He must also seize his attacker's weapons and turn them against him. Follow the example of the soldier and use temptation as a means of virtue.

If your inclinations are to be greedy and selfish, increase your donations to charity. If you tend toward boasting, make a deliberate effort to be humble in all things. This way you can find in temptation a renewed determination to increase in piety.

Don't Ignore Small Vices

We should not make the mistake of assuming that if we practice most of the virtues, it will then be permissible to have one or two small vices. The enemy you ignore the most usually is the one who conquers. If a person has true charity, he holds all the vices in equal abomination and does not let himself be fooled by any one of them, because he knows that the least vice leads quickly to the worst, and will lead him to destruction.

Don't compare difficulties of combating temptation with the pleasures of sin. Compare the bitterness of the fight with the bitterness that sin brings. Before a sin is committed, the guilt in which the sin results has a sweet and comfortable air about it. But think of the sweetness and comfort that will come to you when you have won out, and you will have little difficulty making the choice.

A good soldier never admits defeat, even when he is in retreat. Imitate the soldier and don't despair if you have fallen. Be determined to get up quickly and go on. The good soldier's temporary defeat and painful wounds seldom drive him from the field. They spur

(Continued on page 26)

When we sin,
we sign a
contract with
death.

Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1536) of Rotterdam, the Netherlands, was one of the most learned and brilliant scholars of the Renaissance. His writings ranged from erudite studies of classical literature to practical devotional texts such as the Handbook of the Militant Christian (1504), from which this excerpt has been adapted. In a chaotic, fragmented, and polemical period of the church's history, Erasmus called people to charity, unity and simplicity.



Like it or not, life has some absolutes.

- ◆ No one can successfully serve two masters. Said Jesus, *"You cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matt. 6:24).
- ◆ No one can love the world AND God. Said James, *"Whoever chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy"* (Jas. 4:4, NEB).

Logical enough, but do we realize what this means?

God has called His people to a total commitment. All who profess the name of Christ will readily agree that we should say "yes" to God. But when we do, we are automatically saying "no" to a host of other interests.

If not, we are compromising.

When God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham did not stop to negotiate, or to ask for all the details of the plan. (He hadn't even been told where he was to go). He immediately said "yes"—because he was convinced that God was issuing the command, and he had committed himself to obey God. And so we read, *"It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the summons to go out to a place which he would eventually possess, and he set out in complete ignorance of his destination. It was faith that kept him journeying like a foreigner through the land of promise, with no more home than the tents which he shared with Isaac and Jacob, co-heirs with him of the promise. For Abraham's eyes were looking forward to that city with solid foundations of which God Himself is both Architect and Builder"* (Heb. 11:8–10, Phillips).

But consider: When Abraham said "yes" to God, he was saying "no" to every other interest or influence. Did his wife have another idea? Did his father, or brother, or in-law wish to go another direction? It was not even a consideration, because Abraham had directions from God. Were they offended? It was not a cause for concern. God had given a command, and Abraham obeyed.

Here is a faith that says "no."

Genesis chapters 13 through 19, report the story of Abraham and his nephew Lot. The lives of these two men illustrate the blessing of saying "yes" to God without reservation. Both Abraham and Lot were men of God, yet does it seem that Lot and his family were attracted, at least to some extent, to the wicked influences of Sodom? Lot's family were reluctant to leave the wicked city. At least, when the angel came to talk

about leaving Sodom, Lot's sons-in-law thought he was joking. And Lot's wife showed that her heart was entangled with Sodom. Even when given the opportunity to escape and save her life, she looked back—and lost all. The pull of Sodom was stronger than the pull of her faith in God. She did not have a faith that could say "no" to temptation.

When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law, He answered, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:30–31). To Jesus, nothing was more important than keeping God first in our minds, first in our affections, first in our lives.

Yes, God must be first. Everything else—even those who are closest to us—must come second.

How is your life prioritized? How is mine? What comes first...second...last?

Remember, when we say "yes" to God we say "no" to the world.

Looking at it from another angle, if we cannot say "no" to lesser interests, we have not truly said "yes" to God. □

Upon My Honor as a Christian

The following is the personal experience of one who believed her integrity could carry her through. Nevertheless she was tempted.

"Recently I was given a take-home test in my seminary class. We were told that we would be on our honor to study, close our books, complete the test in one hour and return it the following week.

"At first I was excited to have more time to study and to have the freedom to take the test when I felt ready. But as the time came closer for me to take the test, I wondered who would know or care if I left my books and notes open just in case I got stuck. Temptation was close at hand. I had a choice: to follow the instructions and not know all the answers, or to cheat and get a better grade.

"When I came to the final study moments before opening the test envelope, again the strong temptation to cheat flooded my mind. I stopped to pray for God's help: "Lord, I want to be honorable before You. I don't want to have to follow cheating with a lie that I didn't cheat. I know You hate the dishonesty that results from my pride. I want to be honest before You, my professor, my friends—and myself. Please help me through this temptation."

"I put my books and notes on the floor, opened the test and finished exactly one hour later. My heart was ecstatic—not because I had finished the test, but because I had experienced victory over temptation."

—from Decision Magazine, December, 1996.



He Saw... He Coveted... He Took...

These words are the transgressor's own honest confession of guilt: "I saw...I coveted...I took...I hid." Who? What? When? Where?

Let's look closely at the account. It is found in the book of Joshua, chapter 7.

The Children of Israel, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, had finally entered the land of promise, and under the leadership of Joshua they were beginning to conquer it.

The first city to be conquered was Jericho, one of the largest and richest cities in all Canaan. The gold and silver of Jericho had long drawn toward the city the traveling dealers who sold the rich and beautiful textures woven on the Babylonian looms.

The Lord spelled out the details that were to be followed in conquering this city, along with a singular command: Jericho was to yield no spoil to the conquerors. Like the first fruits of the harvest, the proceeds of this victory were to belong to God; and no part of the spoil, neither thread nor shoelatchet, was to be so much as touched by Joshua or any of his men. "Do not take any of the things set apart for destruction, or you yourselves will be completely destroyed, and you will bring trouble on all Israel. Everything made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron is sacred to the LORD and must be brought into his treasury" (Josh. 6:18-19, NLT).

The conquest went just as planned, and Israel won a great victory. As far as anyone knew, Joshua's instructions were followed precisely. After rescuing Rahab and her family, "the Israelites burned the

city and everything in it. Only the things made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron were kept for the treasury of the Lord's house" (Josh. 6:24, NLT).

Shortly, when it was time to continue the conquest, Joshua confidently sent forces from Jericho to Ai. The soldiers looked forward to



what should have been an easy victory. But to everyone's shocked surprise there was no victory at all, for "the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto...the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted and became as water" (Josh. 7:3-5).

What was wrong? What did it mean? This was only the second encounter in a war that God was directing. What was going to come of this great conquest—when the Israelite armies were defeated in the second? Had God forsaken them?

It was a solemn moment. Joshua rent his clothes, and..."fell face down to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening.

The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!' Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" (vs. 6-9, NIV).

Someone had violated the law, and immediately the whole camp was involved. The transgressor had broken faith. God's covenant with His people was always a covenant of faith. And that covenant involved a solemn obligation. To take that which had been forbidden, that which had been consecrated to God, was to rob God—a far worse sin than to rob one's fellowman.

Who was guilty? No one knew. No one would admit to any wrongdoing. How did Joshua find out?



God commanded Joshua not to lie there but to get up and do something. Israel had sinned and had transgressed His covenant. *"They have even taken something from the devoted portion and stolen it. They have been deceitful and have put it with their own belongings."* And God would not help them any more until the accursed thing was removed and the offender destroyed.

Joshua obeyed. He arose early the next morning and gathered all of Israel before him.

Look at the camp of Israel that awful morning. See the anxious faces of those fathers and mothers, wives and sisters who have loved ones in the army! How their hearts pound, beating as if it were the last moment! What family will be called? No one knows.

The tribe of Judah is taken, then the families. The family of the Zarhites, then Zabdi's household. Man by trembling man files by Joshua. At last Achan is taken.

"My son," Joshua urges, *"give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me"* (v. 19).

At this point Achan confesses that he has indeed sinned against the Lord. *"When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it"* (Josh. 7:20-21).

Who thinks for a moment that he can hide from God?

"I saw...I coveted...I took"

An honest confession, one which might have earned him an honorable place among those whom God forgives. But Achan did not make this confession voluntarily because he wanted to be right with the law. Achan did not confess his sin until its consequences had been sealed by his own doing. For Achan did not stop with seeing, coveting, and taking what was forbidden. He went on to conceal and cover his sin, and

not even the repeated pleas of Joshua could bring him to acknowledge it. Worse still, when Achan fell into the pit of transgression, he pulled his whole family in with him. Such is the treachery of sin as it spreads like a disease from heart to heart.

"I saw." Here is the first opening. Temptation often knocks first at the body's window: the eye. Achan's eyes were his fatal snare. It was his eyes that caused his downfall. Had Achan not *seen* that beautiful garment, he would not have coveted it. He would have gone home to his tent that night a good soldier and an honest man. But once Achan's eyes had lighted on that rich garment, and the gold, and the silver, he could not get his mind off them.

Next, he *coveted*. He let desire overrule conscience.

Achan saw, and had he immediately turned his eyes away from the temptation and fixed his mind on his duty to obey the words of his commander, he could have prevented the whole hideous affair. But he didn't. Maybe he didn't really believe the law. Or maybe he thought it didn't apply to him—as though he were an exception. Anyway, who would ever know? Besides, just consider the value of the gold, the goodly garment, and the silver!

And so the covetousness in his heart grew, and grew, and grew.

Such is the way with evil, if it is not stopped at its source. It grows, and grows, and grows. The holy God demands a holy people. His people must render a total dedication, a total obedience. Anything less than total obedience is disobedience.

Then, Achan *took*. Carefully he watched. And when he thought no one was looking, when all backs were turned, he quickly rolled up the precious garment, with the gold and silver inside it, and thrust it down into his sack.

Watch him, as Achan moves swiftly through the darkness with his stolen goods. He stops abruptly near a certain tent, and makes a faint call. The tent door is quickly lifted, then closes. And there, in the

light of the faintly burning embers Achan shows the coveted goods to

The holy God demands a holy people.

his family. One can almost hear the hushed "Oo!'s" and "Ah!'s" as Achan spreads his precious booty upon the floor. Then taking a spade, he begins to dig a large hole in the earth right in the midst of his tent. Now it is safe. His family give hearty approval. With such wealth in their hands, they will be well set for years to come.

Where did Achan get his covetous nature? To be sure, he already had it before he went to battle at Jericho, but so did many others. What was the difference? Achan

Anything less than total obedience is disobedience.

looked at the riches, and started to think of all that his family could do with that amount of wealth. He looked and didn't stop until he had yielded to the temptation. Not only that, but he pulled his whole family into sin with him. Carefully he concealed the shining treasure, took it home to his family, and influenced them to covet and conceal it with him. Together they coveted, together they concealed the precious treasure—and together they died.

*The benefits of
our resisting
temptation will
reach through all
the ages of eternity.*

Who can deny the frightful consequences of sin?

We may read this account, and say smugly to ourselves, "I would never do such a thing." But let us be careful: for, *"whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning"* (Rom. 15:4).

Let us remember Achan's dreadful confession: *"I saw...I coveted...I took."* Where is the place to prevent the whole ugly affair? Right at the start: *"I saw."* We may not be able to keep our eyes from seeing, but we can act quickly when we do see something forbidden, withdraw our eyes, and turn our minds in an opposite direction.

But suppose we go from step one to step two? Suppose we must say, *"I saw...I coveted."* Can we stop there? Yes! But the stopping is harder because the desire has conceived and is growing in our heart. Achan kept the picture of that beautiful Babylonish garment in his mind. He had never seen anything more beautiful. The more he thought about it, the more it grew in value. It grew so large, in fact, that he could think of nothing else. He *had* to have it.

This is how covetousness works.

Still, the fateful action had not been taken. He still could have stopped and said to himself, "No, the law of God forbids my touching that garment. It does not belong to me, and I will not break faith. I will not mar my record before God. If God forbids it, I hate it." And with that thought he

could have turned away, saved—though narrowly—from the awful transgression.

But Achan did not stop there. He allowed his desire to conceive and bear fruit, and so he *"took"* that which was forbidden.

The deed was done. Achan felt a certain relief in his heart. Now he did not have to think about it any more. It was his.

Do we see in Achan a picture of ourselves? Are we longing for that which is forbidden? Are we pressing some accursed thing to our hearts even though we know it will bring death?

Achan did not bring the goodly garment and place it where all the camp could examine and admire it. No, he hid it. He knew he was coveting something that was forbidden, something that belonged to God.

Achan took, with that set the fateful transaction was completed. Then he proceeded to add sin to sin. He took it home and shared it with his family. He shared it in such a way that they all bought into his horrible plot. They all agreed to help him covet, conceal, and cover, his wickedness.

There is yet another lesson in the case of Achan for us to ponder. We may not commit an evil action ourselves, yet may not condemn that evil in another. In this way, we are *"consenting"* with a thief and are a partaker of his evil deed (Ps. 50:18).

Although Achan's *family* did not steal the robe or the silver and gold, they gave their consent to Achan's bringing it into their home and burying it. But it was like the eagle that stole a piece of sacred flesh from the altar—and brought home with it a smoldering coal that kindled a fire that burned up both the nest and the young.

Have you sinned? and have you tried carefully to conceal every trace of that sin? As sure as God is in heaven, your sin will find you out. You may think that the darkness will cover you, but it never will. You may be convinced that sin does not pay wages, and may go on sowing as you please. But when the harvest is reaped, you

will find that you will reap as you have sown.

Achan could have done better, even after he had seen, and coveted, and taken the forbidden goods. Even after he had taken them home and hid them in his tent, he still could have awakened to his sinfulness, pulled the stolen goods from their hiding place, and gone straight to Joshua with his confession. The deed was done, but it was not yet at its worst point.

Is there some sin hiding in our lives? Let us go home to our tent tonight, take the accursed thing out of its hiding place, and lay it bare before the Lord, if not before all Israel. What folly to try to hide our sins from God, He who sees and knows the thoughts that come into our minds, every one of them!

What shall be the reward of resisting temptation?

For the books we now forbear to read, we shall one day be endued with wisdom and knowledge from on high. For the rough and raucous music that we will not listen to, we shall be permitted to join in the song of the redeemed. For the degrading pictures and scenes from which we turn our eyes, we shall someday gaze on the face of our Creator. For the illicit companionships we shun, we shall be welcomed into the society of angels and the communion of triumphant saints. For all the idle amusements we avoid, we shall be welcomed at the celestial jubilee.

Indeed, the benefits of our resisting temptation will reach through all the ages of eternity. □

*The longer
you look at
temptation, the
more liable you
will be to fall
for it.*

THE PRIME AMERICAN Tempter BEWARE!

When more than 98 percent of Americans have television sets, when most families consider television a valuable source of information and entertainment, what should the Christian do?

Be exceedingly selective. Let us bring the old-time motto up to date and apply it:

View nothing you would not want to be found viewing when Jesus comes.

What does much TV viewing consist of? In the June, 1997 issue of *The Christadelphian Tidings*, the editors published the following e-mail article, which we would like to reprint for the benefit of our readers. The article was written by a citizen of the United Kingdom.

Early evening soaps concentrate on the qualities of the tongue for entertainment, backbiting, insults, sarcasm and cheek.

Late evening soaps feature adultery, greed, avarice, domestic violence.

Game shows concentrate on the greedy desire for material things with a fair amount of innuendo thrown in for "entertainment."

Political talk shows specialize in mockery, lack of respect for authority, disdain, contempt, insult, derision, etc. for their "pull factor."

Mainstream news is presented as "entertainment" with attractive music intros, pontification by self-important news reporters, sound bite sniping and carping criticism, along with a fair amount of sensationalist scandal, violence from the latest war and patronizing human interest.

Police dramas usually feature two detectives who bumble their way through a whodunit mystery encountering a mixed set of fleshly vices along the way. These pander to the pride of the viewer in following a mystery and guessing its outcome, encouraging judgments and criticisms on the characters involved.

Soapy police dramas rely on our nosy interest in other people doing wrong things and how they try to outwit the police, who are portrayed warts and all.

Health dramas focus on our need to watch others in health/accident misfortune and see the health service struggle to cope.

Comedies come in various sorts. You mainly have the sexual innuendo and war of the sexes type with no appreciation or respect for either sex inculcated. The later the hour of viewing the more explicit is the dialogue.

Talk shows again portray the vices of the tongue in abundance. The later the hour, the more rude, disrespectful, churlish and backbiting are the comments.

Late night films portray increased nudity and violence, degrading men and particularly women.

Sports programs exalt the achievements of men and women and encourage competition—frequently in a form of controlled violence.

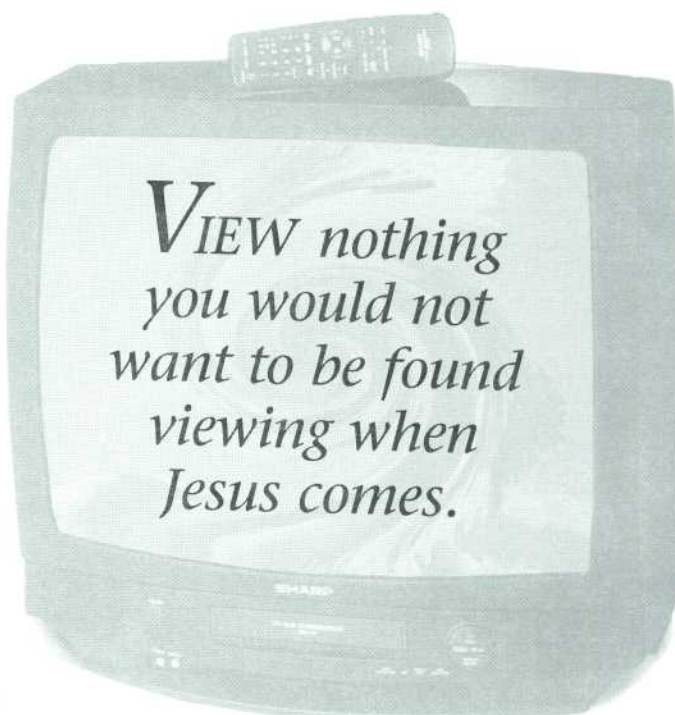
Children's programs show in milder form all of the above, e.g. flirtation for sex, playground bullying for violence, etc. They often portray child against adult.

Fashion shows encourage vanity, preening, pontification, etc.

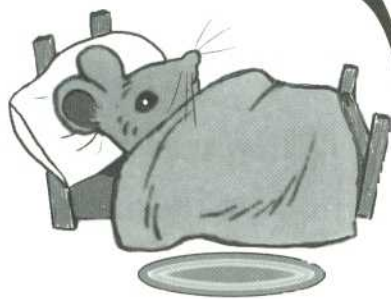
Contemporary pop parades reprehensible values in its lyrics and performers and gesticulates sex in its stage performances.

Science fiction is the religion of TV. It sets out an atheistic vision of the future.

Religious programs are inane and vacuous; a sop to established religion. □



AN OLD FASHIONED STORY FOR CHILDREN



Willie the Mouse



Mice and people are alike in several ways. A mouse is curious; boys and girls are curious, too. Mice get hungry, and people get hungry, too. Mice like to play, and boys and girls like to play, too.

This story is about a little mouse named Willie.

Willie lived in a hole in the wall. During the day he usually kept out of sight, but at night he often prowled around.

One night little Willie climbed into his matchbox bed, pulled the covers up to his chin and tried to sleep. But he just couldn't sleep. The more he tried, the wider awake he became. Finally he realized what was the matter. "I'm hungry!" he said. "That's what's the matter with me. I guess I should have eaten my supper as mother wanted me to, then I wouldn't be hungry now."

Just then his wiggly little nose picked up a strong smell coming from the kitchen through the hole in the wall.

Why! it was limburger cheese! Willie sat up in bed and sniffed deeply of the wonderful odor. "Ah!" he said to himself, "Some kind human being has remembered that little mice get hungry."

Willie scrambled out of bed, tiptoed to the hole in the wall and looked into the kitchen. He sniffed again, looking this way and that to be sure the big gray cat wasn't anywhere around. Every minute Willie got more hungry. Oh, how good that cheese smelled! Willie decided he *must* find that cheese. It smelled better and better every minute.

Willie crept quietly through the

hole and across the kitchen floor to where a strange looking thing was sitting on the floor. It was made of a piece of wood and had some shiny pieces of wire on top of it. But the main thing—the most important thing about it—was that right on top was a large piece of limburger cheese! It was stuck on a small piece of metal that was tipped up at an angle.

Do you know what the strange thing was? That's right, it was a trap.

Willie was young. He had never seen a trap before. He didn't realize that it was dangerous. He didn't know that somebody had put it there to catch him. He thought that because it had a nice piece of cheese on it, it must have been put there to satisfy his appetite and to make him happy.

Now there are things in life that are just like that, things which boys and girls think would make them so happy. But like a trap, they are dangerous and harmful. For example, many of the pleasures and ways of the world are like a bait that will catch us. Just like Willie and that piece of cheese, they will draw us little by little and farther and farther from God.

Suddenly, Willie remembered that his mother had warned about those strange things called traps. He remembered what she had said about Uncle Bill, how he had been caught in a trap and then was never seen or heard of again. With a shudder, Willie turned and ran away from the trap as fast as he could go. He was hungry, but not *that* hun-

gry. Back into his hole in the wall he sped. He didn't want to get killed—no, sir!

But somehow Willie just could not get the smell of that cheese out of his nose. What a nice color it was! How large it was! It made his mouth water just to think about that nice smelly cheese! And the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to taste it.

In spite of all he had heard about the danger of traps, and all that his mother had told him, Willie went back to the hole in the wall and looked out.

"Yes, sir," he said to himself, "there it is, right where I left it. Why, it hasn't moved an inch! I don't think it would hurt anything if I took a little tiny nibble of that cheese. Uncle Bill was just a bit careless. He must have slipped or fallen some way."

Willie also thought about his mother. "She's getting older now, and is sort of old-fashioned and out-of-date. I don't think she understands these modern inventions. I think maybe she has lost her appetite for cheese and that's why she told me not to go near that trap with the delicious cheese on it."

Willie walked all around the trap. Then he walked around the trap again. Willie sniffed, then he walked all around the trap once more. Very, very carefully, Willie put one foot on the trap. Nothing happened. Very, very carefully Willie put his other foot on the trap. Nothing happened. Very, very slowly Willie reached out and took one tiny nibble from the cheese.

"Deeeeeeelicious! Simply delicious!" exclaimed Willie. "What a shame if I had missed a treat like this! I'm glad I'm not home in bed."

Boys and girls sometimes feel just as little Willie did—they can't see why they aren't big enough to do certain things. They don't see any harm in doing just as they please once in awhile. And so they go ahead and do things that are wrong, just as Willie did.

Willie took just another little nibble, and another, and another. Nothing happened. He bit off larger and larger pieces. What a delicious feast! Still nothing happened. He took another bigger nibble. How good it smelled. He took another bite, then a bigger bite, and—*SNAP!* The trap jumped up in the air and the wire snapped down on little Willie!

And that was the end of Willie.

What is the lesson for us? How did Willie get caught in that trap? Did he come dashing out of his hole, leap high in the air, and jump on the trap? No! He came little by little. He took tiny nibbles at first, then he took bigger bites, and still bigger ones. He became bolder all the time until finally he was caught in the trap.

That is the way boys and girls get caught, too. They give in just a little at first, then, when nothing happens, they go a little further, and then a little further still, until finally—*SNAP!* And they are caught.

Bad habits are like traps. The longer we keep them, the tighter they hold us and the harder it is to get away from them.

Some of these bad habits may be disobeying our parents, quarreling with other children, telling a little lie, or taking some little thing that does not belong to us. It may seem like a small thing, but small things lead to bigger and bigger sins, and we are asking for trouble.

Willie the mouse did not plan to get caught. And boys and girls do not plan to either. But that is what happens. It all starts with our thoughts. Willie thought about the cheese. He kept thinking about it until finally he went to the trap and got it.

Willie got in trouble because he thought he knew more than his mother did. We should be so thankful to have those who can help us until we learn to say "No" to temptation. Willie did not learn to say "No" to the smell of the cheese. If

we do not learn to say "No" when we are young, we will get caught when we are older—just like Willie's uncle who was never seen or heard of again.

If we keep working to be good every day we will grow up to be happy men and women. We will become good, strong Christian characters and be able to do many things for God and He will take delight in us. We do not have to grow up to work for God. Girls and boys can read their Bibles and can pray to God to help them live for Him each day. By being good and honest ourselves, we can help others to be good. We can show them by our example what kind of a child God would like them to be. Above all we must not forget to show kindness first at home, by helping in whatever way we are able to. When we are busy doing good we will not be tempted to be mean, nasty, hateful or disobedient. Then, too, when we are trying to be good there will be many who love us and will help us keep away from these traps. And God will help us, too, and we can be safe from the deadly traps of sin that ruin our lives now and leave us with no promise of future life. □



Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? —Proverbs 6:27

It was a shocking tragedy. A 15-year-old boy was strangled by the family's pet. The slender youth had gone to an upstairs bedroom to play with an 11-foot Burmese python. Nobody is sure how it happened, but the supposedly tame snake turned into a killer that took the boy's life.

The lesson is powerful: don't play with anything that could become an agent of death.

This news story changes the old adage "Don't play with fire!" into a flashing warning signal. The warning applies even more to the hazard of playing with sin—some "small" thing that seems merely to give pleasure without hurting anyone. At first it seems harmless, but feed it, let it grow, take pride in it, and a trifling sin can become a terrible tragedy that "brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15). The apostle John applied this same warning to everything that might be classified as the "lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes," or the "pride of life" (1 John 2:15-17).

As believers in Jesus Christ, we must check even the smallest evil the moment it springs up, and ask God's help to overcome it. Playing with a pet sin is like playing with a pet snake: sooner or later it will take our life.

*We can't afford to play with fire
Nor tempt a serpent's bite;
We can't afford to think that sin
Brings any true delight. —Selected.*

***The most deadly sins do not LEAP upon us,
they CREEP up on us.***

To play with temptation is to play with death.

HERE I AM Responsible

All of us welcome responsibility. In it is a sense of worth and a challenge which is basic to healthful, balanced living. The youth looks forward eagerly to assuming the responsibilities of life, and only reluctantly do the aged relinquish.

God has so designed His plan that each of us is individually responsible for our own eternal salvation.

So great a calling involves a great responsibility. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:1, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*

As committed servants of God, we are His representatives in this world—a serious responsibility indeed. In our hands we hold the religion of Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, the truth of the ages.

As His servants, we stand between God and this world. *"You are my witnesses,...says the Lord. And you are my servants. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other God; there never has been and never will be"* (Isa. 43:10, NLT). You are My servant, says God. You have been chosen to know Me, believe in Me, and understand Me. Are we standing with sword and trumpet in hand, banner flying, and dressed in pure white robes? Or are we posing in front of God as a bedraggled son of Satan, dishonoring the cause we profess to uphold?

✓ I Am Responsible: before the World

Is my attire a faultless example of what I profess?

If our first loyalty is to Christ, no leaning toward the fashions of the world is excusable, no accommoda-

tion, no compromise. To copy the fashions of this world is but to say by our conduct that the standards of Christ are not so high nor the conduct required of the follower of Christ so different as the casual observer might have been led to suppose.

Where are *my eyes*? The world contains so much that is vile, sordid and obscene. Are these things attracting any of my attention? Am I countenancing the unclean, even by a look? Someone may be watching me more closely than I think.

As a Christian, it is our duty—and it is folly to us if it is not our desire—to keep our feet on a higher plane, our head in a serener world, our eyes fastened on nobler things than lie in the realms of Sodom. A living hope must be supported by a living sacrifice. Unless we are making that sacrifice, the hope to which we are clinging is dead and meaningless.

Then, what am I doing with *my tongue*?

People listen to us with the interest due one who has made a high profession. How careful I must be that no phrase, word, opinion, idea, or expression comes from my lips that would not fall from the lips of an angel of God.

What kind of *listener* am I? Think what a reproach I bring upon my faith if I announce to the world by my actions that God has nothing more interesting with which to occupy the minds of His children than worthless, idle chit-chat!

Each of us is a continual influence for good or evil. Daily we are weaving our influence into the lives of those around us. Is it a bright, golden thread of purity, or a dark, sinister strand for the coat of death?

✓ I Am Responsible: to My Fellow Believers

Here my responsibility becomes yet more serious, because my influence is more keenly felt. I am responsible for a large measure of either the joy and happiness and earnest effort, or the misery and suffering, trials and battles of those with whom I am daily associated. Little things mean so much. By my example I can lift a brother or sister, or I may be encouraging them to take a step downward, because I am saying by my conduct that I do not fully believe God means exactly what He says: *"Avoid every kind of evil"* (1 Thess. 5:22, NIV).

A kind word instantly sends a thrill of pleasure through the heart. A cross word may rankle there for many days. A generous disposition invokes generosity. So, also, selfishness breeds selfishness. Light, giddy, foolish talk often comes from one whose mind is occupied with the frivolities of this world, and not Christ. The effect is to lull the spiritually unstable to dangerous slumber; whereas a word of instruction or hope would strengthen the weak and arouse the sluggard to a sense of duty for days to come.

Pride, haughtiness, self-seeking, worldliness—how quickly these attitudes spread from heart to heart!

Where is my influence tending? How many times has my indecision or my lack of courage or my waywardness been a stumbling-block to another who is not strong in the faith?

I have a responsibility, too, to those who are younger.

Even if we are not teachers by occupation, we all influence younger people. We must strive to be a good example, to encourage, to

motivate, to teach, to influence them toward God and godliness.

Scripture suggests how important this is. The Psalmist wrote of "telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord" (Psalm 78:4). The apostle Paul took the youthful John Mark with him on his missionary journey (Acts 12:25). He also encouraged Timothy by recalling the faith of his grandmother and mother. Although Timothy's faith was his own, it was deeply linked to theirs. "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother" (2 Tim. 1:5). What an admonition to parents and grandparents to be faithful!

✓ **I Am Responsible: to My God**

The responsibility of my calling grows steadily greater. To my Heavenly Father I owe everything I have and am. For it is He who created me, and who has extended to me this wonderful calling which I have accepted. It is He who opened up a way for me to learn His knowledge and seek His favor. It is He who set His angels over me, to guard and keep me until I have had life sufficient to perform all God's will.

The goodness of God is beyond our ability to fathom. He has given His word to strengthen us, fellow-believers to help us, leaders to go before us, trials to discipline and purify us. For all this we owe Him our deepest appreciation, including a full obedience to His law and a full recognition of all His mercies and blessings as they come.

Moreover, I owe it to my God to use these blessings He has showered upon me, to study His Word, to profit from the trials. I am dutybound to take the talent He has entrusted to me and use it, not a little but to its fullest capacity, not taking to myself that which I gain thereby but devoting it again to the service of the Lord.

Our talents are not our reward; they are simply a trust, a test of our faithfulness.

What gross ingratitude

should I fail to be true to such a kind, loving, merciful, Heavenly Father! To be untrue to Him who has given and would have given me such fathomless blessings would place me among those who will see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the faithful inside the Kingdom of God—while I myself am shut out—forever.

✓ **I Am Responsible: to Myself**

Here I come face to face with my utmost responsibility. Here and here alone I am wholly and solely responsible for the eternal destiny of an individual, that individual being the one individual in the whole world whose success or failure means everything to me. Because it is going to mean so much to me if this person fails through my negligence, I want to take my responsibility here very, very seriously.

I want to watch closely what this person reads, says, and does. It is even my duty to delve down into the motives, and the thoughts that dwell in this individual's mind, to sift them over and censor them strictly. It is my duty to see to it that this person is not permitted to do or to wear that which keeps a little spark of pride alive. I must watch closely and check severely any rising feeling of anger, putting a bar before the mouth to forbid the utterance of a hasty word.

It is my duty to watch what occupies the mind of this individual, to fill it so full of high and holy

and heavenly thoughts that the foolishness and clutter of this world will find no lodging-place there.

Then, too, I must do all that lies within my power to keep this person out of temptation. I must bolster courage, require humility, and enforce obedience. Nothing that concerns this person's salvation is beneath my dignity to perform.

With so much responsibility resting upon me, I am very thankful that God has limited the extent of my jurisdiction to one person: myself. One battle of life is enough to wage in one lifetime.

If I extinguish the Light God has given me and kindle a spark of my own, God will send forth another flaming torch by the hands of one more worthy. His cause will not sink to earth because I fail to uphold it. God can get along without me. He is not short of resources. He can get along without my help. My fellow believers can get along without me. If I refuse to help, the Gospel will be spread to the world without my help. The only real loser, should I fail to be true to my responsibility, is myself. No one else loses anything at my hand, but I lose everything.

How, then, can I fail to take seriously, very, very seriously, this responsibility that God has placed upon me?

A great responsibility is mine, but it is small when weighed against the reality of eternal things. By and by it will become a glorious privilege as the vistas of our usefulness expand and increase and the unending wonders to which we have been called are one by one revealed to us.

How well am I fulfilling the responsibility God has laid upon me? How well am I answering the purpose to which I have been called?

My earnest prayer is that when Jesus looks over the record of my life, He will be able to say, "You have been faithful in a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord." □

We have been called to glory and virtue; called to be a peculiar people; called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; called to be crowned...to dispense peace and plenty abroad until all nations shall call us blessed; called to have wonderful power given us so that we can move to and fro with the freedom of the wind; called to every joy and pleasure conceivable to the human mind, yea, far beyond all we can now even ask or think."

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

◆ Worship Jesus?

"How can you worship Jesus if you don't believe He is God?"

Jesus spoke repeatedly of His Father and of His own role as Son, hence, we cannot believe He was His own Father. Nor can we accept the idea that He was equal in power and authority to His Father, for He said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). He was sent of His Father (a separate being) and He ascended to His Father (obviously not to Himself) (John 14:12).

How then can we worship Jesus? Near the close of Jesus' earthly

ministry, the Father apparently delegated to Jesus a certain degree of authority by which He could and would act as intercessor and mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) and receive prayer and petition. These are Jesus' words:

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

Again, in His last recorded sermon delivered the same night in which He was betrayed, He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, What-

soever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full....At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father [Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit] and am come into the world" (John 16:23-28).

The New Testament confirms this, giving frequent mention of Christ in His role of mediator and as worthy of worship and honor (See Heb. 8:6; 9:15; Rev. 15:4). □

LETTERS

Clever or Wise?

Many people today are very quick and smart, others very clever, but that certainly doesn't give them wisdom. It also works the other way around. If ever anyone had wisdom it was King Solomon and for years the Lord was with him. However, at the end of his life he lost his wisdom, and was not very clever, as we read that his strange wives turned his heart away from the true God and he worshiped idols. This must be the saddest of all tales, to have wisdom and not use it. Much better to start in a small way and through God's word become clever, be wise and get wisdom, and in the end—eternal life.

England

J. Treharne

Trying

God is working my life in His own way and in time I'll understand why life is as it is now. There are so many, many ways God tries His people. If it is not sickness, it is something else. I'll keep my faith growing and pray my changes in character and lifestyle will improve too. I'll keep trying!!

Maine

R. Deschenes

Appreciating the Bible

Even though we don't have visits from angels or the Holy Spirit power, we have God's Word, the Bible. We were quite impressed by the series in the Message about the infallibility of the Bible. Recently Clifton and I have been reading, *The Bible Through the Ages*, a "Reader's Digest" publication. It is about the

evolution of the Bible and its influence on people from its beginning until now. Only because it's the Word of God could it have come through the writings, translations and the merging of so many different works as it did.

The fact that it was written especially for us in the latter day is awesome. Every bit of instruction and proof we need to perfect our characters is there. We can be sure that all prophesy will be fulfilled and is being fulfilled around us every day. We shouldn't need angels to impress us or miracles to convince us that God is in charge.

The trouble is the world is too much with us. We are surrounded by worldliness. It is so easy to become complacent and tolerant of sin and evil. It is a grave mistake to think we are pretty good when we compare ourselves to the world. Only Jesus Christ can be our pattern. We cannot compare ourselves to any other pattern.

There isn't much time left. What are we doing with ours? If we are praising God every day, all day, there will be less time for sin. Complacency is one of our biggest enemies. We don't have time for it. The older I get the more I realize how fast time goes. We are not guaranteed even 70 or 80 years. We have to do our best every day or the work will never be finished.

I thank God for all His blessings and pray I may be able to resist the lure of sin and do all to His honor.

Texas

P. Fleming

Resisting Temptation

(Continued from page 16)

him to gather his strength and fight harder than before.

As soldiers of Christ we must be the same. If we find ourselves in a spiritual disaster, we should quickly renew our courage. When sin disgraces us, set our heart with new resolution, new eagerness to live again a life of virtue. One wound is easier to take care of than many; and a recent wound is easier to heal than an old, infected one.

A Contract With Death?

If, when passion stirs us to commit sin, we recall how loathsome, abominable, and detestable sin is, this will help us to counter the temptation.

Before we turn ourselves over to the power of any sin, shouldn't we stop to consider that we are members of Christ's body, that we are seeking His favor? Then, shouldn't we consider how sin is a sickness of the body, mind, and soul, that sin is the serpent's poison? When we sin, we sign a contract with death. Sin is a master, and so is Christ. Sin pays its servants; the reward is death; Christ pays His servants, and the reward is life (Rom. 6:17-23).

Whom are you serving? □

DID is a word of achievement,
 WON'T is a word of retreat,
 MIGHT is a word of bereavement,
 CAN'T is a word of defeat.
 OUGHT is a word of duty,
 TRY is a word of courage,
 WILL is a word of strength,
 CAN is a word of power.

The smaller your god, the bigger your problem. The bigger your God, the smaller your problem.

Think of your mind as a castle. When greed, ungratefulness and other enemies knock, don't let them in! "Guard" your heart with diligence (Prov. 4:23).

We are wrong in thinking we can entertain wrong thoughts a little while and then expel them. It simply doesn't work!

Give to the Lord the best that you have, and the best will come back to you.

The way we are living and the road we are traveling are determining the character we shall have and the goal we shall reach in the end—to experience the pit or enjoy the summit.

The Sure Word of Prophecy

(2 PETER 1:19-21)

We have precious promises,
 Worthy of our high regard,
 That we might escape the world
 Through the favor of the Lord.
 Wherefore give all diligence,
 Make your own salvation sure;
 If you Jesus' words obey,
 Then your life shall long endure.

To the sure and blessed Word
 Turn with hope and grateful eyes;
 Gaze upon that holy light,
 Till the Day-Star shall arise.
 Not by will and power of man
 Were the Holy Scriptures given,
 But men spake as they were moved
 By the Spirit sent from heaven.



FOREWARNED. READY?

What are our thoughts on the second coming of Christ? Is it an event that may someday occur but not now? Or is it a certainty that is constantly on our minds and a part of our life?

We are aware, of course, that only God knows the day and hour, but Jesus foretold certain events that would precede His second appearing. He said that His coming would be in a time such as it was in the days of Noah. We do not know particulars, but we do know that the people of his time scoffed and ridiculed Noah. They went right on living their own worldly way, giving no thought to the imminent end of their world. Are not people today doing the same?

But what of us? Are we looking for and preparing for our King and Judge? In Matthew 24:42 Jesus tells us, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

The ancient prophecies were true, they are true today. "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hasteth greatly" (Zeph. 1:14). What are we doing to prepare ourselves for that Day?

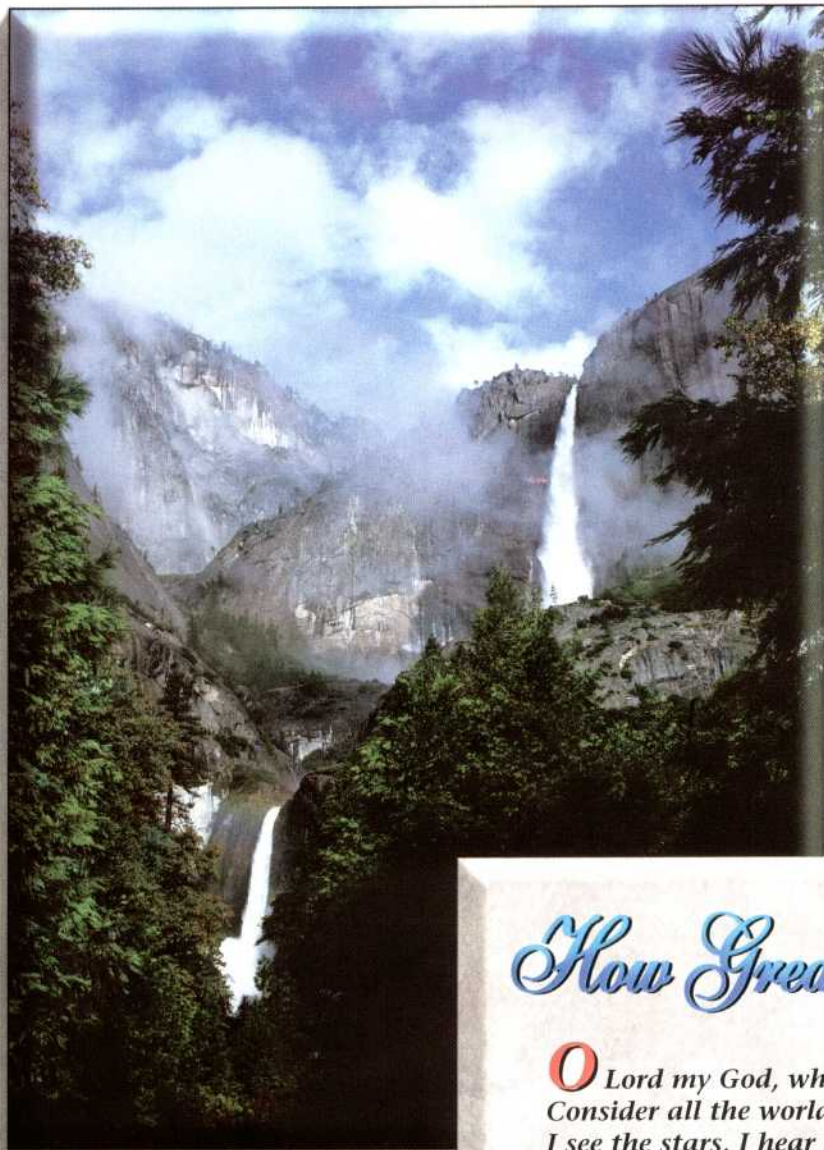
Do we read the Word of God as we should, as He expects us to, as eager students of God's knowledge?

What of our love? It is written, "Love not the world." We have been forewarned not to love the world. Why? Because "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Only "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). Have we taken the warning to heart? Shall we stand when Babylon falls, or shall we fall with her?

Many think they belong to Christ while they love themselves, their things, their earthly goals and goods more than they love Christ. But there is no such thing as a worldly-minded Christian. If we love the world, we don't love God.

Let us take inventory of our lives. Are we ready for the coming of the Lord? We are not ready if we have any sin remaining in our lives. We are not ready if our hearts go after the interests of this world.

How about you? How about me? We have been forewarned. Are we ready? □



Great is the Lord, and
greatly to be praised.

—Psalm 48:1

How Great Thou Art

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r thro'out the universe displayed:

When thro' the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art! how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee:
How great Thou art! how great Thou art!

When Christ shall come with shouts of acclamation
And rend the skies, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art!"

—Selected

