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Megiddo Message

O Lord God!

*You have made
the Heavens and Earth
by your great power;
nothing is too hard for you!*

—Jeremiah 32:19

by GERALD R PAYNE

Whose Values?

Newspapers and news broadcasts are replete with violence, war and hatred between nations and groups within nations. To define this type of violence, a new and terrible term was given birth this past century: ethnic cleansing.

There are two common thoughts about what causes such violence. The most popular, perhaps, is that age-old resentments and hatreds simply well up and motivate ethnic cleansing. The other thought is that they are initiated by modern-style states that have at their cores racist, nationalistic ideals.

No matter which view you may hold, your view is the result of a system of beliefs and the value you place on these beliefs. This belief system may show itself in somewhat subtle

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values may become ours.*

ways. For example, recently while doing some research, I discovered a website offering a free counter for all "Christian" web pages. But to get this free counter, there were a few requirements which reflected the values of those making the offer. Surprisingly, this "Christian" web page placed greatest importance not on morality, not on obedience to the Word of God, not on studying and understanding the Bible as the Word of God, but on their own belief values. To use their web-counter, one had to subscribe to belief in the Trinity, the blood sacrifice of Christ on Calvary to pay the debt for our sins, and salvation as a result of belief on Christ—without works and plus nothing. I didn't read any more because I realized this "free counter" was far too costly.

While placing great value on belief can bring about wonderful results, wrong beliefs and misplaced values can result in prejudice, violence, hatred and even bloodshed. Such was the case during the battles of the Crusades, the clashes

during the Great Reformation, the Holocaust, and even the recent terrorist attacks on America.

Suppose God decided that He would take away the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe if we didn't believe as He wants us to believe. Suppose Christ had not called the hated tax collector Matthew, or the tempestuous Peter, or Paul the Christian persecutor. Or, suppose He would have nothing to do with either Jew or Gentile because neither would listen completely to His laws. Where would this leave you and me?

To view the history of war and witness the animosity between religious groups with this in mind is revealing. We are here not to discriminate between religious or racial groups but to learn God's will and do it; to change our faith values to be in perfect harmony with the law of God. Life is not just a few years to spend in self-indulgence, career advancement and pleasures. It is a divinely given privilege, a responsibility, a stewardship to be lived and loved every day, every moment according to a higher law—God's law. This alone gives meaning to life and opens the way to eternal life.

Do your belief values measure up to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? *"Are your hearts tender and sympathetic? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing"* (Phil. 2:1-4, NLT).

Our moral compass must always be pointing in one direction, toward Christ, so that by His example, His faith values may become ours.

To follow Christ's will, we need to keep Christ's faith values in clear focus. Such a life will bring controversy. But if you ever feel discouraged, remember Jeremiah, one of Judah's greatest prophets during the nation's darkest days. Apostasy, idolatry, perverted worship, moral decay—these were the conditions under which Jeremiah lived and ministered—and all because he would not compromise. Life for him was not easy. He was persecuted, plotted against, imprisoned, priests and false prophets declared

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.

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Megiddo Message

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BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; DBL—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; EDNT—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; GES—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; HAL—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; LSJ—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; LN—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains; SHG—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. THAYER—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

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).



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Front cover and star images are courtesy of NASA and the Space Telescope Science Institute.



THINK Like A Christian

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious,
if there is any excellence, if there is
anything worthy of praise,
think on these things”

—The Apostle Paul (Phil. 4:8).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Think!

What does the Bible mean when it tells us to think? In one sense it may mean to consider, as in making a decision, to think through the consequences that are likely to follow our choice, and choose accordingly. Why think? Because “to think” or “not to think” is a life-

or-death matter. Haggai said it repeatedly to the people he was sent to warn: “*Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways*” (Hag. 1:7). Or as another translation has it, “*Give careful thought to your ways*” (NIV).

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

And the problem is not new.

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

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

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

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

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

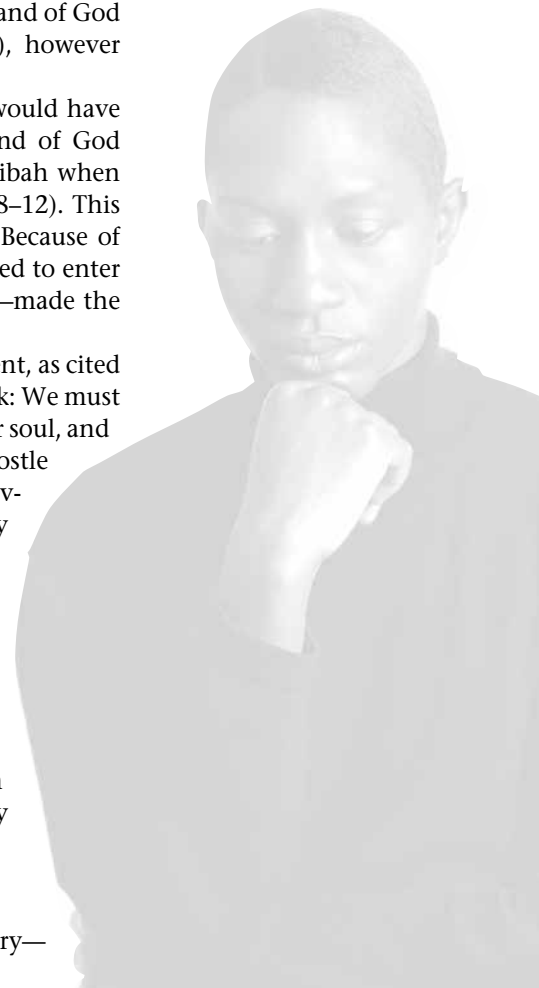
Choose, Choose!


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

Have you ever advised someone to take a certain course of action, and their reply was, “I’ll think about it”?

What did Paul mean when he said “*Think on these things*”? Was he giving take-it-or-leave-it advice, or was he seriously telling us what to do?

Each term Paul used is a quality of life that is known only as it is *lived*.





How often we
have stumbled in our
Christian walk
because we did not
think!

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

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

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

There are two tasks which at first seem equally difficult: the mastery of our speech, and the mastery of our thoughts. But they are not equal. If it is difficult to set a watch upon our lips, it is more difficult to set a watch upon our thoughts. Why? Because speech has social consequences, which are a great deterrent. If you speak your mind, you may lose your position, your good name, or

your friend. But your thoughts can grow in the dark—as vicious as you please—without visible effects. It is this secrecy that makes thought mastery so difficult.

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

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

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

*Just as a musician creates beautiful music
by right practicing, so we create harmony
in our minds by right thinking.*

WHOSE VALUES?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

him worthy of death, threatened him in his hometown of Anathoth, and put in stocks. Forced to go into hiding from king Jehoiakim, he was ridiculed publicly by the false prophet Hananiah and put into a cistern. When Jeremiah became discouraged (wouldn't we too?) his first thought was, *"I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name. But"*—did he give up? Did he change his beliefs and val-

ues? Not for a moment. Speaking of the Divine message, he said, *"His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not"* (Jer. 20:9).

Nor will we hold back if our faith values are in clear focus. All of us cannot be great speakers or writers. But if God's words are in your heart like a burning fire, a joy and delight, as they were to Jeremiah, your life will be a living testimony to your faith.

Have you checked your faith values lately? ■

THINK
Like A Christian

Keep an Eternal Perspective

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

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

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

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

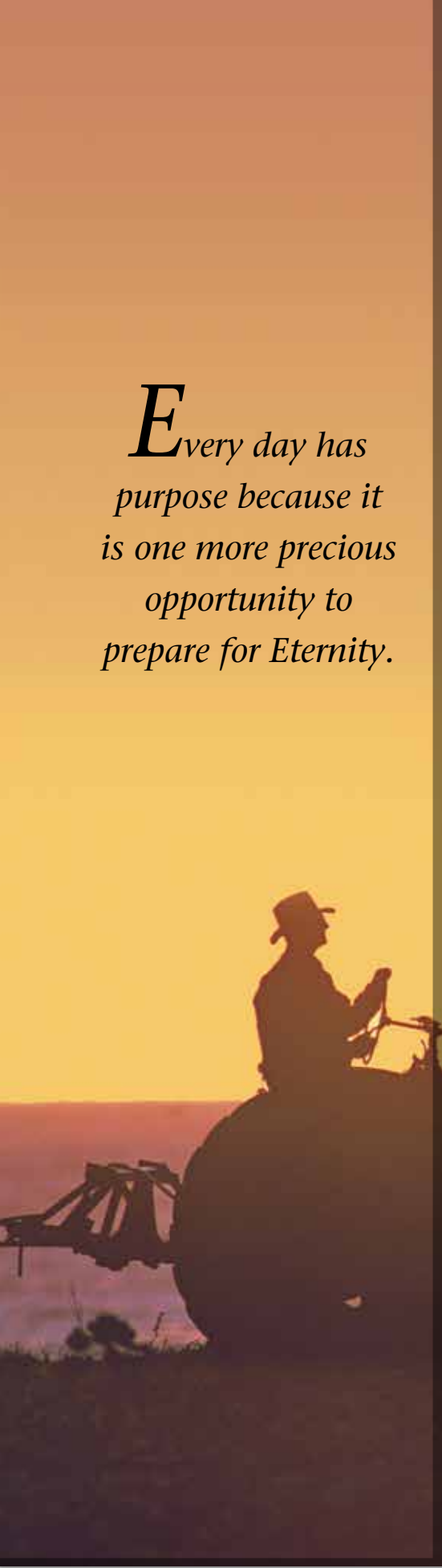
family, a job, more money, more leisure, more education, more "things." These goals may be good in their way, but to the believer, one who has caught a glimpse of what God is offering, they are too small, too limited, too temporary. The Christian appreciates what he can enjoy in this world, not as an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

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

*The visible things are transitory:
it is the invisible things that are really
permanent."* —The Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 4:18 Phillips)

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





*Every day has
purpose because it
is one more precious
opportunity to
prepare for Eternity.*



THINK
Like A Christian

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Secular or Sacred?

and the timespan of eternity—the difference is phenomenal!

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

The Benefits of Christ-like Thinking

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

What are the benefits of thinking like Christ?

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

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

tentions of the author of it all. Just so we, in serving Christ, cannot expect to have insight into every part of our lives or our world. All we see is one small portion of the whole. But we have been given a book—the Scriptures—from which we may learn about this drama. And the more we study it, the richer and fuller will be our knowledge, the more we will trust the Director,—and the less we will criticize and complain.

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

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

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

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

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

Identity of the Christian Mind

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

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

the human mind. If they cannot duplicate it, it didn’t happen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The willingness to acknowledge God as the only source of truth and to condemn what He calls evil is the hallmark of the Christian mind. ■



*Serving Christ
must be my whole life.
If I’m driving my car or...
eating dinner or...
doing my work or...
relaxing in an easy chair,
I’m serving Christ.*



How To Have a **CHRIST-LIKE MIND:**

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



Developing A Christian Mind

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

How?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Think On These Things

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

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

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

—Selected



Look Up and See!

by RUTH E. SISSON

Go outside on a moonless night, under a truly dark sky in the desert or the mountains, far from the light pollution of the cities, and look up. The spectacle is awesome.

Look through one of several large telescopes on our planet—in California, or Germany, or Australia—and what do you see? There's no other word but awesome.

And the discoveries continue as astronomers report seeing more and more distant and more and more immense concentrations of quasars and galaxies which include billions upon billions of stars that are billions of light years away.

How many galaxies are there? Estimates range from 100 billion to 250 billion to a literally infinite number. And each galaxy is a vast star city containing billions of individual stars.

One Divine, eternal purpose

The Great Creator is working according to one eternal, ongoing purpose. The Bible tells us what that purpose is with relation to our own planet, and when we apply this same purpose to the vast creation, we see beauty and glory overwhelming.

What is His purpose for our earth? The prophet Isaiah tells us *"he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited"* (Isa. 45:18).

Who will be those inhabitants? They are defined by literally hundreds of passages of Scripture. Jesus described them as those who *"do his commandments"* (Rev. 22:14). The Psalmist said that each one has *"clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation"* (Ps. 24:4–5). The Lord Himself described them as *"His glory"* in these words to Moses: *"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord"* (Num. 14:21). In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes them as the *"meek," "the pure in heart,"* those who *"hunger and thirst after righteousness"* (Matt. 5:3–13). He said further, *"Not everyone that saith*

unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

How does the Creator select from among humankind those who will have a part in His eternal creation? Actually, He has designed a plan whereby they select themselves—by their faithfulness, their obedience, their loyalty and love. The apostle Paul says that God will give *"immortality, eternal life"* to those *"who by patient continuance in well doing seek"* for it (Rom. 2:7). For this selection process He has allotted seven thousand years, at the end of which His creative work on earth will be finished.

God set in motion certain laws of life. Those laws operate without His direct oversight, and individuals are free moral agents to choose what they will do. Every human being is given this life free, without so much as asking for it. But this life is all they will get, unless they use the knowledge He has supplied to qualify for more life, i.e., an eternal life in God's new and eternal world.

When Jesus returns, He will judge and reward those who have served Him and will, with the help of these individuals, subdue the forces of evil and set up a new government which will be worldwide. Under this new government, millions and billions of people will find life happy and satisfying, as they comply with its laws and

Where did
all this come
from?

as they are given the opportunity to prepare to live in Christ's eternal Kingdom. This happy arrangement will continue for a thousand years, at the end of which these individuals will be judged and rewarded for what they have done. All who prove faithful will be changed to the immortal state and be granted an eternal place on the earth glorified, beautified and perfected. All evildoers will be eliminated and the whole earth be filled with His glory. Jesus Christ will be the eternal King, supreme and unchallenged, and through eternity will live with His immortal co-rulers and immortal populace. (For detailed Biblical support of the above, see our booklet, "These Things Shall Be.")

Such, in capsule form, is God's plan for this earth as it is revealed in the Bible. And when we read that His plan for this earth is "according to his eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11), we have an idea of what God is doing all through His vast creation. If His pattern is the same throughout, His plan is to create and populate a world, develop it and transform it into a perfect Paradise of delight, then repeat the process on another planet in some other part of His vast creation, and another, and another *ad infinitum*. He may be working on ten billion planets like ours all at once in other parts of His universe, so limitless is the realm through which He may spread His mercy! And it may well be the future work of the inhabitants of our finished, glorified planet, to initiate and follow through the same process on another planet, and another, and another—just as the angels have overseen the work on earth (Heb. 2:5; 1:14).

The Bible tells us that the plan of God has been in operation from eternity past, and will continue to eternity future. We read in Psalm 103 that "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (vs. 17–18). For God's mercy to extend from everlasting past to everlasting future, He must have had living beings upon whom to bestow mercy in a glorious, finished creation.

First human, then angel

The Bible reveals that there is constant progress throughout His creation, from mortal to immortal, from human to angel. Worthy men and women will one day be physically changed to be made like the angels of heaven, a fact which indicates God's plan of progression: first the human level of life (subject to death), then the higher, angelic level (immortal, incorruptible,

not subject to death). Jesus said that those worthy to obtain the better life will be made "equal unto the angels,...neither can they die anymore; for they are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35–36).

First Corinthians 15 reveals this sequence: first the "earthy," then the "heavenly." Our present level of life is earthy, it is not the ultimate; it is only an introduction to life. And "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly...Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption...We shall all be changed...for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:49–53). When Jesus returns, He will "change our vile [corruptible] body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20–21).

God's work is not limited to one tiny planet in one small solar system in one corner of one galaxy. The God who created us has countless billions of worlds filled with glorified, immortal beings. He has countless others on which He (or His agents) are still at work, and countless others in the beginning stages of creation. It is all one vast, on-going plan for the benefit of His living creation.

"Shine as the stars"

The Bible tells us that immortal beings (angels) radiate light. Stars also radiate light, and the Bible reveals that "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

Our earth is now a dark planet; it depends on the sun for its light. But when God's work here is complete, the earth will no longer need the light of the sun. Why? Because "the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (Isa. 60:19). So bright will be the radiance that the prediction is for the end of night: "There shall be no night there" (Rev. 22:5).

Does it not seem possible that such is the pattern throughout God's vast creation, that the



“God’s plan for His people is a progression: from mortal to immortal, from human to angel, from earthly to heavenly.”

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They Call It "home"

“Those who are wise
will shine like the brightness
of the heavens, and
those who lead many to
righteousness, like the
stars for ever and ever.”

— Daniel 12:3 NIV

See also:

Ps. 103:17-18; Isa. 60:19;
Matt. 13:43; 17:1-2; 28:3;
Luke 20:35-36; Acts 9:3;
Revelation 21:23; 22:5

*Heav'n of heavens, orbs of beauty,
Far-flung worlds of dazzling light —
We look up, amazed, and wonder
What the meaning of the sight?*

*Yet we're told in those far regions
Live vast hosts of angels bright,
Sons and daughters now immortal,
Beings shining with His light;*

*Angels when like us, once struggled,
And were victors in the fight;
Who put down each form of evil
And exalted all that's right;*

*Now they're blest with God's own glory,
Dwelling on those worlds above;
Crowned with grand, immortal splendor,
Fadeless honor, deathless love.*

*Now they shine in matchless beauty,
Ever radiant, free to roam;
We look up and call it "heaven,"
They look 'round and call it "home."*



*When someday a new-flung planet
Bears the likeness of our race,
People there will look above them
To a world that angels grace,...*

*To our Earth, then joined to heaven,
Shining like the stars we saw,
Where live God's own sons and daughters—
How their hearts will fill with awe*

*As they think about God's mercy,
And exclaim about "that star"
From which angels come to guide them,
Heavenly beings from afar.*

*As those mortals pray, we'll listen
While they're feeling quite alone—
They'll look up and call it "heaven"...
We'll look 'round and call it "home"!*

—Ruth E. Sisson

presence of immortal beings is one reason why stars radiate light? By the definitions to which we are accustomed, light is a release of energy as a result of a change from one state to another. But can we say that all light comes from such a process? Are we competent to say that such is the *only* source of light?

The angels who appeared in Bible times were luminous beings, with natural brightness greater than human eyes could look upon. They also had the ability to diminish that brightness, so that they looked like ordinary “men” (Judges 6:1, 21-22).

Jesus Himself said that *“the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matt. 13:43). The prophet Daniel said that the *“wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever”* (Dan. 12:3).

In the book of Revelation we read of the eternal city (a figurative representation of the glorified saints—see Rev. 21:1–10), that *“the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof....And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light”* (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

When our earth is filled with glorified beings, each one a light in himself, this dark planet will be no longer dark but will shine as the other worlds in God’s finished creation.

How many other dark planets throughout the galaxies are in a similar stage of development?

Who are we?

Who are we, mere earthlings, and where do we fit into this vast creation? Are we vanishing into nothingness in a universe that is immense beyond our power to imagine?

No, positively no! The stars speak of God, His greatness, His magnificence and His eternity. And through His Word we can become acquainted with that God, that Creator, as we see—at a distance—what He has been doing and is doing—and what He will shortly complete right here on earth!

As we look into the wonders of the heavens, we ask: Why are we, mere mortals, being permitted to peer so far into the heavens? Why is God permitting us such a deep-field view into His creation?—or is it still only the surface that we are permitted to see? Perhaps the portion we are seeing is so small that it is insignificant in the Divine scheme.

What is God doing? Perhaps God is counteracting the drugging effects of our faithless and

indifferent generation. Perhaps God is providing a means for us to look above the mire and materialism of our world, above its sensuality and vice and its multitude of problems, and see the destiny He has planned for our world.

Perhaps He is trying to boost our faith, our confidence, our zeal for His cause, by giving us a tiny, breathtaking glimpse of His handiwork. Perhaps He is saying, “See what I can do—and believe. Get ready, for I will soon complete my work on earth.”

Perhaps He is giving us one last stimulus to prepare for what He has promised, before He breaks into human history and changes the course of life for everyone on earth.

When we think about His Divine purpose and the stupendous opportunity He has set before us, how can we forget it for a moment?

Our faith in God and His Word is strengthened and magnified by the discoveries of science, the Hubble Telescope, and those who are working hard to discover what has not been seen before. All that they find only emphasizes the fact that a God of order and design controls the mighty universe. We do not pretend to understand all. Even those who study it intensely are limited by their observations (what they can actually see, which at light years of distance, is limited at best), must constantly revise their conclusions and theories.

But the more they are able to see, the more we realize our extreme smallness, and the more we marvel at the fact that God recognizes us at all! Small wonder that the Psalmist exclaimed, *“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”* (Ps. 8:3–4).

Yet this Infinite Creator is inviting us mortals to become part of His eternal creation. Who will turn down such an offer for the small gratifications of this world? Who can think of willfully cutting himself off from such glory, such immensity, such beauty and light?



“The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” – Matt. 13:43

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FAITH in Action



Bible Text: Acts 2:5–13 NIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

by RUTH E. SISSON

AM I HEARING THINGS?

 READ ACTS 2:5–13

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

The news flashed across the city, as Luke puts it, and a “*crowd came together.*”

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

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

What had happened?

This needed some explanation!

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

1. What was the purpose of the gift of languages on that day of Pentecost? (Mark 16:20). _____

2. How well did the gift accomplish its purpose that day? (Acts 2:41) ____

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

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

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

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

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

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

PETER'S PENTECOST SERMON

 READ ACTS 2:14–21

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

A Prophecy Fulfilled

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

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

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

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

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



Did you know...

Peter, Peter...?

Was this Peter the same man who only a few months earlier had denied that he even knew Jesus? Now hear him proclaiming boldly to all who would listen that this Jesus is the one sent of God. Hear him as he shouts, *"you put him to death... God raised him from the dead."*

Peter knew—and they knew also—that many of those listening were the same people who had been present when Jesus was crucified.

“We hear in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” — Acts 2:11



Insight

When is the “great and notable day of the Lord”?

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

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

“You yourselves know...” — Peter to the assembled Jews (Acts 2:22)

Bible Text: Acts 2:22–35 NIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

3. What great event will accompany the next and greater outpouring of Holy Spirit power? (Acts 2:20). _____
4. What group of people will receive the greater outpouring? (Acts 2:17–18; Joel 2:28–32) _____
5. What specific benefits did Isaiah associate with the greater outpouring of power? (Isa. 35:5–6) _____

“Blood ... Fire ... Smoke”

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

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

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

THIS IS FROM JESUS!

 READ ACTS 2:22–35

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

But what they would be slow to believe was the resurrection of Jesus. So Peter led them quickly to the core of his topic and the evidence underlying it.

Point #1: You knew Him, heard Him preach and crucified Him (Acts 2:22–23).

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

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

Peter went right on to speak of Jesus’ cruel death “*by wicked hands*” (hands of those outside the law, i.e., Roman soldiers). He said, “*You, with the help*

of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." It was all current events, which no one could argue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Why did Peter place so much emphasis on Jesus' resurrection?

7. Suppose you were a very loyal Jew living in Jerusalem and hearing Peter's sermon. How would you describe your reaction to his message?

8. Peter wrote in his Second Epistle, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables" (2 Pet. 1:16). What evidence did he give in his Pentecost sermon to show it was not a fable? _____



Insight

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

In prophetic language (Ps. 16:7–11) David foretold that Jesus would die, and be resurrected. He also foretold that Jesus would ascend to heaven and be seated at the Father's right hand (Ps. 110:1). Peter made a contrast between Jesus—who was right then alive at the Father's right hand—and their ancestor David, who was "both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us to this day" (Act 2:29–35). Note that Peter also said, "David is not ascended into the heavens" (v. 34). The dead sleep in the grave (*hades*, literally "a pit") until the time of the resurrection (Job 17:13; 19:25–27).



Take heed

Resurrection in the Old Testament?

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

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

Can anyone deny it? The resurrection has been the hope of God's people from the beginning! It is still the very real hope of believers today.



Did you know...

Voluntary Sharing

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

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

9. How can we be sure David was prophesying of Jesus’ resurrection in Psalm 16:8–11? _____

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

Some were convinced, and said to Peter and the other Apostles, “*Brothers, what should we do?*”

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

Repent...be baptized...be forgiven your sins...receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The first message was always “Repent.” Repentance is a change of heart and mind, a total redirecting of one’s life. Along with repenting they were to be baptized. Water baptism was part of Jesus’ commission to His apostles (Matt. 28:19-20). It was a sacred rite by which they broke with their former life and joined the fellowship of the believers serving God.

Did Peter’s sermon get results? The results were astounding. Three thousand were added to the Church that day! (Acts 2:41).

All Things Shared

These new, zealous believers took another step: They “*shared everything they had....They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need*” (Acts 2:44-45 NLT). In this way everyone had enough.

There is no record of how long this communal system was continued, nor do we know of it being practiced in any church other than at Jerusalem, but the apostles must have felt that it was appropriate for the time. This was a period of intense missionary activity, and the Apostles were present, performing “*many miraculous signs and wonders.*” And “*they worshiped together in the Temple each day,... with great joy and generosity*” (Acts 2:46 NLT).

What a send-off for the young Church!

At this time there was apparently no opposition or persecution. Common people who did not know Christ saw the believers’ worship, their zeal, their joy, and were attracted by what they saw. This is why it is recorded that the Lord kept adding day by day “*those who were being saved*” (v. 47). ■

TO BE CONTINUED

Look Up and See! CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Jesus is coming to make earth a part of heaven. To those whom He accepts, the door will be open to explore the vast reaches of creation. Interstellar space travel is common to angels. Eternity will be none too long to survey the length and breadth of it. And as we look at the universe visible to the Hubble telescope, does not that most precious of all promises become even more meaningful: “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those*

who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9, NLT)? Our power to imagine grows ever greater—perhaps we can even have a hand in forming and filling other planets with happy, blessed inhabitants.

For when life and opportunity and expansion are everlasting, where is the limit of usefulness to which one may aspire?

We can only say with the great Apostle, “*Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods!*” (Rom. 11:33 NLT). ■

KNOW YOUR BIBLE

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning" -Proverbs 1:5



ANGELS

1. In what city did the angels visit Lot?
2. Who did the angel of God wrestle with?
3. What is the name given to the archangel?
4. What did the angel of God use to separate the camp of Israel and the Egyptians?
5. Who did the angel of the Lord stand in front of (blocking his way)?
6. Who did the angel of the Lord deliver from the fiery furnace?
7. How did the angel of the Lord appear to Moses?
8. What did the angel Gabriel tell Zacharias would happen to him because he didn't believe?
9. What angel flew swiftly to Daniel while he was praying?
10. What did the angels who visited Abraham look like to him?

COVENANTS

1. Who, after making a covenant with his father-in-law, set up a pile of stones as a witness to their act?
2. Who, after making a covenant with a dear friend, gave him his robe, armor, sword, bow and belt?
3. Who was told by God that the sight of a bow in the clouds would be a covenant between Him and every living creature?
4. Who, after making a covenant with the people at Shechem, set up a great stone under an oak as a witness?
5. Who made a feast for the royal party, after making a covenant with a king who had once hated him?
6. Who, after God made a covenant with him, had his name changed?
7. Which king sat in Ahab's chariot and made a covenant with him, promising to restore cities his father had taken?
8. Who stood between God and the Israelites at Horeb on an occasion when God made a covenant with them?
9. What priest "*made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people*" followed by the people breaking down all the altars of Baal? ■

COMPLETE THE BEATITUDES

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, _____
2. Blessed are those who mourn, _____
3. Blessed are the meek, _____
4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, _____
5. Blessed are the merciful, _____
6. Blessed are the pure in heart, _____
7. Blessed are the peacemakers, _____
8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, _____
9. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me, rejoice and be glad, _____

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOVE

COMPLETE THE BEATITUDES

1. *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. 5:3)
2. *for they will be comforted.* (Matt. 5:4)
3. *for they will inherit the earth.* (Matt. 5: 5)
4. *for they will be filled.* (Matt. 5:6)
5. *for they will be shown mercy.* (Matt. 5:7)
6. *for they will see God.* (Matt. 5:8)
7. *for they will be called sons of God.* (Matt. 5:9)
8. *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt. 5:10)
9. *because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* (Matt. 5:11-12)

ANGELS

1. Sodom (Gen. 19:1)
2. Jacob (Gen. 32:24-30)
3. Michael (Jude 1:9)
4. Pillar of clouds. (Ex. 13:21; 14:19-20)
5. Balaam (Num. 22:23-27)
6. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Dan. 3:21-25)
7. In a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-2)
8. He wouldn't be able to speak (Luke 1:11-20).
9. Gabriel (Dan. 9:21)
10. Men (Gen. 18:1-2; 19:1-2)

COVENANTS

1. Jacob (Gen. 31:43-48)
2. Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3-4)
3. Noah (Gen. 9:12-16)
4. Joshua (Josh. 24:22-27)
5. Isaac (Gen. 26:1, 26-31)
6. Abraham (Gen. 17:2-5)
7. Benhadad (1 Kings 20:33-34)
8. Moses (Deut. 5:1-5)
9. Jehoiada (2 Kings 11:17-18)



QUESTION & ANSWERS

"Rightly dividing the word of truth" -2 Timothy 2:15

How Has GOD Forgiveness Us "for Christ's Sake"?

I have been looking at Ephesians 4. I heard someone talking about verse 26, "Be angry, and sin not." He said that he got angry a lot, but it did not really matter for salvation because in verse 32 it says that "God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

How does this fit? Are we already forgiven even before we sin?

In Ephesians 4:31 and 32, the apostle Paul is concluding a whole chapter of intensely practical advice with an appeal to harmonious personal relationships. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."

We all know where and how these originate. Wherever people live and work together, whether they are friends, acquaintances, strangers, or members of the family, sooner or later there is likely a flare of wrath, anger, or harsh words. Paul is saying that all such must go, because those who profess to be truly followers of

Christ must reach beyond themselves and practice being "kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another."

Then, to give more strength to an already strong appeal, Paul lifts forgiveness to an even higher level, comparing our relationship with others to our relationship with God and Christ. He says we must be as ready to forgive another as God is to forgive us. No malice here, no place for strife or bitterness, for we must forgive even "as God for Christ's sake" forgives us.

Some have concluded from this statement that Paul says God forgives all our sins past, present, and future when we acknowledge Christ as our "personal Savior." Paul says nothing of the kind. The great apostle is making a point, but we must not read into his words what he does not say. Neither must we overlook other statements in Scripture that state God's **conditions** for forgiveness. And nowhere in Scripture is God's forgiveness promised or guaranteed in advance. ***Forgiveness is always conditional.***

God's Conditions of Forgiveness

Jesus stated one of the primary conditions for

obtaining forgiveness from God in His very first sermon recorded in Matthew 6. Jesus said we cannot be forgiven our transgression unless we positively extend forgiveness to any to whom we owe forgiveness. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

Isaiah had already stated this principle centuries earlier. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

Another condition for obtaining forgiveness from God is that we confess and forsake the sin. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

Two Kinds of Forgiveness

The New Testament uses two different Greek words when speaking of forgiveness. The word used most often is that used by Jesus when He was talking about forgiveness in His first sermon, recorded in Matthew 6. Here He used the Greek word *aphiemi*, which means "to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing—to pardon, to forgive, forgiveness,...*'forgive us the wrongs that we have done'* Mt 6:12,... forgive, forsake, lay aside, leave, let (alone, be, go, have)" (Definitions from *Louw-Nida*; also *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Lexicon*). These definitions refer most often to forgiveness of sinful behavior.

The word that Paul used for "forgive" in Eph. 4:32 is different. Derived from the word translated "grace," it is *charizomai*, and means: "to forgive, on the basis of one's gracious attitude toward an individual—to forgive....*'forgive me for being so unfair'* 2 Cor 12:13. It may be useful in some instances to translate *charizomai* in 2 Cor 12:13 as 'be so kind as to forgive me' (*Louw-Nida*); to "do something pleasant or agreeable (to one), to do a favor to, gratify; ...univ. to show one's self gracious, kind, benevolent: ... to give graciously, give freely, bestow" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). Paul's advice to us to forgive "*like God for Christ's sake forgives us*" implies the forgiving of lesser offenses, much like we would say "excuse me," or "pardon me."

In Scripture God's forgiveness is always conditional.

Far from suggesting that God forgives any and all our sins past, present and future as some evangelists are teaching, Paul is telling us to take on this godly grace of kindness and be gracious to one another, with a forgiving rather than a vindictive, blaming spirit, overlooking the small offenses that so easily can upset us.

♦ “BE ANGRY” AND NOT SIN? NEVER!

“I understand from other places in the Bible that anger is a sin, and that Ephesians 4:26 should not be taken as a statement, as though we can be angry and not sin. Is that right?”

You are absolutely correct that the Bible calls anger a sin. When we get angry, we sin. Your friend must be getting his consolation for allowing his anger from his preacher, not from the Bible. If he reads his Bible, he will find anger condemned as a sin many times. The idea that one can be angry and not sin is sometimes combined with the remainder of Eph. 4:26 to reinforce the impression that anger is not sinful under one condition: that the day does not end with the person still stirred by feelings of anger. In other words, reconcile, or at least “cool off” before you go to bed! Usually no mention is made of the damage an angry person can do in a single day! Those who hold this view sometimes “approve” anger which they understand as sudden flare—a venting—provocation, exasperation, sudden and violent. But they will condemn wrath, which they see as a lasting mood with unhealthy consequences.

Such thinking is not consistent with the rest of Bible teaching. To take Ephesians 4:26 as a statement allowing us to get angry is to make Scripture contradict Scripture. Nowhere does the Bible justify the human emotion of anger. In this very chapter, as noted above, Paul says we must put away anger, he even says “*all... anger.*” “*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice*” (Eph. 4:31). Could words be plainer?

There are many other passages where the Bible forbids anger. Just to mention a few:

Psalm 37:8, Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm.

Proverbs 16:32, He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and **he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.**

Proverbs 25:28, Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.

Ecclesiastes 7:9, Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.

Philippians 2:14, Do all things without complaining and disputing.

Colossians 3:8, But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

1 Timothy 2:8, I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

James 1:19–20, So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

There is also another set of commands we must pay attention to, that we must be peaceable, gentle, and patient, humble, prayerful, grateful. These commands can only be obeyed in the absence of anger.

For example:

Matthew 5:9, Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Hebrews 12:14, Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

Romans 12:18, If it is possible, as much as depends on you, **live peaceably with all men.**

Psalms 119:165, Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing causes them to stumble.

2 Timothy 2:24, And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be **gentle** to all, able to teach, **patient,**

Galatians 6:1, Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of **gentleness**, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

1 Thess. 5:16–18, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything **give thanks;** for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

James 3:17, But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

2 Pet. 1:5–7, But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Anger is a direct contradiction of all these virtues.

How, then, are we to understand Paul’s words in harmony with the teaching of Scripture? The answer lies in looking into the original Greek, at the source from which Paul is quoting these words.

When Paul says, “*Be angry and do not sin,*” he is actually quoting directly from the Old Testament book of Psalms. The passage he is citing is Psalm 4:4, which reads in the Authorized Version, “*Stand in awe, and sin not.*” In casual reading one would never think the two passages were associated, but the original Greek New Testament shows that Paul is quoting the Septuagint (Greek) translation of Psalm 4:4. The Septuagint was the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures which a group of Jewish scholars compiled and translated into Greek during the third and second centuries BC. This was “*the Scriptures*” available during the time of Jesus and the early Christian Church.

To understand this passage we need to consider three points:

*The Psalmist
is not excusing
anger but rather
giving a warning:
“tremble and not
sin,” –Psalm 4:4*

1) Original HEBREW to ENGLISH:

The meaning of the original Hebrew words in the Psalm 4:4 passage. What is this passage saying?

2) Original HEBREW to GREEK (Septuagint) to ENGLISH:

The meaning of the Greek words that the Septuagint scholars chose for this passage in translating the Hebrew into Greek.

1) Original HEBREW to ENGLISH:

What is the meaning of the original Hebrew words used by the Psalmist in Psalm 4:4? What do they communicate to us in English?

The Hebrew Old Testament uses three different words for “anger,” and none of them are used in Psalm 4:4. The Hebrew word translated “stand in awe” is *ragaz*, and communicates strong emotion. *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament* by Holladay and Kohler gives the following: “**shake, quake**: subj. earth 1 S 14:15, heavens 2 S 22:8; —2. metaph. **tremble**, in fear 2 S 7:10, joy Je 33:9, grief 2 S 19:1; —3. **ragaz min come out trembling** from Mi 7:17; —4. **be upset** (of emotion) Gn 45:24, **fly into a passion**.” R. L. Thomas’ “*New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*” defines it as “a prim. root; to be agitated, quiver, quake, be excited, perturbed.” The “*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*” defines it as: “be agitated, quiver, quake, be excited, perturbed;... provoke to wrath; tremble (with rage, fear).”

All these English expressions for *ragaz*, which our KJV translates as “*Stand in awe*,” show strong emotion, of which anger would be one expression. What is the best rendering of the Hebrew *ragaz* in English? In context, the thought of the Psalmist is not to vent one’s anger but on the contrary to avoid letting one’s passions lead to sinful action. The second phrase in the passage confirms this. In the Authorized Version, it reads: “*Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.*” The NKJV words it: “*Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.*”

The Psalmist is not excusing anger but rather giving a warning: “*tremble and not sin*,” i.e., make your thoughts effective in controlling your impulse to anger.

A comment in *A critical and exegetical commentary on the book of Psalms* by Briggs and Briggs, adds: “*Say (what you have to say) in your heart, to yourselves, in secret, while lying upon your bed, and be still*” give no expression to your wicked thoughts.”

We are not being told to vent our anger but rather to take seriously the controlling of our own passions. To “*tremble and not sin*” could be a way of saying, It isn’t what someone did to you that should cause you anger and distress. Think about it. As the prophet Haggai said to his brethren, “*Consider your ways*” (Hag. 1:7). The Psalmist says the same: “*Commune with your own heart upon your bed.*” The passage tells us to “*Meditate within your heart on your bed*,” i.e., think about our conduct, and “*be still.*” In other words, What you should REALLY be alarmed about is that you became angry, and there is NO excuse for this. The follow-up thought should be, “What does GOD think of me for allowing this attitude to disturb my mind?”

2) Original HEBREW to GREEK (Septuagint) to ENGLISH:

What is the meaning of the Greek words chosen by the Septuagint scholars in translating the Hebrew into Greek?

The original of Eph. 4:26, quoting from the Septuagint, uses the Greek word *orgidzo* to translate the Hebrew *ragaz*.

The meaning of *orgidzo* is, according to *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, “To be provoked to anger, be angry, be wroth.” In Eph. 4:26, Paul states it as a command (imperative), but as scholar Zodhiates comments in his *Complete Word Study Dictionary*, in the NT this word is used “only in the middle indicative, and passive voice.” Paul is not commanding us to be angry at someone. The middle indicative has a reflexive sense: the subject acts on or for itself. In using the imperative, Paul is stating a command to be distressed at oneself. How contradictory to his own statements if he were telling us to be angry at someone!— especially when he says in the same context to put away “*all... anger*” (Eph. 4:31). But by using the middle voice, which reflects back to the subject, he is saying, Be deeply distressed **at yourself** because of what **you** did; don’t let yourself sin.

Far from opening the door to allow us to get angry, and contradicting many other passages of Scripture, Paul is telling us how to be distressed when we do wrong, so that we will not sin.

What about the remainder of Ephesians 4:26, “*Let not the sun go down upon your wrath*”? Since God has made clear that we are not to get angry, one possible thought could be, Don’t let your day of probation end with your passions still out of control. Get your emotions under control— don’t lose any time, because anger is deadly. ■

Heaven-Sent Guidance

We need guidance if we wish to travel in the way that will lead us to the Kingdom of God.

I am reminded of an example, in the book of Acts. An Ethiopian eunuch who was the official entourage of the queen of Ethiopia had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was on his way home. During this time, an angel of the Lord appeared to Philip and told him to go to this man riding in a chariot as he was reading the book of Isaiah. When Philip asked him if he knew what he was reading, the eunuch replied, *"How can I, unless someone guides me?"* Then Philip explained to him the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:26–35). — E. Reynolds

Your mention of the Ethiopian Eunuch reminds me of a question I have entertained for some years. What inspired the Eunuch from a place over a thousand miles away to (1) visit Jerusalem, (2) procure the scroll of Isaiah, (3) to read a certain passage about Jesus on his return trip home, and (4) to have Philip directed to join the Eunuch at just the right time? Was all this just happenstance—or heaven-sent guidance? I am inclined to believe the latter.

Look at the details behind this.

Speaking of the queen who visited Solomon about a thousand years earlier, the historian "Josephus mentions the queen once, calling her the 'Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia' (*Ant* 8.6.5–6)." — *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 5, p. 1171). Some scholars contend that Sheba (Hebrew) is Ethiopia (Greek), while others say that the location of Sheba is uncertain. But recent archeological discoveries do place Sheba at Ethiopia, which means that this journey was no small venture. It would likely have taken the Eunuch about a week to reach the nearest waterway leading back to Ethiopia, and then a very long trip by water, about 1,200 miles to arrive back home.

Why was the Eunuch in Jerusalem? He might have traveled there on business for his queen. A thousand years earlier both Solomon and the queen were engaged in maritime trade, a very lucrative business for both countries. It seems logical that a report of such a meeting would have been put in the archives of Sheba (Ethiopia). The "queen of Sheba" was very impressed with all she saw and what she learned about the God of Israel (2 Chron. 9).

There is no way of knowing, but the Eunuch could have discovered the details of the queen's visit in the archives, which he found intriguing—which moved him to purchase a scroll while in Jerusalem, which would have been a considerable expense. And he was reading at a certain place in Isaiah at just the right time on his way back home for what happened next. A coincidence? No, it was no coincidence he was reading at this place when Philip received the orders, *"Go over and join this chariot."*

Philip's question to the Eunuch is significant and reveals the eunuch's frame of mind: *"Do you understand what you are reading?"*

Of course not. He needed Philip; and the angel (guided by God's "Spirit") made the arrangements.

While the above is speculative about how the Eunuch became so interested in the God of Israel, the evidence points to a man with an honest heart who wanted to know the true God, and an angel who was ministering in behalf of the eunuch, who was sent to make the arrangements (Ps. 34:7). The angel of the Lord still camps near *"those who fear"* God, and delivers them.

There is no question, it does happen today. God still finds any who are seeking Him (Jer. 29:13), except that God's instruments work in the background, in silence (Ps. 50:3). We can't see or touch the angel, but our world today is being watched by their protecting eyes. We do not have Holy Spirit power or any supernatural transportation provided. But even these facts would not hinder an angel from making the arrangements for the benefit of one God foresaw as an *"heir of salvation"* (Heb. 1:14; 15:3; 2 Chron. 16:9).

Very soon, though, the great change will come, and God's work will be open. *"He shall send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets"* (Acts 3:20–21 NIV).

"Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). ■ — Gerald R. Payne



We can't see or touch the angel(s), but our world today is being watched by their protecting eyes.

DO I NEED RELIGION

to Know the Difference Between Right and Wrong?

Your web site has been really helpful but I have a question I would value any comments on. I go to Sutton Coldfield Girls' School in Birmingham, UK and as part of a R.S. lesson there was a discussion with the title:

"Do you need religion to know the difference between right and wrong?"

"As a member and believer in Glebe Farm Baptist Church, I have my own ideas concerning this but I need to justify that I am not the only one who feels this way."

"Thank you in advance."

Before answering your question, I think we should look at what we mean by *religion*. What is religion? In its basic form, religion is any system of belief, practices, ethical values devoted to God or to powers believed to govern life.

Religion can help in understanding right and wrong only to the extent that it represents complete or accurate knowledge. For example, the ancient Aztec or Inca Indians on our Continent had elaborate religious beliefs, which to them epitomized all right and wrong, but those same beliefs in-

Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4).

Therefore, to know right from wrong,
one must first know what God's laws are.

Sin deceives, then defiles, then destroys (James 1:14-15).

cluded the rites of human sacrifice and the worship of spirits and demons. Certain religions today have been involved in mass suicide, or uprisings against the government. Such religions could not possibly be a "right" religion even though their members may uphold such behaviors.

To be effective in teaching what is right or wrong, a religion must promote the building of an upright character and restrain the lower instincts of one's nature.

Human views of right and wrong vary widely. For example, the standard of ethics accepted by many young people today is called situation ethics, which says there are no absolutes. Whatever fits the situation is said to determine what is right. If telling a lie achieves the desired results, it is all right to lie. What is the control on human conduct? "If it hurts, then God does not require it," says one. A little thought shows the folly of such a conclusion. Bad habits—especially if we enjoy them—are sometimes painful to break. Such a philosophy condemns discipline of any kind.

There is also the philosophy which says that our conscience is a reliable guide, whatever it tells us, that we instinctively know right from wrong by an inner intuition or feeling which is thought to be from God. But when we think about it, don't training and environment play vital roles in our development? Suppose a child is taught that cows are sacred. There is an abundance of beef, but he will starve before he will eat it. This has been a very serious problem in India. The German people during the time of Adolph Hitler are another example. To many of that nation it was "right" that they should hate and destroy the Jews.

None of these ideas find any support in the Bible.

The next issue in this question is a clear definition of what is "right" and what is "wrong." Shall we say that "right" is what is generally believed, what is accepted by our society, or what is accepted by our Creator? Were we to ask everyone in a community for a definition of right and wrong, we would likely get as many definitions as there are individuals in the community.

All of the above confirms a statement made by the prophet Jeremiah long ago, a statement inspired by God and recorded in the Bible. *"I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps"* (Jer. 10:23 NIV).

The answer to your question is yes, we do need religion to know the difference between right and wrong. The only problem is that humans, by and large, do not want to be told what is right or wrong, especially if it conflicts with their own idea, or if it involves some type of self-denial or sacrifice.

We do need religion to know the difference between right and wrong, and a religion founded on the Bible is the only unchanging standard.

What the Bible teaches about right and wrong

If we define "right" as conduct which pleases God and promotes the physical and spiritual well being of others, let us turn to the Bible for some definitions of that standard. We find the following:

A kindly attitude toward others, whether family, friend, associate, or stranger. *"Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you"* (Eph. 4:31-32 NRSV).

"[The grace or gospel of God] teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12 NIV).

A desire to follow good (godly) examples. “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God” (3 John 11 NIV).

Clean, moral behavior at all times. “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Rom. 13:13–14 NIV).

An attitude of peacemaking. “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14 NIV).

Growth in humility, gentleness, patience and love. “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2 NIV). “...Do to others what you would have them do to you...” (Matt. 7:12 NIV). “Let love* and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (Prov. 3:3 NIV).

Encouraging goodness in others. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24 NIV).

Loyalty and respect to one’s government. Jesus was asked this question: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Mark 12:14 NIV). His answer was, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s...” (Mark 12:17 NRSV).

Obedience to the laws of one’s nation, as long as they do not contradict the laws of God. “Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there. All governments have been placed in power by God” (Rom. 13:1 NLT). But if authority contradicts the laws of God, then as Peter said, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29 NRSV). In the United States our Constitution guarantees freedom of worship to all, for which we are very thankful.

Wholesome, constructive thinking. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8 NIV).

Then there are “wrong” types or modes of conduct—some as natural as breathing—which we must restrain or remove from our lives:

Don’t complain or argue. “Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world” (Phil. 2:14–15 NRSV).

Don’t slander or backbite. “O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their

tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors” (Ps. 15:1–3 NRSV).

Don’t be angry. “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness” (James 1:19–20 NRSV).

Don’t retaliate. “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else” (1 Thess. 5:15 NIV).

Don’t be covetous of what belongs to another. “Keep your lives free from the love of money...the love of money is the root of all evil...” (Heb. 13:5 NIV; 1 Tim 6:10 KJV). Nor should one unnecessarily go in debt, but rather “...be content with what you have...” (Heb. 13:5 NRSV). There are many people today that live far above their means. They go into debt to meet obligations. The Bible principle is: “Owe no man anything, but to love one another” (Rom. 13:8).

Avoid dissension and gossip. “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (Prov. 16:28 NIV).

Avoid evil and deceitful speech. “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Pet. 3:10 NIV).

Avoid deceit. “No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence” (Ps. 101:7 NIV).

Why all the emphasis on upright character and virtue? Because Christ will soon return and establish a Kingdom that will never end. Only those whom He judges as doing right will be allowed to live in His Kingdom. Life in that Kingdom will be wonderful beyond anything we can imagine. For the first time in the history of the earth there will be universal peace, universal goodwill and universal health and justice. Every individual who lives in that world will benefit, for “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (Rev. 21:4 NRSV; 1 Cor. 2:9 NIV). What more could one hope for!

Yes, religion is the only way to know right from wrong. But that religion must have behind it the authority of God and His written Word, if it is to be of any more than temporary or social value. Such a religion will do more than just restrain improper conduct. It will discipline our thinking and create in us new desires and a new purpose in life—in short, a whole new nature. ■

*The word “love” has many shades and grades of meaning in the English language. To be like Jesus Christ, His followers must develop one kind of love, the love that the Scriptures teach. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Cor. 13:4–7 NIV).



YOUTH IN CHRIST

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." -Ecclesiastes 12:1

What Do You Hear?

MEMORY VERSES:

"Take heed what you hear" -Mark 4:24.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS:

What music do you listen to? Do the words please God? Advertisers know that words set to music stay with you even longer than spoken words. And how about the music itself? Would you invite Jesus to listen with you? Be sure that both the words and the music please Him.

Rodney!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomas. "How many times must I tell you not to play that kind of music!"

"Aw, Mom, everybody listens to a little rock now and then," protested Rodney. "Besides, this don't hurt me."

"Doesn't hurt," Mother corrected. "But Rodney, it does hurt! Both the words and the music get into your mind and influence you whether you realize it or not."

Rodney sighed and reached for his jacket. "Is Dad home yet?" he asked.

"Not yet," replied Mother. "Since he was made manager of Burger Haven, he has extra responsibilities. Shall we surprise him and meet him there?"

Rodney brightened. "Oh yes! Can I have a large sundae?" he asked eagerly.

"You can't possibly be hungry yet," laughed Mother, "but maybe a small one would go down. We'll see."

Rodney's father saw them come in and came to greet them. "I'll be with you in a minute," he said.

They sat down, and Rodney listened intently as Dad walked away. "What's Dad singing?" he asked.

"Come to Big Al's, bring all your pals." Dad's voice drifted back softly as he sang under his breath. "Our burgers are the best, in the east and the west."

Rodney burst out laughing. "Dad, you're advertising for the competition!"

Dad grinned sheepishly. "I heard it on the radio while I was driving to work this morning, and it looks like it got into my head. I'd better be more careful what I listen to."

On the way home, Rodney was thoughtful. "I guess maybe you're right, Mom," he murmured finally. "If hearing that song could make Dad advertise for the wrong restaurant without even knowing it, maybe the songs I hear influence me also, more than I thought they did. I'm going to be more careful about what I listen to." ■

Music does influence you!

Are You Prejudiced?

But the Lord said to Samuel, *"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* -1 Sam. 16:7 NIV

Jeff shuffled slowly toward home, his thoughts and feelings a jumble. Now he knew why he couldn't make friends in the new school. They thought him retarded.

Mother greeted Jeff cheerily as he entered the kitchen. "How was school today, son?"

"I wish I could run away and never show my face in school again," answered Jeff emphatically.

"Why, Jeff! Whatever happened?" Mother

responded in surprise.

"They think I'm retarded," Jeff blurted out.

"Retarded? You're sure they're not teasing?"

"Absolutely sure. I heard it with my own ears." Jeff went on to explain. "You know the history test I studied so hard for? Well, I got 105 on it. Mr. Dexter complimented me for my good grade and then read my report to the class. At first I was happy, but then I felt some-

thing was wrong—the whole class seemed to be staring at me. I heard Tracy whisper to somebody, ‘Isn’t Jeff supposed to be retarded?’ I felt like dropping through the floor!”

There was silence for a moment. Mother spoke first.



“Thank God, Jeff, you have an excellent mind, but I know how you must feel.”

“Why did I have to inherit your eye problem?” Jeff said bitterly.

“I’m sorry, Jeff, that you did. I, too, was teased about my thick glasses and at first it really hurt. But I had to have glasses to be able to see, so I made up my mind to concentrate on being thankful for them instead of being hurt.

You know, what people think isn’t nearly as important as what *God* thinks. He doesn’t care how we look on the outside—He’s looking for a good and honest heart. Jeff, anywhere you live you will meet people with prejudices.”

“What are they?” asked Jeff.

“Prejudices are opinions people form before they learn the facts. Often it is a dislike of people who are different in some way,” Mother explained. “God doesn’t want us to be prejudiced, because it isn’t being kind and He says, ‘*Be kind to one another.*’ Can you tell me about some in your class?”

“They’re mostly just ordinary,” answered Jeff. “There’s one

boy, though, his name is Usak, he’s different. I think he’s from—from—Turkey?”

“There is a country called Turkey,” Mother volunteered.

“Nobody likes him much. He doesn’t eat with the rest of us in the cafeteria, and he doesn’t dress like the others. And his mother picks him up right after school every day so he doesn’t have to ride the bus. He’s a snob!”

“Jeff!” exclaimed Mother. “You shouldn’t say that.”

“Well, it’s true, Mother. He is,” Jeff insisted.

“Jeff, you don’t know the reason why Usak is different. You are being prejudiced against him just like you said the others were against you.”

“But, Mother—” insisted Jeff.

“Does he speak English?” asked Mother.

“I think, a little.” Jeff answered. “He doesn’t say much.”

“Maybe he is just shy. Why don’t you try to make friends with him,” suggested Mother. “He may need a friend as much as you do. He could turn out to be a wonderful friend. You know, Son, prejudices do a lot of harm. There are many kinds of prejudices,” Mother continued, “and all prejudices are wrong in the Lord’s sight. Aren’t you glad God doesn’t care *where* we come from, or *how* we look, or *how much money* we have? He looks for upright and Christ-like character. He looks at the condition of our heart. We can’t read the heart, so we want to be very careful how we judge, don’t we?” ■

Do to others as you would have them do to you. –Matt. 7:12

Abib 2018 – *Calendar*

This year the members and friends of the Megiddo Church will welcome the beginning of the **sacred New Year** on the evening of Monday, April 16, and extending through Tuesday, April 18, Bible time being measured from “*evening to evening*” (Lev. 23:32). The ancient Hebrews, according to the law God gave to Moses, marked the beginning of the sacred New Year with the month “Abib,” which is the month beginning with the first new moon following the spring equinox (March 20, this year). The first new moon occurs this year on April 16.

- ◆ This day has double significance as we commemorate the **beginning of the sacred year** and also the **birth of Jesus Christ, our great coming King**. Services in honor of Jesus Christ our King will be held on Sunday, April 15.
- ◆ The **memorial of the Lord’s Supper (New Passover)** will be on Saturday evening, April 28.
- ◆ **Resurrection anniversary** on Tuesday, May 1, 2018.
- ◆ **Ascension** on Saturday, June 9, 2018
- ◆ **Day of Pentecost** on Tuesday, June 19, 2018 ■





*Lighthouses don't
ring bells to call
attention to their light;
they just shine.*

*We cannot direct
the wind, but we can
adjust our sails.*

SPEAK ONLY TO EDIFICATION

*"Comfort each other and edify one another, just as you
also are doing. -1 Thess. 5:11*

What is "edification" as used in the Bible?

The word edify means to build, as a house; then to rebuild or reconstruct. Applied to the church, it means to do anything by teaching, counsel, or advice which will tend to promote its great object; to aid one another to surmount difficulties.

Defined by the lexicons, it means: "(the act of) building, building up. In the N. T. metaphorically,... the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness" (*Thayer's Greek English Lexicon*); figuratively, of spiritual strengthening,... edifying, edification, building up" (*BDAG*).

*What can I say to help you,
Each one in this congregation?
For the Book of Truth says plainly,
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak words of sober meaning,
Is Paul's good admonition,
Not words of idle jesting—
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak truth to friend and sister,
Speak words of exhortation,
Speak kindly to your neighbor,
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak comfort to the mourning,
Solace them in affliction;
True love your words adorning,
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak gentle words of warning
To help resist temptation.
Good counsel give the erring,
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak hopeful words and loving
To cheer the weary laden,
Tell him the goal is nearing,
Speak only to edification.*

*Say "No" when'er temptation
Would lure you by deception,
Yield not to vain dissembling,
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak like the faithful Hebrews,
In the furnace of affliction.
"We will not serve your idols"—
Speak only to edification;*

*The words of truth speak boldly,
Nor fear the persecution
Of those who are unholy,
Speak only to edification.*

*The way of life teach plainly,
As taught by inspiration,
To those who thirst and hunger—
Speak only to edification.*

*Speak often to each other,
You who would reach perfection;
Each be your brother's keeper—
Speak only to edification.*

*Thus would I speak, loved brethren,
Before this congregation,
And like the Book of wisdom,
Speak only to edification.*

Because...

*"By your words you will be justified,
and by your words you will be
condemned." -Matt. 12:36-37.*

Nothing can come between God and me if I live close enough to Him.

Prayer must be followed by the courage to act.

The smallest deed is better than the greatest intention.

When our judgments and our feelings lack patience, they may also lack wisdom and virtue.

The lad who gave his loaves and fishes to Jesus didn't have to go without his dinner.

Prayer is the mortar that holds our spiritual house together.

Don't spend time, invest it.

There is an old Italian proverb: "When God shuts a door, He opens a window." Many of God's people have come to barriers in life which have eventually opened upon new and broader fields of service. If we are identified with Christ, distressing circumstances may bring us to new possibilities in His service.

A pint of example is worth a gallon of advice.

God's Word enables us to live straight in a crooked world.

The best level to live on is your level best.

Faith in God is dead to doubts, dumb to discouragements, blind to impossibilities, knows nothing but success.

TODAY

This is the beginning of a new day God has given me to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good.

What I do today is important, because I'm exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something that I have traded for it. I want it to be gain, not loss; good, not mediocre; success not failure, in order that I shall not regret the price I paid for it.

Wrong is wrong despite our excuses.

If you cannot do great things, you can at least do small things in a great way.

It is not ability that God wants (He gives that), but avail-ability and pli-ability.

The thickest cloud may bring the heaviest showers of blessing.

The best tranquilizer is a clear conscience.

Following the Lord with doubt in your mind is like driving a car with the brakes on.

Don't wait for a crisis to discover what is most important in your life.

There is not enough darkness in all the world to put out the light of one small candle.



A man with faith in God cannot be defeated.



Like a Christian

Father, help me to **TALK** like a Christian:
to speak in such a way that I build another up
instead of tearing down.

Father, help me to **DRESS** like a Christian:
I want others to recognize me as a representative of Your cause;
a member of Your family—modest, humble, Christ-like.

Father, help me to **EAT** like a Christian:
to eat healthily, moderately, gratefully;
giving thanks to You for every good You have provided.

Father, help me to **DRIVE** like a Christian:
to be courteous to my fellow drivers on the highway,
to obey the rules of the road;
to drive responsibly, with respect for others,
willing to yield my rights for the safety of all.

Father, help me to **GIVE** like a Christian:
not grudgingly or for show;
I want only to share what I have received,
to bless as I have been blest,
that my gift to another may carry Your approval.

Father, help me to **WORK** like a Christian:
to be always honest and trustworthy,
doing my best even when I am alone,
knowing my real Master sees everything I do.

Father, help me to **LIVE** like a Christian:
to follow the One who was never guilty of any wrong;
who always did Your will. Help me to
reflect His likeness in every part of my life. **AMEN.**