

A large crowd of people at a festival or concert, with many hands raised in the air. The scene is bathed in vibrant green and blue light, creating a festive atmosphere. The text "ANSWERS FOR TODAY'S SEEKERS" is overlaid on the top half of the image.

ANSWERS FOR TODAY'S  
**SEEKERS**

## *1. After the long night... It's Time for the Sunrise!*

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, ...not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof (Romans 13:11-14).

Jesus Christ never intended for His people to be taken by surprise at His coming. He intends for you to be totally aware of the time of His return, so that you would be watching, waiting, and ready when He comes again. Scriptures that refer to His coming again as "a thief in the night" do not refer to the way the Church will experience His return, but to the way the world will see it. The coming of Christ will take the world totally by surprise - but not the Christian. Paul said, "You are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief. You are the children of the light" (I Thessalonians 5:4,5).

"Knowing the time." The children of the light know that the coming of the Lord is very near. We know we live near the end, because God has placed so much evidence and proof in the world events around us - signs that are intended to alert us to the hour and the day in which we are living.

If the Jews of Jesus' day had only known the time of His coming, they would never have rejected Him. They would have received Him.

Actually, the Jews should have been looking for their Messiah to come the very year Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem. If they had been reading their Scriptures and had been properly taught the Word, they would have known exactly when the Messiah was due to appear.

Daniel had revealed that it would be 483 years from the time the commandment went forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of the Messiah the Prince. Since the commandment went forth in 445 B.C., the Jews should have been looking for their Messiah precisely when He arrived 483 years later. Daniel received this prophecy when he had been studying the Word of God. He knew that a dramatic year was arriving. Daniel knew through studying the Scriptures that the 70 years of the Jews' captivity in Babylon were about over, according to the prophecies of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 25:11 said, "They shall serve the king of Babylon for 70 years." After some basic mathematics, Daniel knew the time of Israel's repatriation had come. He started praying and seeking the Lord concerning any special part He had for Daniel in the return of the people to the land.

Because Daniel was familiar with the Scriptures, he was aware of the world events around him. If you're in the Scriptures and studying the Word of God, then you should also be aware of the events that are happening

in the world around you. You'll be privileged to know what they really mean!

The problem with the Jews in Christ's day was their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures. When Christ came they weren't expecting Him. They were expecting their King to come with regalia on a white charger or in a great chariot. But the Scriptures had said, "Behold, your King comes to you. But He's lowly, He's riding upon a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) So, when Christ came riding on a donkey, they turned up their noses .

Today, we see people who are versed in so many areas of understanding, but they're totally oblivious to the fact that we're coming to the end of the line!

There is no reason why any believer should be taken by surprise when Jesus returns. Even as the Word of God gave so many signs and indications concerning His first coming, it also gives us many signs and indications of events that will be a forewarning of His second coming.

When I looked at the paper the other day, six of the seven articles on the front page were of prophetic significance! They were prophesied in the Scriptures as events at the time of the return of Jesus Christ. All around us are signs and indications that the coming of the Lord is at the door.

It's amazing to me that so many Christians are planning their lives as if they'll be here for at least another 20 years. Do I believe the Lord will return within 20 years? You bet your life I do! I don't want to be around 20 years from now, anyway. If what the ecologists say is

true, it's going to be a very unpleasant world 20 years from now!

### *Alerted*

A young girl came up to me the other day and showed me her arm. There was a rash all over it. She said, "This is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy! I went to my doctor, and he said that this rash is a result of ultraviolet radiation. He said there are many cases of skin irritation due to ultraviolet radiation, because of the depletion of the ozone in the atmosphere."

If those who have been warning us about the dangers of aerosol propellants are correct and we continue to deplete the ozone blanket, 20 years from now you won't dare walk outside in the sun. If you decide to go to the store, you'll have to travel in a little mobile cubicle with protective shields. (See Revelation 16:8-9)

But you're going to have a hard time propelling that little vehicle because, according to estimates, we'll be out of fossil fuels by then. And the experts haven't developed anything else which is even close to replacing fossil fuels as our major energy source.

According to an interesting book about these crises, scientists fed various factors and data regarding the world, its population, the food supply, the ability to grow food, etc. into a computer. Each time this information was fed into the computer to find out what the world would be like 20 years from now, the computer said, "The world can't last that long... there's not enough fuel to take you there... the ozone will be

depleted to the point where life will be totally endangered... the population will be so large that you'll be unable to feed it."

Actually, 15 million people are dying of starvation this year. Two out of three people being born will suffer permanent brain damage from lack of protein in their diets during the developmental years.

There are the exotic super-weapons that are being developed. How much longer can we go until one of these is released by accident or on purpose? The terrorists in Europe are now talking about stealing a nuclear device and using it as their next threat of blackmail.

There are devices that might even be worse than the nuclear weapons. Our forces in Europe have been trained concerning a new nerve gas that has been developed by Russia. We have already received a kit with an anti-toxin for this gas. It contains a spring loaded needle. Hit yourself in any part of your body and the needle will go right through your boots or your clothing and inject this serum into your body. You have fifteen seconds from the time of exposure to the gas to inject the anti-toxin, or you'll be too late. You have ten seconds to analyze and determine whether or not you've been exposed to the gas. If you use the anti-toxin when you haven't actually been exposed to the gas, the anti-toxin will kill you.

What kind of a world are we living in when we have only ten seconds to judge, and if we make a mistake we lose our life? What kind of world will it be 20 years

from now? And who wants to try to exist in that kind of world!

When you talk about the coming of the Lord, the world says, "You're a prophet of doom!" If you ask me, a gloomy message is what the ecologists are saying about our future. As I look around the world, I take great comfort in knowing that it won't be long until the Lord comes!

I look around and see the turmoil. I see, as the Scripture says, "the distress of nations with perplexity." The word "perplexity" translated from the Greek actually means "no way out." We don't know what to do! The economic experts are as confused as the public. They don't want to admit it, because they're afraid we'll panic.

The Bible says that the night is far spent and the day is at hand. The night of evil, the night of misery, the night of darkness of man's history is about over!

The Lord must be coming any time now. We know that we're getting closer with each passing day. That's what Paul meant when he said, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11).

### *Prepared*

Realizing that the Lord's coming is due at any moment, how should we live in these final days of grace? First of all, Paul says that we should cast off the works of darkness. These works are described as rioting, drunkenness, chambering (sexual immorality) and wantonness (sexual immorality with no shame), strife and envying.

Christians living in this polluted world are under tremendous pressure. My mother used to say, "Son, any dead fish can float downstream with the current. It takes a live fish to swim upstream against the current." She said, "You'll be faced with a tide of evil, and the easy thing is to flow with it. But that only proves that you're spiritually dead." She said, "Be alive unto God. Be alive unto Jesus Christ. Dare to go against the tide!" Thank God for mothers who give that kind of advice to their sons.

How should a Christian then live? "Let us put on the armor of light." The literal phrase in the Greek is "weapons of light."

Did you know that there are weapons of light? Truth is a powerful weapon of light. What a power the man has who uses the weapon of light in a dark and evil world, the man who will not bow his knee to Molech, the god of the flesh, but who stands strong in the face of the corrupt society around him.

Another powerful weapon of light is love. We're to put on love and let God's love fill our hearts and our lives.

What is destroying our whole system? Greed. We want someone else to make the sacrifices. Let someone else quit their driving. I'm not willing to sacrifice. Look at the whole economic upward spiral. Why? Because the laborers are demanding higher wages in order to buy the higher priced goods. The manufacturers are saying, "We've got to put higher prices on the merchandise so we can pay the higher wages." Greed drives inflation even higher.



Where's it going to end? It's almost over! The night is far spent. The glorious day of the Lord is at hand!

Paul next exhorts, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He is the Light. Oh, that we will walk in His strength, His ability, and His power! It's only through Him that we have any chance at all in this world in which we're living. If you don't appropriate the power and strength of Jesus Christ, you're a goner!

If you believe you're only a product of accidental circumstances, a series of evolutionary changes, then life for you is meaningless. But life is real. Life is earnest. The grave is not the Christian's goal. Dust thou art, to dust returneth was not spoken of your soul!

God has a plan and a purpose for you. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and discover the glorious life that God has for you. Life with meaning, a life of beauty, a life of joy, a life of love, as we walk in the Spirit, and as we, through Him, become a light in this black, darkened world.

Make no provision to fulfill your flesh's desires. Don't give it an opportunity. If you do, it can take over and bring you under its power and control. Knowing the time, it's high time that we wake up. It's almost over. The cry goes forth. "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" Jesus said, "Be ready!" - for they that were ready went in to the marriage supper! (Matthew 25:6).

## *2. Compared to the Heavens...*

### *What is Man?*

One of the unfortunate by-products of our urbanized society with its resultant air pollution and bright lights is that we cannot see the heavens very clearly anymore. I think that everyone who lives in an urban area should get away to the desert or mountains two or three times a year to look up and be reminded of the glory of heaven. Unfortunately, we forget about the vastness of the universe when we don't see it fully. We begin to think of this world as being closed-in, but when we look at the heavens, we can realize how great the creation of God is!

The Bible declares that the glory of God is greater than the heavens themselves. The psalmist David said,

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens... When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? (Psalm 8:1,3-4).

The sun, the work of God's fingers, is 860,000 miles in diameter. It is so large that 1,200,000 Earths our size could be placed in it. Traveling at 11 1/2 miles per second through space, the sun was flung out by God's hand.

Many stars, because of the density of their atoms, weigh much more than the sun. One of the dual stars of Sirius has such a high density, the number of atoms in a given volume, that one cubic inch weighs 1,725 pounds!

Imagine what would happen if a rock-sized meteor from Sirius was laying on the ground in your path and you decided to kick it out of the way. Yet, as heavy as that star is, God has also spun it into orbit.

"What is man?" First of all, he is body. But the body elements aren't worth very much. With inflation, they are now probably worth about \$2.26 in raw chemicals. Our bodies are made up of atoms which have a nucleus of protons and neutrons with tiny electrons whirling around it. If you could stop these electrons from whirling, they would draw into the center of the mass of the nucleus. If all the atoms in your body collapsed like this, you would immediately disappear. There is so much empty space in these atoms that you'd be smaller than a speck of dust; in fact, it would take a microscope to see you. All of us are made up of these blown-up atoms.

However, the Bible teaches that man is more than body. It teaches that man is a soul and a spirit. The body is called a "tent" in the Scriptures, because it is the temporary dwelling place of the spirit. Paul the apostle said,

For we know that if our earthly tent were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

When these tents in which we're now living return to the dust from which they were made, by the grace of God, our spirits move out. God then has another place of habitation for our spirits - not tents but houses.

God isn't mindful of me in some abstract way, He's mindful of me in a personal way. He knows when I get up in the morning and go to bed at night. He knows when some sound awakens me in the middle of the night. He who knows my thoughts, and also understands my dusty frame (Psalm 103:14); and yet, knowing my weaknesses and my failings, He still loves me!

Sometimes, Satan lays a trap on us. He tells us that once we have made a mistake or failed, or because we may continually fail, God wants nothing to do with us. Satan would have us believe that God is no longer interested in us. But God knows our frames, that we are but dust. God also knows our hearts, and the real intentions of our hearts and lives.

When you have a little child who is just learning to walk, you let the child grasp on to your fingers and steady him as he walks. Then, when you feel that he's steady enough, you let go of his fingers. The child may really be attempting to take that first step, but he may fall right away, because he isn't coordinated enough to walk yet. When this happens, you don't pick him up and scold him, saying, "You rotten little kid! Why don't you walk?" You don't punish him for falling. You grab him and hold him close. You encourage him, saying, "That's okay, angel. Let's try again." You assure him of your love.

As long as the child is trying, you continue to encourage him and love him. Even though he may fail a hundred times, you don't toss the child out. You don't

get rid of him just because he has failed. In the same way, God knows when you're trying; and, if you do fail, God doesn't discard you and say, "Oh, I get so sick of you!" He picks you up and holds you close, then dusts you off and says, "Come on now, let's try again."

On the other hand, you may have a teenager sitting in the room. If you say, "Come over here. I want to show you something," and he replies, "No, I don't want to, and you can't make me," you may want to pop his head off because he's being rebellious. There's a difference of attitude between the baby and the teenager. One is an attitude of weakness: wanting to do something but not being able to, the other is an attitude of rebellion: having the ability to do something and not wanting to. If you want to serve God but lack the ability, don't be afraid that God is going to be angry at you! God loves you! He knows your frame. He knows how uncoordinated you are spiritually. God looks upon us with love because we're His children. As a father pities his child who is learning to walk, so our heavenly Father looks upon us, His children, with pity.

However, if we're in open rebellion against God, saying, "I don't want to do it! I won't do it! You can't make me do it!" He may prove to us that He can make us do it, just as a father may prove to his teenage son that he can make him come across the room.

"What is man?" Generally, man is a rebellious little creature. He's down here on this little planet, shaking his fist at his Creator and saying, "I don't want to follow Your rules! I'll live just as I please! You can't make me

live the way You want me to! I'll do what I want!" This is man, a little speck of dust, shaking his dusty fist at the Creator of the universe. How foolish it is to rebel against the Creator!

"What is man that thou art mindful of him?" The question is unanswerable. But God is not only mindful of me, He came to visit me: "And the son of man, that thou visitest him." The Gospel of John begins:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made... He was in the world, and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name... And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3,10-12,14).

God's visiting man is a marvelous mystery, but the blindness of man's rebellion is a tragedy. Rebellion will always blind you. It is always folly to be in rebellion against God. Here is little man rebelling against his Creator. His Creator came to visit him, but man didn't even recognize Him. Even though the world was made by Him, the world knew Him not.

Psalm 8 continues in prophecy of Jesus Christ and His visit to Earth.

For Thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.

In Hebrews 2:8 this Psalm is quoted in reference to Jesus Christ. God has placed all things in subjection unto Jesus Christ, giving Him the authority over all of His created work. However, at the end of this passage the writer of Hebrews declares, "But now we do not yet see all things put under him."

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*The heavens do declare the glory of God... but only Jesus Christ declares the fullness of God's love for man.*

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As we look around in the world today, we do not see everything in subjection to Jesus Christ. In fact, we see a world in rebellion against His authority. Even as Christians, our flesh sometimes rebels against Him, but there is coming a day when God shall place all authority in Jesus Christ. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10). We do not yet see all things in subjection,

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9).

May God help us to see beyond the rebellion around us and beyond the rebellion of our own flesh, and may we, this day, see Jesus! May we, this day, crown Him with many crowns, the Lord upon His throne. May we, this day, submit ourselves to His authority and to His will. May we bow our knee to His scepter and worship at His feet. May we enter into the glories of the kingdom of God by submitting ourselves to Jesus Christ, the King. May we see Jesus and, when we do, may we say with David, "O Jehovah our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! who has set Thy glory above the heaven" (Psalm 8:1).

What is man that God would think of him? Yet He did. What is man that God should redeem him? Yet He has. What is man that God should want him? Yet He does. What is man that God should save him and make him His own throughout eternity? Yet He has!

The question we should be asking is not, "What is man?" but, "What is God?" He is infinite grace, infinite love, infinite goodness.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:11-13).



### *3. Positive Confession*

And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him (I John 5:14-15).

The word *confidence* in the Greek literally means "the boldness of speech." When we talk to the Lord we can be bold! We can be free, open, and honest. If we say something wrong, it doesn't matter. God isn't going to throw it back at us. If we say something foolish, He understands. We can pray with real boldness of speech. Praying with confidence is an exciting thing!

The boldness of speech that we have is in asking. The Scripture has encouraged us to come boldly to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). That is proper and correct. There's nothing wrong with coming to God under pressure. I can't help but feel that maybe God at times has created the pressure just to get us to call on Him! There's nothing wrong with coming to God and asking. In fact, the Lord tells us to. Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7). Again, Jesus said, "Ask, please ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

When I come to God, I can come boldly. I can ask God for my needs. I don't have to worry that He'll misunderstand me. I don't have to be afraid that He'll be rude or rough with me. I don't have to worry that I might be asking the wrong thing.

We have this confidence in Him, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." I'm so glad that qualification is there! I'm glad that this Scripture doesn't say, "Whatever we ask we receive." I'm very grateful that He inserted "according to His will." Had God answered all of our prayers, some of us wouldn't be here today. We would have destroyed ourselves a long time ago!

He loves you too much to let you run your life. When you put the "I" in run, you've got the true picture: you'll ruin your life when you try to run it.

Paul tells us that we don't always know what the will of the Lord is. That's one of our problems in prayer. From past experience, I realize that I made so many mistakes in the analyses of my own needs that if God had answered some of those prayers, it would have been absolutely tragic!

What if I were in control? What if God were acquiescing to every confession that I made? People say, "Be careful not to make a negative confession! What you say is what you get." That's ridiculous!

David said, "I know one day Saul is going to kill me." Don't say that, David! That's negative confession. Now it's going to happen, because what you say is what you get! And now one day Saul is going to kill you. But Saul didn't kill David.

"If I could have things by just making a positive confession." "If God must yield to my demands." Do you see what that immediately does? It elevates me to

the position of God and puts God in the subservient position. I'm no longer serving God, but God is serving me and my every whim.

To put God in this kind of position, as Paul declares in Romans 1:21, is to fail to glorify God as God. It doesn't make God "God" anymore but some kind of servant who has to run around and do my will, follow my commands, and fill out my confessions. It puts me in control and God in the servant's seat. To exalt my demands, wishes, and my will above God's will is audacious, perverted, and insane.

Certainly, the greatest prayer any of us can ever pray is, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." That isn't a spiritual cop-out as some people would accuse. It's just glorifying God as God and recognizing that He's a lot smarter than I. I may think that something is best for me, but He knows what's best for me.

"Not my will, but Thy will be done" is the wisest prayer I can offer to God. That's the way I always want it to be. Though we don't always articulate it, that submission to His will is always the background of every prayer I offer to God. "God, this is what I want. This is what I think I need. But, Lord, You know what I need better than I know myself. Your will be done in my life. Your will be done in this illness. Your will be done in this financial problem. Don't listen to me. I'll mess it up worse than it is. You do what is best for me, God."

A person who's afraid to pray "Thy will be done" is a person who doesn't truly understand or know God. If you really know God then you have no problems

praying that way at all. Unfortunately, many people have a lot of false concepts of God.

Satan has done a tremendous job of lying about God and His nature. So many people think that God's will is the most terrible thing that could ever happen to them. They think that whatever you don't want to do is just what God will make you do when you say, "Thy will be done." If you say, "I don't want my nose rubbed in the dirt," the first thing that's going to happen is that God will rub your nose in the dirt. Oh, what a blasphemous concept of God to think that He would do some horrible, ugly thing just because you've submitted to His will. God's will for our lives is so glorious and marvelous that I'm afraid to have anything less than God's will for my life!

God delights in giving good gifts to His children. He's more anxious to give than we are to receive! If you can have the proper concept of God then you can, with confidence, totally cast yourself upon Him and say, "Here I am, God! It's Your problem now! Take care of it. Whatever You want, whatever You wish. My life is Yours. You work out all the details and circumstances. I'm going to relax and let You do it!" You won't be able to believe those things He desires to do for your life - just because He loves you! No way am I afraid to say, "Lord, Thy will be done in this situation." That's all I want.

We must remember that there is a limitation to our asking: "...anything according to His will." The

Scripture isn't just a blanket promise. God has put a limitation to our asking - a *blessed* limitation!

## *4. God's Refining Process*

Because the Jewish nation had forsaken the covenant of the Lord, walked in its own path, and would not harken to the Lord's voice - God proclaimed, through Jeremiah the prophet, the judgments to come against Judah. Jeremiah then turned to the Gentiles and prophesied the judgments to come against their nations.

Jeremiah 48 tells us that destructions are determined upon the Gentile nation of Moab. Its cities were to be made desolate. Its armies would be slaughtered and destroyed. Verse 11 tells us why:

Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees. and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither had he gone into captivity; therefore, his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.

### *1. Change*

One thing that you must declare concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ: it changes people. What you were before you met Christ is not what you are after you have met Him. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

There is something radically wrong with the person who claims to know Jesus Christ and has not had any changes in his life - who still walks after and according to the things of the flesh and minds the things of the flesh - because Jesus Christ will change your life. You

cannot be the same person after you have met Him if you have truly experienced His power in your life.

One of the sad testimonies of the Church is that many of the people who attend church, take the name of Christian, and say their prayers faithfully have never had the change in their lives that Christ effects in a man.

The basic difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that the non-Christian is ruled by his flesh and by his fleshly desires. In talking about our pre-Christ experience, Paul the Apostle said:

In times past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works among the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our manner of life in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh (Ephesians 2:2-3).

A person who hasn't met Jesus Christ is a person whose life is dominated by his flesh and fleshly desires. A person who has come to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a person who knows and acknowledges the supremacy of the Holy Spirit and lives according to the Spirit. The Bible tells us, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

It's possible to call Jesus "Lord." It's possible to have all the religious vernacular, go to church, sit and listen to the messages, but never be touched in the deeper area of your life. You may have the head knowledge. You may have the spiritual jargon down pat. But if it hasn't

come into the area of your life where it affects your will  
- your religion is vain.

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*God's refining process is based on love! He won't let us stay settled in the dregs of the flesh. He has something better for us than the empty, fruitless life we often seek.*

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If you're not being led by the Spirit of God, you're not a son of God. You're still mastered and dominated by your flesh and still living after the flesh. The Bible declares that the mind of the flesh is sin and death, but the mind of the Spirit is life, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 8:6).

You can't go out all week sowing wild oats, then come to church on Sunday and pray that they'll never grow. "Oh, God, kill all the seeds I've sowed this week! Don't let them grow." That can't happen. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). If you're living to the flesh and sowing to the flesh, of the flesh you're going to reap corruption.

Jesus was crucified for making this declaration. He asserted the supremacy of the spiritual over the material. The people couldn't handle it, and they finally put Him to death. Yet it's true. When Jesus Christ comes into your life He changes you from the old flesh-ruled life to the Spirit-ruled life.



Jesus said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself" (Matthew 16:24). That's the very first step. You've got to deny the old life, the old flesh, the desires of the flesh. Deny "himself" is the very first thing. Many people have come to Jesus Christ in theory, but they haven't yet come to Him in practice. They're saying, "Lord, Lord," but they're not obedient to the will of the Father.

## *2. Purification*

The second thing the Gospel of Jesus Christ does to a person is purification. The Bible says that we are pure even as He is pure (I John 3:3). God is going to work in your life to purify you. God wants to bring you into purity. This purifying work is explained in Jeremiah 48:11, where he is describing the process by which wine is made. Jeremiah said that Moab had been at ease from his youth, had settled on his lees, and had never been poured from vessel to vessel. This was his problem. Moab had never been disturbed.

When they were making wine, the people would pour the juice into a vessel. They would allow it to set in that vessel until it fermented. The sediment, known as lees or dregs, would settle to the bottom of the vessel. Once the dregs settled, they would carefully pour the wine out of that vessel into another vessel, so that the settling process might again take place. As the dregs sank to the bottom, the wine makers would pour the liquid back into another vessel. Back and forth from vessel to vessel, each time being careful not to pour out the

dregs. They were coming to a pure, clear product of the vine. This was their method of making excellent wine.

If the people didn't pour the wine from vessel to vessel but allowed it to set too long in the collected dregs, the fermented juice would begin to develop the taste of the dregs. The wine would become bitter. Then it would begin to get the smell of the dregs, a rotten smell. It would also begin to take on the color of the dregs. It's tragic when Christians get settled in the things of the flesh, the flesh walk, the flesh life. At one time in their Christian walks they were shocked that people could do such evil things of the flesh. They'd say, "I would never do that!" After a while, you find them doing the same things and becoming settled in them.

This impurity actually begins to permeate your whole life. Your life begins to be colored by the flesh. Your life begins to smell of the things of the flesh. Your life begins to just taste of the things of the flesh. Rather than bringing spiritual refreshment, all you're talking about is the latest chatter of what's happening here, what's happening there, this new movie, that new fashion. Your mind is caught up in the things of the flesh. In reality, you become no more than a heathen. Jesus said that you shouldn't be taking thought about what to eat, what to drink, or what to wear. He said, "For after all these things do the Gentiles [the heathen] seek" (Matthew 6:31-32).

If your life gets caught up in that trip - what shall we eat, what shall we wear, what new thing to buy, always interested in the adornment of your body, buying

clothes and keeping up with the fashions, or always in the eating and drinking crowd, seeking to delight yourself in the fancy foods, a gourmet - you're no better off than the heathen. These things occupy their minds. They live after the flesh.

It's tragic when Christians settle down in these kinds of dregs so much that their lives are colored by it. You can't have a spiritual conversation with them. They're so interested in some new thing they purchased last week - "Wait till you see it!" It's all a flesh trip. Settling in the dregs of the flesh, they are colored, they are scented, they are tasting of the things of the flesh. It is a flesh life, not the life of the Spirit. God wants to purify us. God wants to clean out those dregs. God has something better for you than that empty, fruitless life of the flesh. You need to experience the purifying effect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

It's tragic that many people who have spent their entire lives in church or under its influence, attending very regularly, are still spiritually "babes in Christ." Paul calls them "carnal" (I Corinthians 3:1-4). They've never developed in their spiritual walk. They've been at ease. They've settled into the dregs. They haven't been poured from vessel to vessel.

### *3. Deliverance*

The third thing the Gospel of Jesus Christ does is deliverance. The power of Jesus Christ can set you free from the power of the flesh. Some of you today have become slaves to your fleshly desires. It's amazing what a strong grip and hold it can get on your life. The very

first time you tried it, it was just for a kick. You were just searching for a little diversion.

We have many people in our church who are alcoholics. How little did they realize the power it would get on their lives, the grip it would hold over them. Thank God they know. They know better than to take again that first drink. They've experienced the delivering power of Jesus Christ. Having been delivered from the entanglements of the world, don't be so foolish as to go back and be entangled again with that yoke of bondage.

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*Unless we're poured from vessel to vessel, our lives begin to "smell" of the things which we have settled into!*

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We have many drug addicts. Maybe the first time they took a pill was to ease the appetite a bit. Maybe it was to alleviate some pain or to calm their nerves. But the drug began to get a hold of them until, finally, they came under the power of that substance, unable to free themselves. They found themselves bound in that drug. How little did so many realize, when they took that first fix, the hell it was leading them into.

They know now. Thank God for the power of Jesus Christ to deliver us from the bondage of corruption in which we found ourselves through our own folly and

foolishness. The power of Jesus Christ can and does deliver man from the bondage of sin and death.

Today, maybe you find yourself entangled in a situation where you never thought you'd be. Maybe today you find yourself caught up in an adulterous situation. It started off so innocently, just as a little flirtation. Now, you're all involved. You never intended to be, but you opened the door to the flesh, and it took over. Now that situation is mastering your life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ can set you free. He can deliver you. Maybe you're hooked on drugs, or maybe you can't stop drinking. You've come to the place where you need that shot when you get home in the evening. Then, worse, you need it when you get up in the morning.

Maybe you have been bound by some desire or lust that has overwhelmed you and made you its victim. Moab was in this sad condition, because it had been at ease. Moab never had any problem, never was in captivity, never knew what it was all about. It grew up rather sheltered and protected. It settled into this condition as a result of no waves, no stirring. Moab had never been poured from vessel to vessel.

But, you know, God loves you. If you come to that place in your Christian experience where you start to relax and settle down into the dregs of the flesh, God's love won't allow you to get by with it. God will upset your position.

God uses disturbances. They are the tools of God to bring us to Himself, to take away our trust and our

reliance in other things. He doesn't want us to have job security, social security or security in man, government, bank accounts, or ourselves. He wants us to find our total security in Him. And so He pours us from vessel to vessel.

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*"For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).*

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Maybe this knowledge has disturbed some of you. Praise the Lord! You see, He wants to shake you up from that little smugness and ease in the flesh that you've fallen into, the trap of trying to find the answer in the things of the flesh.

We have been created for His pleasure (Revelation 4:11). He can't enjoy us when we smell of the flesh. He can't enjoy us when we taste of the flesh. *It is only as we walk in the Spirit, as we live in the Spirit, as we move in the Spirit, that we become what God would have us be - a pure product that He can enjoy.*

### *A Time of Change*

You go to work. The foreman walks up to you and says, "I don't know what's wrong, but here's your termination notice." You think, "Termination? What do you mean 'termination'? I've got house payments, car payments, and television payments. What do you mean termination? Oh, God! What are You doing?"

He's got you're attention now. He's pouring you from vessel to vessel. You see, you began to rely on and find security in your job. You were settling down into the dregs. You weren't walking after the Lord. You weren't searching after the *Spirit*.

God doesn't want you to smell of the flesh. So, God pours you into another vessel. God will not let you get entangled in the things of the flesh. If you start doing it, if you start meddling, if you start giving over to the things of the flesh, your day is coming. God is going to pour you from vessel to vessel to purify you.

And, suddenly, there you are. You're brought into a new relationship with God - being refined and purified through these disturbances that He brings into our lives.

## *5. Keep Yourself in the Love of God*

Jude exhorts us: "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (v. 21). This seems like a strange injunction. If you don't read the entire context, you could easily misinterpret it. How can we keep ourselves in the love of God?

Looking back at verse one, however, we find that Jude is writing to those who are "preserved" or kept in Jesus Christ and have been "sanctified" and "called" by God. Jude shows throughout this short letter that some have begun in fellowship with God, but have failed to keep themselves in the love of God. Thus, they haven't achieved the full potential of God's plan for their lives. They failed to keep themselves in that place where God could bless them.

Jude writes about the children of Israel who, though delivered out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness (v. 5). They didn't enter into the full blessing God had for them, because they didn't keep themselves in the love of God. Though they had experienced deliverance, they didn't come to the full benefits of God's work in their lives. They failed to keep themselves in the love of God.

Jude also describes certain angels who once were in fellowship with God and abode in His kingdom, but they "kept not their first estate" (v. 6). They didn't keep themselves in the love of God and were cast out of His kingdom. Now they are reserved for the day of judgment.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who lived in that well-watered area of the plain, had many blessings



from the hand of God; yet, they certainly didn't appreciate them (v. 7). They didn't keep themselves in the love of God and, thus, failed in their purpose for life.

Jude mentions Cain, who killed his brother; Balaam, who enticed the people of God to sin; and Korah ("Core" in the Greek translation), who rebelled against the authority of God and was destroyed (v. 11). With this background the writer exhorts us, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

What did he mean by that? First of all, we know what he didn't mean. He didn't mean to keep yourself in such a way as to make God love you. He didn't mean for you to do nice things for God's love. God's love is unsought, undeserved, and unconditional. You cannot get away from the love of God. God loves you just as you are. You may be in the midst of rebellion against God today, but He still loves you. God isn't persuaded to love you because you're an especially good person. The text doesn't mean that - because you cannot put yourself outside of the love of God!

John 3:16 begins, "For God so loved the world" The world that God loved wasn't seeking His love, nor did it deserve His love. Yet God did love it. God didn't impose conditions on the world. He didn't say, "Now, if you fulfill these conditions, I'll love you." God loved the world as it was, in the midst of rebellion against His order and His government. He loves it still.

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*We can lose that first glow of having our hearts aglow  
with God's love and of desiring nothing else but Him  
by not keeping ourselves in His love.*

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God, because He loves you, wants to demonstrate that love by bestowing His blessings upon your life. Jude points out three attitudes in verse 11 that can restrict God's blessings. Cain hated his brother. Balaam was mastered by greed, thus he enticed the people of God to sin. Korah was envious, which led to rebellion against the government of God. You may be thinking, "Oh, you're talking about murder, enticing people to sin, and rebellion against God's established order. You're not talking about me." But Jesus in His Great Manifesto said,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,  
Thou shalt not kill;... but I say unto you, That  
whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause  
shall be in danger of the judgment (Matthew 5:21-22).

John stated, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a  
murderer" (I John 3:15).

Cain killed his brother after coming home from offering a sacrifice to God (Genesis 4:3-8). Cain had just been to church! Yet, his heart was filled with hatred toward Abel and he murdered him. Hatred is not in harmony with love. Keep yourself from hatred.

Balaam enticed the people of God to sin, because he was filled with greed (Numbers 22-24). He desired the rich reward that Balak the king had offered. Though Balaam couldn't curse the people of God, he enticed them into a trap that brought a curse upon them. He did this right after uttering one of the most beautiful prophecies in the Old Testament! It was an anointed, inspired prophecy concerning the people of God. Then Balaam betrayed the people by telling the king how to entice them into sin, so that God's judgment would fall upon them. *Greed* is out of harmony with the love of God. Keep yourself from greed.

Korah was filled with envy because of Aaron and the appointed priesthood (Numbers 16). Korah was a leader among the people and a leader of a popular movement. He was a minister of God and offered services unto God, and yet he was envious of the high position of others. So whatever he had was taken away from him. *Envy* is out of harmony with love. Keep yourself from envy.

Keep yourself from hatred, greed, and envy, for these things are out of harmony with love. If these things fill your life, you cannot enjoy the fullness of the benefits that God wants to bestow upon you. Those rich blessings cannot be given to you if these evil things are hindering what God wants to do. Keep yourself in the love of God. This warning is needed, because sometimes we're in danger of losing that first bloom of love. We can lose that first glow of love when Jesus came in to our lives and washed away all our sins. We can lose that feeling of having our hearts aglow with

His love and of desiring nothing else but Him - by not keeping ourselves in His love.

Jesus wrote to the church at Ephesus:

I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have something against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" (Revelation 2:2-4).

The first bloom of love had gone! The glow of fresh love wasn't there anymore. Jesus warned them of the inevitable consequences of leaving that first love. He said it would ultimately result in the candlestick's removal from its place - the loss of the consciousness of the presence of Jesus Christ.

If that love of the Lord isn't burning brightly in your heart, one day you'll even lose the consciousness of God's presence. The Bible says, "In thy presence is fullness of joy" (Psalms 16:11). But with the loss of the consciousness of His presence comes the loss of the joy in your life. You wonder, "What's happening to me? Where is the blessing I once knew? Where is the joy I once had?"

Your problem is that you haven't kept yourself in the love of God. You have allowed hatred, greed, or envy to come in. It has robbed you of what God wants to do and what He already has done. Only by keeping yourself in God's love can you blossom into the full

potential God has for you - and for which He's drawn you out from the world and the bondage of sin.

Grace doesn't act independently of responses. Though God's grace is extended toward you, you must respond to the grace of God if you're to benefit from that grace. Privilege brings responsibility - and responsibility not acted upon can destroy you.

God's Word is searching your heart right now, and, if you're in His love, then respond to it. Put away all that is contrary to the love of God - any bitterness, any hatred, any impurity - and keep yourself in the love of God!

*Q: How can I keep myself in the love of God?*

**A:** Right here surrounding our text Jude gives us three steps for keeping ourselves in the love of God.

1. "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith" (v. 20). As we read this epistle, we realize Jude is talking about faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. In the beginning of the letter he warns about those who will even deny our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 4). So, building up your faith in Jesus Christ is the first and foremost means of keeping yourself in the love of God. Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which we build.

Peter said,

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it

unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church (Matthew 16:16-18).

What is the "rock" that Christ builds His Church upon? The fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Savior of the world. This is the foundation upon which to build your faith.

Paul the apostle said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). Build your faith upon this foundational rock of Jesus. For Jesus Christ was with God, He is God, but He became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-2,14). He went to the cross, carrying upon Himself all our sin and guilt, and He died in our place - but He rose again the third day. He ascended to heaven to the Father where He lives today, making intercession for you and me. This is the foundation. Now build on it in faith!

2. Jude 20 continues, "praying in the Holy Ghost." What does that mean? "Praying in the Holy Ghost" means that your prayers are directed by the Holy Spirit. So many of our prayers are directed by our own needs, by our own intellects, or by our own wishes and desires. Jude is encouraging us to pray in the Holy Ghost.

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*If that love of the Lord isn't burning brightly in your heart, one day you'll even lose the consciousness of*

## *God's presence.*

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In Romans 8, Paul talks about one of the weaknesses that we have as Christians:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26).

One of our weaknesses is that we don't always know how to pray. But the Spirit, he said, will make intercession, because He knows what the mind of the Father is, and intercedes according to His will.

How can you pray in the Holy Ghost? You can pray in the Holy Ghost when, out of your deepest being, you can no longer adequately express yourself to God. Savonarola, a 15th century reformer, said, "When prayer reaches its ultimate, words are impossible." You move from the realm of the intellect into the realm of the Spirit, and you let God interpret your prayer. It may come forth in soft weeping or as a groan. Your praying may be totally unintelligible to you, but it is communion with God in the deepest sense. Through it God washes, purifies, and cleanses your soul and keeps you in His love.

Paul declares,

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I

will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also" (I Corinthians 14:14-15).

The obvious reference in praying with the Spirit is when we're praying in an unknown tongue. Such praying in the Holy Spirit keeps us in the love of God.

**3.** The third way to keep ourselves in the love of God is to look "for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (v. 21). We keep ourselves in the love of God by looking for the return at any moment of Jesus Christ. The consciousness that Jesus might come today makes me very concerned with what I say, how I preach, and how I relate His truth.

If you're witnessing with the realization that this might be the last opportunity to share Jesus Christ with this person, you'll be very careful about how you witness to him. If you realize this might be your last day to serve the Lord, you'll be careful about how you serve Him. You'll want to do it in such a way that you'll be in full harmony with His love and His Spirit. There's nothing like the expectancy of the return of Jesus Christ to channel the Church into holy, righteous living.

Jesus warns in His Word,

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (I Thessalonians 5:3).

Jesus is coming at any moment! "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time" (Hebrews 9:28). Be looking for the return of your Lord. Don't get caught up in the "Lord delayeth His coming"



syndrome. Don't get caught up in the things of the world.

Live in harmony with God's love, so that you can become the full recipient of all the blessings, grace, and goodness that come from walking in fellowship with God and in His love. Having begun in the love of God, don't depart from the love, and thus, miss the full benefits of it. Don't wander in the wilderness when you can be resting in an oasis, enjoying the fullness of God in your life. "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Jude began his epistle by addressing those who are kept or preserved in Jesus Christ. He ends his epistle by praising, "Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless" (v. 24). The chief injunction of the epistle is: keep yourselves in the love of God.

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*You cannot get away from the love of God. God loves you just as you are.*

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One day Christ will present you faultless before the presence of God's glory. But you must respond to that grace of God. You must keep yourself in that place where God can bless you and use you. Keep your heart from hatred, greed, and envy - those evils that would choke out God's work in your life. Keep yourself in the love of God - and He will keep you unto that day!

## *Does God Still Love Me?*

A little boy asked his Sunday school teacher, "Does God love bad little boys?"

The teacher answered, "Oh, no. God doesn't love bad little boys - just good little boys."

But this reply is wrong. In fact, it's blasphemous. God loves bad little boys. God loves bad little girls, too. He loves everyone! Somehow, we think, "Well, because I've been bad, God doesn't love me anymore." That's not true! God loves you just as much when you're bad as when you're good - for God's love is unconditional. Though you may have wandered from God, grieved God, or even forgotten God, His love is still reaching out toward you.

So, why does the Scripture say, "Keep yourselves in the love of God"? You must keep yourself in a position of harmony with God's love, so that you can receive and enjoy its full benefits and blessings. Though God loves the world today, much of the world receives no direct benefits of His love. Indirectly, everyone benefits from God's love. For example, everyone enjoys the sunshine - those who love God and those who don't. We love God, but not everyone does. We're in harmony and fellowship with God's love, but others are not.

Today, you may be living beneath the full, rich benefits that God has for your life. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years, as a result of their rebellion against God and the rejection of His love. But the prophet Isaiah tells us, "His hand is stretched out

still" (v. 12). They spited the love of God, but "His hand is stretched out still" (v. 17).

Just as the children of Israel, you may have been delivered out of Egypt, but may still be wandering in the wilderness. You haven't entered into the full benefits of God's promises. Though this glorious inheritance is waiting for you, you may still be a spiritual pauper.

The full benefits of God's love cannot be manifested in your life if you're not keeping yourself in the love of God. You dwell in the love of God, but only when you live in harmony with the love of God will you begin to experience the abundant richness and fullness of that love.

## 6. *The Rapture!*

Death to the Christian is so different than to the non-Christian that it's incorrect even to use the same term. For the Christian death is really a *transition*.

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:21-23). Paul said that we who are in this body do groan, earnestly desiring to be delivered; not that we would be unclothed but that we might be clothed with that body which is from heaven (II Corinthians 5:2).

Speaking to the Thessalonians concerning their loved ones who had already died in Christ, Paul said,

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: **Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air:** and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, emphasis added).

Some people would ridicule the idea or concept of the Rapture of the Church. They declare that the word "rapture" isn't even found in the Bible. It all depends on which Bible you're reading. The phrase "caught up" in I Thessalonians 4:17 is the Greek word *harpazo*, which actually means "to be snatched away violently." The Latin equivalent of *harpazo* is the verb *rapio*, "to take away by force." In the Latin Vulgate, one of the oldest Bibles in existence, the appropriate tense of *rapio* appears in verse 17. *Raptus* is the past participle of *rapio*. Our English words "rapt" and "rapture" stem from this past participle. Although "rapture" isn't in the King James Bible, the basic word does appear in the Latin Vulgate.

### *What is meant by the Rapture?*

The Rapture refers to that event where Jesus Christ snatches His Church out of this world. It shall happen suddenly without any notice. The Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ are completely different. At the Rapture Jesus is coming for His saints.

In I Corinthians 15:51-52 Paul said, "Behold, I show you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will be changed [metamorphosis, a change of body] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." You won't even realize it's happened until it's all over. Suddenly, you're in the presence of the Lord with all the church!

We the Church will be changed. Paul wrote to the Philippians,

For our [citizenship] is in heaven, from whence we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ: Who will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious [image] (Philippians 3:20-21).

Describing the metamorphosis Paul wrote to Corinth, "For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Corinthians 15:53). At the Second Coming we will return with Jesus Christ. Jude 14 tells us, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints."

### *When Will the Rapture take place?*

Jesus said, "No man knows the day or hour..." For us to presume to declare some date or some hour would be an unscriptural presumption. If we say we know the hour, we're boasting of knowledge superior to Christ's when He was upon the earth.

Although we do not know the exact time of the Rapture, in I Thessalonians 5 Paul said,

But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord is coming as a thief in the night. For when they will say, Peace and safety; then comes sudden destruction... **But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief** (emphasis added).

The Bible is saying that the Rapture shouldn't come to you as a surprise.

### *Why Should "That Day" Not Overtake Us as a Thief?*

God has given to us the warnings that would precede the coming of Jesus Christ. One of the greatest signs to the world today is the re-establishment of the nation Israel. For years Bible scholars had looked forward to the regathering of the nation Israel based on many Scriptures (including Matthew 24:32), and applying expositional constancy (fig tree or figs in parables symbolize the nation Israel). Skeptics ridiculed this prophecy. Never in history had a nation been born out of the past, but a miracle has taken place and a nation has been reborn. God has reestablished Israel among the family of nations on the earth. God has fulfilled His promise even as He said He would.

Psalm 102:16 declares, "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory." Because the Lord is building up Zion, the orthodox Jew today is looking for his Messiah. We are too! We're looking forward to this fulfillment of God's promise the coming again of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh even know that it [My coming] is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:32-35).

### *What "Generation"?*

Not the generation Christ was talking to, because they've passed - but the generation that saw the fig tree budding forth. The coming of Jesus Christ is "even at

the doors." The rebirth of Israel should be a sign to every child of God!

Jesus said throughout the rest of Matthew 24, "Watch... be ye also ready." That was the constant warning to the Church: watch and be ready. In Luke 21:28 when Jesus was speaking of these same things, using again the parable of the fig tree, He said, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

### *Will the Rapture precede the Great Tribulation?*

There are arguments and Scriptures that people can present for pre-, mid-, and post-Tribulation theories. My personal opinion is that Jesus will come before the Great Tribulation to rapture His Church. I don't believe that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation period.

In I Thessalonians 5:9 Paul wrote, "For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul said the same in Romans 5:9 - we've not been appointed to wrath. Jesus, in the whole context of the Tribulation, said, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). My prayer is that I will be accounted worthy to escape all of these things that are going to come to pass upon the earth.

The Lord divided the Book of Revelation into three sections: "[1] Write the things which thou hast seen, [2] and the things which are, [3] and the things which shall



be after these things [meta tauta]" (Revelation 1:19). John, in obedience to the commandment, wrote in chapter I the vision of Christ that he saw on the island of Patmos. In chapters 2 and 3 he wrote of the Church and the message of Jesus to the seven churches. Let's look at two of these messages where Jesus made reference to His coming again.

1. The church of Thyatira had introduced the worship of idols within the church. Jesus said,

I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel... to seduce my servants to commit fornication... I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into **great tribulation, except they repent of their** deeds (Revelation 2:20-22, emphasis added).

The unrepentant church of Thyatira, which had gone into spiritual "fornication" (idolatry and saint-worship), was to be cast into the Great Tribulation unless, the Lord said, she repented.

2. To the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10 Jesus said, "Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will **keep you from the hour of temptation** which is coming to try them who dwell upon the earth." The Rapture can happen at *any moment* - and it's exciting to realize that as a Christian you may never finish reading this article! After the close of the messages to the churches, Revelation 4:1 begins and ends with the Greek phrase meta tauta. "After these things," John said, "behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the

first voice which I heard was a trumpet saying unto me, Come up hither, and I will show you things which must be **after these things** [meta tauta]" (emphasis added).

### *After What "Things"?*

Jesus spoke of Church things in chapters 2 and 3. These must be the things that will take place after the Church is taken out of the earth. I believe that 4:1 of the Book of Revelation, is the place of the Rapture of the Church. That "voice" in heaven and "trumpet" are the same as in I Thessalonians 4:16. With the trump of God and the archangel saying, "Come up hither", we the Church will be gathered together with the Lord in the heavens.

### *What Happens After Revelation 4:1?*

John describes the heavenly scene in chapter 4. In chapter 5 he saw the scroll with seven seals in the right hand of Him Who is sitting upon the throne. An angel proclaimed with a loud voice. "Who is worthy to open the scroll, and to loose its seals?" John began to sob convulsively, because no one in heaven or earth nor under the earth was found worthy to even look upon the scroll (Revelation 5:2-4).

Then one of the elders said, "Weep not, behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." John turned and saw Jesus as a Lamb that had been slain, "and He came forth and He took the scroll out of the right hand of Him Who sat upon the throne." Immediately, they brought forth the "vials full of odors

which are the prayers of saints. And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and people, and tongue, and nation; and made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign with Him upon the earth" (Revelation 5:5-10). Notice the song that is being sung.

### *Who Can Sing That Song?*

It's not the song of Israel and the covenant relationship with God. People from all the families of the earth, not just one family of Abraham, are singing. It's a people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Only the Church can sing that song.

In Revelation 5:11 after Jesus takes the scroll, John said that innumerable multitudes, "ten thousand times ten thousands" worship the Lamb, declaring His worthiness to receive the honor, and the authority, and the glory. In Revelation 6 Jesus proceeds to loose the seals of the scrolls. With the very first seal there comes forth the white horse rider, "going forth conquering, and to conquer." This, I believe, is the entrance of the Antichrist, because he's followed by wars, death, famine, and desolation. Certainly, the Second Coming of Christ isn't going to be followed by such events, but by the glorious establishment of the Kingdom.

### *Now, Where's The Church?*

Before the Tribulation ever begins the Church is in heaven singing and praising the Lord for His

worthiness to take the scroll and loose the seals. The Tribulation doesn't start until the seven seals begin to be broken.

*Then Why All The Confusion Concerning Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib, And Post-Trib Rapture?*

In Revelation 13:7, reference is made to the beast, "...making war with the saints," and he is given power to overcome them during the middle of the Tribulation period. Jesus in Matthew 24:29-31 said about His Second Coming,

Immediately after the tribulation of those days... they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

By defining "the saints" and "His elect" as being the Church you would have the Church in the Tribulation period. I believe "His elect" is a reference to the nation Israel, if you read it in context.

Christ said, "Pray that your flight be not in the winter, or on the Sabbath day" when fleeing out of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:16-20). How many in the Church expect to be in Jerusalem fleeing when the Antichrist sets up his image within the temple? How many of you would be praying, "O God, don't let it be on the Sabbath day"? The Church doesn't keep the Sabbath day; that's God's covenant relationship with Israel. The fact is that Israel is "His elect." He's going to gather them back into their land for the Kingdom Age at His return.

As Paul said in Romans 11:25-26,

...that blindness in part [has] happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

"The saints" of Revelation 13:7 are also the same. They are God's nation Israel which He has now established again in a priority basis upon the earth during this last seven-year Tribulation period.

The mistake and the confusion regarding the Church's place in the last times arise out of a misunderstanding of God's full prophecies concerning the nation Israel. Israel will be going through the Great Tribulation. This will be the time of Jacob's troubles spoken of in Scripture (Jeremiah 30:7). This will be the time when, as even Jesus said, "You will not see Me henceforth, until you shall say, Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:29). After the Great Tribulation period Israel will be saying, "O, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!" Jesus shall return again with His Church at the Second Coming of Christ.

Zechariah the prophet said, "And one shall say unto him; What are these wounds in your hands? Then He shall answer; Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). Thus, the glorious first recognition of Jesus as Israel's Messiah when He comes the second time with the Church to establish His reign upon the earth.

## *What Should I Do As A Christian?*

In light of the fact that the Lord might come even today, there are certain things we should do. But first, let me tell you what you shouldn't do. Don't quit your job, sell your house, or see how much money you can borrow figuring you won't have to pay it back. Jesus said, "Occupy until I come" (Luke 19:13). He intends for us to go right on in our work.

Jesus said, "Watch" (Matthew 24:42). You should be watching. In Hebrews it says, "And unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time" (Hebrews 9:28). You should be ready. Jesus said, "Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). Amos cried out, "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). You need to prepare. That preparation is in giving your heart and life to Jesus Christ, receiving His forgiveness and the blotting out of your sins and transgressions. And then wait. James said, "Be patient therefore, brethren, to the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman is waiting be also patient, establish your hearts" (James 5:7-8). II Peter 3:3-4 tells us that in the last days there would be scoffers that would come and say, "Where's the promise of His coming?" But "God is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness; but He is faithful to us" (v. 9).

## *The Question At This Point Is, "Are You Ready?"*

Consider the Lord proclaiming today, "This is the end for the church! You have finished your witness. Come home!" Would you be gathered with the church to meet

the Lord in the air, or would you be down here scratching your head wondering what's going on?

How much better to go with the Church than to be left behind to face the Tribulation and all the horror coming upon the earth. Why make it tough for yourself when the Lord wants to make it easy on you? Why not just open your heart and life to Jesus Christ now? Why not just receive Him as your Lord and Saviour and, as He said, be ready. What do you need to be ready? Jesus Christ dwelling in your heart and in your life.

### *What About Those Who Miss?*

At times there may be a hesitancy in our hearts concerning the coming of Jesus Christ because of what will happen to our unsaved family members when He returns.

Once we've been caught up, many of our loved ones, who have been hassled by our witness and upset with our testimony, will realize that they've actually missed the opportunity of being raptured with the Church. As a result, they'll become dead serious with God and will choose to be martyred during the Great Tribulation period by refusing to take the mark of the beast. They will choose death in preference to the mark and, thus, will be saved (Revelation 20:4).

In Revelation 7:9-14, John saw in heaven "a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds clothed with white robes" singing of salvation. The elder said to John, "These are they which came up out of the **great tribulation**, and washed their

robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (emphasis added). In Revelation 6:9-11 under the fifth seal, these souls martyred during the Tribulation period are waiting for their opportunity to enter the heavenly scene. They are told to wait a little longer until the total number be slain as they were slain.

Being a Tribulation saint is a hard way to come. As Jesus said, "For there will be great tribulation..." such as the world never has seen before or ever will see again (Matthew 24:21). Why wait? Why slough off your chances of being in the glorious excitement of being with the Lord when he catches up the Church?



## ***7. Your Life is an Open Book!***

### ***Be An Example***

Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee (I Timothy 4:12-16).

As a Christian, you're a marked person - because you have claimed to be a child of God. People are watching you to find out what a child of God is like. How does he react under pressure? What does he do when the going gets rough? What does he do when there seems to be no way out?

At work, at school, in your neighborhood, people are watching you. They are watching you, because they have problems and they want answers to their problems. Christianity promises an answer. You're a Christian, so they want to see if the answer works.

Whether you want to be or not, you're an example of a believer to those people around you. They're watching you, because they don't know what a believer is all about. They assume that you're what a believer should be.

Being a Christian is a glorious thrill! God has washed away my sins and written my name in the Book of Life. It is also a fantastic responsibility. People are watching me to find out what a Christian looks like, what he acts like, and what he is.

Many people will never read a Bible, but they're going to read your life like a book. They'll be watching every chapter to see what it says. Be thou an example, not to the believers, but of the believers. By the way you're living, people are determining whether or not they want to believe in Jesus Christ. Is your life drawing people to Him, or are they walking away from Him, saying, "Well, I thought maybe Christianity has the answer, but I guess maybe it doesn't."

*What are the areas that people are scrutinizing and studying in you?*

First of all, your words, the things that you say. Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34). Your words reveal what you are, what you're thinking, what is down inside. It's not only what you say but, so many times, how you say it.

How many times have we said things that we'd like to retract immediately? "Oh no! That's not what I meant!" We'd like to say it again in a nicer way, without that cutting harshness with which we spoke. It's not what I say in front of a congregation that counts so much, it's what I say to my family when we're within the four walls of our home, or the things I say when I'm by myself and think no one else is listening.

Another thing people are observing is how you conduct yourself. If you can whistle and be happy when everything is great... so what? A heathen can, too! People aren't watching your conduct so much when things are going good. They're watching your conduct when things are tough. They want to see how you react in adversity. When it seems that everything is pressing in and things are getting very difficult, then can you smile?

You shouldn't be one thing at church and another thing at business. You should conduct your business as a Christian. If you're working for an employer, you should give him a full day's work for the wage that he's paying you. He's watching your conduct. Are you taking a lot of time standing and visiting others on the employer's time? He's making note of it. If you take longer on the coffee breaks and more trips to the washroom than anybody else, it makes a poor witness.

You say: "There's this guy at work. He's so ripe! He's so ready to accept Jesus Christ!" But if you're spending the boss's time witnessing to this guy about the Lord, it isn't right. You may say, "I'm witnessing, you know. That's the big thing." You may be turning him on to the Lord, but you can be sure that you're turning your boss off!

Your boss is thinking, "If that's Christianity, I want nothing to do with it." Be totally diligent in all that you do, as unto the Lord. People are watching and judging Christianity by the way I act and react. I should be as interested in the salvation of my boss and foreman as I

am of the man working next to me. You can reach him at lunch time and after work. When you're employed, be honest in your labor and give an honest day's work for what you're being paid. Don't cheat by sloughing on your job.

If you love those that love you, that's phileo. Anybody can do that. Loving those that hate you, doing good to those that spitefully use you, that's agape. God has given you more than the natural human love. God has given you His kind of love that keeps on loving and doesn't ask for anything in return. Let God's love begin to flow through your life. The world today needs real examples of self-sacrificing love, willing to give without asking for a return.

What kind of spirit do you possess? A spirit of heaviness, fear, suspicion or murmuring, grumbling and complaining? Be thou an example of the spirit of Joy! That's what the Christian has - love, a spirit of confidence, and trust. It's sad that some Christians have a spirit of heaviness about them. They're either complaining and murmuring like the children of Israel, despairing, or walking around with a defeated attitude. Then they say: "Oh, you need to accept Jesus, brother. You need to get what I've got. Man, you've got the plague!

The world isn't looking for sorrow. They have enough sorrow. They have enough trouble. The world is looking for answers. They're looking for joy, peace, and confidence. As a believer in Jesus Christ and trusting in my Lord, I have great confidence that the Lord will

work out every situation. I have great joy. I'm a child of God. I have great peace. Be thou an example of the believer, for people are watching what kind of spirit you possess.

How much real faith do you possess? How long must the headache persist till you quit praying about it and reach for the aspirin bottle? How long does it take to wear out your faith? How much does it take to destroy your confidence in God? How much does it take until you're convinced that God has forgotten you and doesn't care anymore, and you go back into the slough of despondency and despair?

"Tried to start the car this morning. The battery's dead. I don't think God loves me anymore! God doesn't care about me. I'm not going to serve Him anymore." It's amazing how little it takes to knock the pins out from under a person!

Alexander the Great, an ardent admirer of Diogenes, had read his philosophies and was captivated by them. Diogenes was content to sit on a wash pail. That's all he possessed, but he was happy. Alexander possessed the world, but he was miserable.

One day Alexander the Great finally met Diogenes in person. Alexander was so excited that he said, "Diogenes, you're my master. I'm your disciple. I'll follow you all my life!" Diogenes took two fish, handed them to Alexander and said, "Carry these around in your pocket for two weeks." Alexander was incensed over the idea. "What do you mean! Smell like a fish for two weeks? Never!" Diogenes shook his head and said,

"What a shame. Such devotion destroyed by two smelly fish."

Sometimes we say: "O God, I'll love You forever! I'll serve Thee, Lord. Wherever, whatever, anything! Lord, I'm Your disciple. I'll follow Thee!" The Lord gives us some little task, and we say, "Oh no, Lord. I'll never do that." The Lord shakes His head and says: "What a shame. Such devotion destroyed over a dead battery."

Have confidence in God. Know that God is going to work it out. Even though it's so black that there's no way out as far as you can see, absolutely hopeless as far as you can determine, have faith in God.

We're living in a polluted world. We're all aware of it and we hate it. Pollution is detestable. No one likes to look up into smog-filled skies. No one likes to see a polluted, clogged stream. We love pure air and pure water. But so many times we love a polluted mind. I'm convinced that man can survive the polluted air and the polluted water. It's the polluted mind that will destroy mankind.

You're living in a world in which the majority of the minds of men are polluted. You're living in a world today, in a society, in which anything goes. We've been taught that the mores determine what is right and what is wrong, because there's no absolute determination, no universal law of truth. Everything is relative to the society and to the mores. If the majority of the people are doing something, then it's no longer wrong - now it's right. You're being pressured because the mores of

our society are polluted. Yet you're to be an example of the believer in purity.

I don't care whether the rest of the university is cohabiting together in their co-ed dorms, experimenting with premarital sex, or whatever - be thou an example of the believer in purity. That's what God desires of you. The Bible says, "Keep thyself pure" (I Timothy 5:22). Keep your life pure, keep your body pure, keep your mind pure - for God! It doesn't matter whether the rest of the class has fallen into the quicksand of immoral rot and decay. "But the pressure is so heavy! The flesh is so weak. The opportunities are great and the temptations are multitude. I don't know if I can keep myself pure." The answer is that you probably can't. But I know One who can keep you.

The secret of being an example is to pay attention to and be diligent in the reading of the Word. Through the reading of the Scriptures you become strong, and not by any other way. One of our problems in Christianity today is looking for strength in areas outside the Word of God. You can never be strong apart from the Word of God. Experiences cannot make you strong in the Lord. Experiences don't help your spiritual maturity and growth.

We often have such confusion because of our spiritual experiences. We see persons who have fantastic experiences. They have tremendous power. It seems they lay hands on the sick and the sick are healed. They're constantly telling us of their experiences of discernment or God speaking to them or seeing

healings. They are all experience-oriented. Then we watch these people who have had such fantastic experiences, and then fall at a trial. Now our faith is shaken. We say, "Oh! I don't know They were so strong." They weren't necessarily strong. Experience is no criterion for spiritual strength. You don't grow strong by experiences. You're made strong through the Word of God. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you" (I John 2:14).

Your life is strengthened through the Word of God. You won't find strength apart from the Word of God, for it is the food that feeds the spiritual man. Spiritual anemia or weakness can always be traced back to the lack of knowledge and study of God's Word. Too many people are trying to grow on experience. You can't grow on experience. You can only grow on the Word of God. It provides the solid, substantial growth that you need. Get your foundation. "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word." Get rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Become strong in the Word of God!

These are the benefits you will gain from the Scriptures: exhortation and doctrine. This is what the Word of God actually is.

What is doctrine? Doctrine is correct belief. It will tell you what is the true and correct way. And Scripture does more - it encourages you to walk in the truth and in the way. Within the Scriptures is the encouragement to go ahead and do the right thing.



Each of us has been given a special talent, ability or ministry. When you first came to the Lord - that first, fresh blossom of God's love in your life - you used to go around singing all the time. You used to make up songs of love to the Lord. It was so glorious! It even seemed that God gave you a gift of singing and praising the Lord in song. What's happened? Why aren't you singing anymore?

"Well, they've never asked me to sing at Sunday morning service." But are you singing unto the Lord or unto man? You should sing to the Lord. It doesn't make any difference if man is listening or not. I'm not singing unto man, I'm singing unto the Lord. The beautiful thing is that the Lord appreciates it. Sometimes I sing for man; he doesn't appreciate it. But when I sing to the Lord, oh, it's so beautiful! I love singing to the Lord. Isn't that what the Scripture says? Sing unto the Lord a new song (Psalm 33:3). "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).

When you're singing unto the Lord before man, man will be blessed by it, too. When you're singing unto man just to entertain, that's a sad trip. "I want men to know how well I can sing. What fancy trills I can put into this number. I want them to know what a great musician I am." Then that's just what they'll get. They'll get the impression of your great musical abilities, but they won't be drawn to worship the Lord at all. Sing unto the Lord and men can identify with it and worship the Lord with you. Then you'll have a true ministry.

"Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). Don't neglect that gift that is in you. Don't neglect that work that God began in your life. Timothy was evidently neglecting it. In the next epistle Paul said, "Stir up the gift of God, which is in you" (II Timothy 1:6). Stir it up! Sometimes we grow a little cold or stale. Start stirring up those things again - those expressions of love and praise unto our Lord.

Through our magazines, newspapers, television, and other media, it has become possible to know a little bit about everything. All of us have become somewhat versed in everything. We know a little bit about nuclear science, medicine, politics, diet - a little bit about everything. In reality, we don't know much about anything. We have become very broad but not very deep. Depth is something that is developed through meditation, and meditation is almost a lost art. How little we really meditate.

One morning the Lord set an alarm clock outside my window that went off before the alarm clock on the dresser. A mockingbird was singing glorious praises unto the Lord. I said, "Oh, mockingbird praise the Lord! Just sing your praises to Him. Awake your morning, mockingbird, and praise God!" Because I had extra time that morning, I could spend some of it in meditation. With the accompaniment of the most beautiful music in the world, I began to think of the greatness, the love, and the goodness of God to me. As I began to think about my life, God's Spirit began to talk to me concerning my life as an example, and those areas where I'm failing and falling short. As the Spirit would

bring them up I'd say, "Lord, strengthen me and help me in that area to be an example for Thee."

As you meditate on God's Word, God's truth, the greatness of God, and the work of God's Spirit within your life, God begins to work within you. You're then enabled to be the example of the believer that He would have you to be. You're to be an example through meditation on His Word - wholly giving yourself over to purity, faith, righteous conduct, clean speech, and the love of God working in you.

Paul describes the results of being an example of the believer: in saving others you will also be saving yourself. This is the truth of God. Mark it carefully.

You cannot minister to other people without God ministering to you also. You cannot give without God giving to you. "With what measure ye give, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2). You cannot help others without God helping you. You cannot seek the blessing of others without God blessing you. So many times while praying for God to heal someone else, God healed me; or to strengthen someone else, God strengthened me; or to comfort someone else, God comforted me. When I'm giving out, I find that God is giving in to me. That is a glorious fact of God!

If you sow sparingly, you'll reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully, you'll reap bountifully. You're going to reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7). That is God's law of nature. You want a huge harvest? Plant a huge crop of seeds. You want a few ears of corn? Drop a few grains of corn into the dirt. It's a law of life. We're so interested

in God ministering to us that we get self-oriented.  
"What's God going to do for me? If I minister to them, I won't have time to take care of my own needs."

One time, there was a man who was lost in a snowstorm. He could only see a few feet in front of him. This man had trudged for hours in the blizzard. Finally, he stumbled and fell down in the snow. He thought, "I'm too tired! I can't lift myself up. I'll just sleep for a few moments. Maybe then I can get going again." And that deadly lethargy started to take hold of him.

But, suddenly, he discovered that the object over which he had stumbled was a body. He began to brush away the snow and found that there was a pulse in the body - he was still alive! "Oh, I've got to help him. I've got to save him !" In a super-human effort the man stood to his feet, put the body over his shoulders, and started to trudge through the blizzard once more. It was just a few yards away that he came to a cabin. He found that he was saved by saving another. This is so often true. In saving others we ourselves are saved, in ministering to others we ourselves receive.

As you're an example of the believers and as you give heed to these things, you'll find that God, in turn, will minister back to you all that is necessary to be what He has called you to be.

If all the Christians were just like you - if they served the Lord as diligently as you serve the Lord, if they loved the Lord as deeply as you love the Lord, if they were as faithful to God as you are faithful to God, if

they would follow your example - what kind of Church would exist today?

How many prayer meetings would be canceled for lack of attendance? How many Bible studies would be set aside? How many missionaries would be called home for lack of support? What kind of Church would it be if you set the example for all the believers of how they should love, how they should serve, how they should give?

## 8. *Questions & Answers*

We're very happy to answer your questions as best we're able. Some of the issues I don't understand and don't have an answer for - but, as much as possible, we're taking your Bible questions and giving you biblical answers.

**Q: What do you think of Christians going dancing, listening to rock 'n' roll music, going to the movies, or watching TV?**

**A:** This is a problem of Christian liberty - just what I can and cannot do as a child of God.

First of all. I don't feel that we can set rules for Christian activities. I believe this is definitely a matter of one's own individual conscience. The Bible says, "Who are you who judges another man's servant? Before his own master he either stands or falls; and God is able to make him to stand" (Romans 14:4).

As a Christian I'm probably one of the most liberated persons in the world! We hear a lot today about human rights, freedom, liberty. But those who aren't Christians really don't know anything at all about liberty, because they're bound by the power of Satan and darkness. They have no true liberty.

As Christians it's glorious to have the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. People look upon Christianity as very restrictive, because churches have made a lot of rules. They have tried to tell you what you can and can't do as a Christian. However, the Bible doesn't make any such listings for us.

Certain Scriptures give us guidelines. In John we read, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. He who has the love of the world in his heart has not the love of the Father" (I John 2:15). Paul the apostle declares, "All things are lawful for me" (I Corinthians 6:12). I don't know of any broader theological or philosophical ethic than that! Paul also declares, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Paul the apostle says. "All things are lawful for me." I think that this goes into the area of skating, disco dancing, or the kind of music I listen to. But just a minute! Paul didn't stop there. Though I have a total freedom and there is no condemnation, Paul said, "all things are not expedient." "Expedient" means to help along the way. The idea is that, as a Christian, I'm running in a race. Paul said, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, and only one receives the prize." (I Corinthians 9:24). There are things that can impede my progress, which can slow me down. They can keep me from winning the race. We are told to lay aside every weight and sin which so easily besets us, that we might run with patience the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1-2). These activities can become weights.

My goal is to be found in Christ Jesus, not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of Christ through faith. I don't want a legal righteousness based upon my obedience to man made rules. My righteousness isn't established by my activities. It is through my faith in Jesus Christ! It's totally incorrect to

say, "Since I don't go to shows and disco, this makes me more righteous." It's not a matter of righteousness, it's just a matter of expedience.

I don't want to depend on any kind of righteousness that I could achieve by my own actions, activities, works, or goodness. The only righteousness with which I can stand before God is that righteousness imparted to me by faith in Jesus Christ.

There are things that impede my walk. Thus, though it might be lawful for me, that is, it wouldn't send me to hell, yet because it would impede my walk, I won't do it. Paul went on to say, "All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (I Corinthians 10:23). There are some things that have a tendency to tear me down and draw me away from Christ, rather than to build me up in Jesus Christ. My desire is to be built up in Christ and to draw close to Him.

Though an activity may be lawful for me and I can prove that it's not wrong yet, by the same token, it doesn't build me up in Christ. If it takes me away from Jesus, then I want nothing to do with it.

Finally Paul said, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." I have glorious liberty in Christ. I have been set free from the power of my flesh, which ruled over me for so long. If I go right back into something that brings me under its power, then I'm no longer free.

So, enjoying my freedom as I do, I won't exercise my freedom in such a way as to bring myself into bondage.



However, if I exercise my freedom in that way, I'm actually destroying the very freedom I enjoy, because now my mind is under the control or influence of, say, alcohol. In exercising my freedom to drink I may become an alcoholic, and I'm no longer free. If my mind comes under the control of the alcohol so that I don't respond or react as I normally would, then I'm no longer free. I love my freedom so much that I won't allow my mind to be brought under the power of any influence other than God's glorious Holy Spirit. I don't think that, as Christians, we can draw the fine line between what is right and what is wrong. The whole issue is, "What is pleasing to the Father?" I want to do all things that are pleasing to Him. So, I measure my activities by how they affect my relationship to God, my Christian walk and, finally, my Christian witness.

**Q: Is it wrong for women to wear pantsuits?**

**A:** Let me say, I think it's wrong for some women I have seen to wear pantsuits! However, I don't know of any Scripture that would prohibit women from wearing pantsuits. There is a Scripture that speaks against women wearing men's apparel (Deuteronomy 22:5). But I surely wouldn't wear one of those pantsuits and, thus I don't call it men's apparel. I think they're designed for women. In some cases and in some activities, a pantsuit can be much more modest than a dress. I really have no problem with women wearing pantsuits. I don't think you can make a scriptural case against women wearing pantsuits.

**Q: I have a friend who is a Seventh-Day Adventist. He says that God will reject me for not going to church on Saturday. What does the Bible say?**

**A:** I'm glad the Bible doesn't say what your friend says. In Romans 14:5 Paul said that one man esteems one day above another while another man esteems every day alike. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Your friend esteems one day above another, and he esteems Saturday to be the day to worship the Lord as the holy day. As far as my own personal feelings are concerned, I esteem every day alike, because every day to me is a holy day to worship the Lord. It is something I don't have any problem with, because I just love the Lord and worship Him continually.

When the Sabbath day law was given in the Book of Exodus, God declared that it was to be a perpetual covenant between Him and the nation Israel. "It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever" (Exodus 31:17). Nothing is ever said concerning observance of the Sabbath day by Gentiles.

As recorded in Acts, the early Church elders met together to write to the Gentiles in regards to keeping the Law. Peter said, "Why should we put on them a yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). There were certain "Judaizers" from the church in Jerusalem who went to the Gentile fellowship in Antioch. They told those at Antioch that unless they kept the Law of Moses and were circumcised, they couldn't be saved.

The Seventh-Day Adventists are much like these Judaizers who were creating problems in the church in Antioch. But the elders in Jerusalem only told the Gentile believers that they shouldn't eat anything strangled and to keep themselves from fornication. If they would do this, they did well. The elders didn't try to place the Gentile believers under the Sabbath day law at all!

Paul tells us in Colossians 2 that Christ blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against us. This, of course, is in reference to the Sabbath day law and all the other such ordinances. Jesus took them out of the way. He nailed them to His cross. He made an open display of His victory over them, triumphing over them in the cross. Because of this, Paul said, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come" (Colossians 2:16,17).

These things were all just shadows in the Old Testament of that which was to come, which was Jesus Christ. The Sabbath day was a shadow of the rest we as the children of God would experience in Christ. We have the substance, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the shadows that spoke of the substance have no hold on us. I'm not required to keep the Sabbath day law any longer.

If I seek righteousness by the keeping of the Sabbath day, then it would be important that I keep the Sabbath day completely. The law declares that I'm not to kindle

any fire on the Sabbath. Therefore, I should turn down the thermostat in the house, because, if I allow the furnace to go on, I'm kindling a fire. I shouldn't start my car, because I'm kindling a fire in the combustion chambers the moment I turn on the engine. Thus, I couldn't drive anywhere. I would have to limit my walking to two-thirds of a mile. I would have to keep all of these little regulations!

In the Talmud, the Jews sought to determine what constituted bearing a burden on the Sabbath day. According to their final interpretation, if you wore false teeth you were bearing a burden. So, you couldn't wear your false teeth on the Sabbath!

I'm glad that I have this glorious liberty in Christ, and I don't have to worry about those kind of things. Jesus Christ has set me free from these ordinances of the law. My righteousness is now through faith in Him. Because of my faith in Christ. God will accept me, even as He accepted Abraham long before the law was ever given. Abraham believed God, and it was his faith that was imputed to him for righteousness. God accepts me on the basis of my faith, not on the basis of the day that I worship Him. Thank God for that!

**Q: Would you have any suggestions for someone with a non-degree business background who sincerely desires to teach God's Word?**

**A:** Yes, I surely would. Study the Word of God! Really get into it. Then, open up your home and start a home Bible study. Take a particular book, say the Book of Philippians. If you want to write to me, I'll be glad to

give you a list of some excellent commentaries on the various books of the Bible. You could also get our commentary tapes on the book you choose to teach. Then, just start teaching!

The best way to learn is to teach. Paul the apostle may have had some degree in the Hebrew school, but he certainly never attended seminary. Peter, James, John and the rest of the disciples, never attended a formal college. Yet, they all became teachers. God's ordination is never of man. That which qualifies you is the desire God has placed upon your heart. If you really have the desire to teach, go for it!

The main point is to prepare yourself. God uses prepared vessels. So, prepare yourself in the Word. It may be that you need to prepare yourself in a school. Some people do, because they don't have enough gumption to be self-starters. Others are self-starters. I don't know whether a school is going to do that much for you. Paul the apostle went out to the desert after his conversion and for three years was taught by the Holy Spirit in Arabia. I know of no better schooling than just waiting upon the Lord, getting some good commentaries, and studying. Certainly, God can use you!

**Q: Is a person who commits suicide totally lost for eternity?**

**A:** Definitely not! I believe that a person who is driven to the point of committing suicide no longer has full responsibility for the things he's doing. Driven to a point of such mental extremes, he isn't necessarily

responsible for the action of taking his own life. Certainly, Scripture doesn't indicate anywhere that this is an unpardonable sin. The only sin for which there is no forgiveness is that of rejecting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

**Q: You mentioned that the Antichrist will be blind in one eye and paralyzed in one arm. Where does the Bible say that?**

**A:** In the Book of Zechariah the prophet is dealing with the true shepherd and with the false shepherd. Jesus Christ, of course, is the true shepherd who was coming. Then Zechariah talks about the false shepherd that would arise.

In Zechariah 11:15-17 he wrote, "And the Lord said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd; For, lo, I will raise a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that are cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth his flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and his right eye: his arm shall be shriveled up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." This is a prophecy referring to the Antichrist about his right arm being paralyzed and his right eye blinded. Revelation 13:3 also speaks of His miraculous healing from a deadly wound on His head.

**Q: John 1:12 says, "To them gave He power to become the sons of God, even those who believe on his name." Does this refer to those who believe in Jesus**

**but haven't received the fullness of the Spirit? If so, will they have a different position in the coming Kingdom?**

**A:** The first chapter of John introduces Jesus Christ, declaring that He is God come in the flesh. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us... He came to his own, and his own received him not." "His own" refers to the Jewish people. Jesus came to the Jews, but they rejected Him as their Messiah.

So, as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to those that believe in His name. This is a reference to anyone, Jew or Gentile, who believes in Jesus Christ. Such a person has been given the "power" (the word here means "authority") to become the son of God. The question of having received the fullness of the Spirit doesn't have anything to do with our relationship to God in heaven. I believe that if we have received Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we have received the Spirit. It's up to us to yield ourselves fully to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Every born-again child of God has the Holy Spirit in his life. God desires that our cup overflows, that we might experience the beautiful overflowing of the Holy Spirit.

As for our place in the coming Kingdom, I feel that there will definitely be degrees of position and rewards in heaven. This is certainly brought out by Jesus Christ. We should be concerned with our rewards in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). In reality, these will be predicated upon our faithful stewardship with the things that God has entrusted to us in this life. Have I been a faithful

steward of those things that God has placed in my hands?

Certainly, the fullness of the Spirit in my life helps me to be a faithful witness for God. I need the power and the fullness of the Spirit, but it's just to help me and assist me in my walk here on Earth. It really has nothing to do, as far as I understand, with our rewards in heaven.

**Q: When an animal dies, does its soul simply go out of existence?**

**A:** The Bible doesn't tell us anything about the future of an animal's soul. Since the soul is the consciousness, it definitely appears that the consciousness of an animal ceases to exist when it dies. So, I'm of the opinion that its life completely ceases at death. However, the Scripture is totally silent on this particular subject. Thus, there's no way to answer the question, except in the form of conjecture and opinion.

Let me tell you one thing. My opinion isn't worth very much at all on any subject. It is what God has to say that's important. There are certain questions that, if I cannot answer from the Scriptures, I'd rather not give an answer at all. It's only then my opinion on a subject, and that's of practically no value.

**Q: Is there anything in the Bible that explains the possible existence of unidentified flying objects? Could alien beings have anything to do with the end times prophecies?**



**A:** Many people who believe in flying saucers often point to the vision in Ezekiel chapter 1. The prophet saw the wheel within the wheel, heard the noise of the wheels, etc. Was Ezekiel sighting a flying saucer?

It's important to note that when Ezekiel described his vision, he was actually describing cherubim (Ezekiel 10), angelic beings that worship around the throne of God. These cherubim are a class of angelic beings. The prophet was describing what cherubim looked like, how they moved, and their sounds.

At the time Satan rebelled against God, he himself was one of the cherubim. We are told that he was the anointed cherub that covereth (Ezekiel 28:14). He had been in Eden, the Garden of God. When he fell, Satan took a third part of the angelic beings with him (Revelation 12:4,9). These fallen angels allied themselves with Satan in his rebellion against God.

So, since Satan was a cherub, perhaps other cherubim went with him in his revolt. It's quite possible that the sighting of these supposed flying saucers, with their movements and lights, are actually evil spirits, cherubim or other spirit beings controlled by Satan. Thus, UFOs could come from the realm of the spirit world, and people may actually be seeing the spirit world of fallen angels, who have the appearance of a wheel within a wheel, making whirring sounds, etc.

Outside of this reference, I don't know of any Scripture that would confirm the fact that alien beings have anything to do with the end times prophecies. However, with the increasing reports of UFO activity, it

may be one of the explanations offered to those who remain on the earth after the rapture of the sudden disappearance of millions of people.

**Q: In John 15:6 it appears that anyone who doesn't produce fruit will be cast "into the fire." But I Corinthians 3:15 says that a person whose works are burned up will be saved "as by fire." I'm confused. Is there any difference between the fruit and the works? How does this relate to salvation?**

**A:** In John's Gospel, Jesus was talking about the necessity of abiding in Him. If you don't abide in Him, you cannot be saved, and you cannot bear fruit. Such people who don't bear fruit will be gathered and burned, because they're not saved. The passage in I Corinthians talks about the works I do as a child of God with the wrong motivation. I may be motivated with the desire to glorify myself or receive praise from men. Such works performed by a Christian will be burned up, though he will be saved, even as by fire.

**Q: I want so much to open my heart to Jesus, to walk with Him and live by His Word, but I've been sinning all my life. Even though I love God, I still sin a lot. Does God still love me? Does He forgive people who aren't good Christians? How can I feel He's always with me and still loves me when I sin so much?**

**A:** You can only feel it as you believe His promise to you: God's love is unconditional. God doesn't love good children and hate bad children. God loves good and bad children alike! You need to realize that glorious grace God has extended toward you and

receive His love and grace - even though you realize more and more how totally undeserving you are of that love. I have discovered that accepting grace gracefully is very difficult, but I'm slowly learning how to do it.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:8-9). What is the sin for which a man will be condemned? It's the rejection of Jesus Christ. I have accepted Him. I still may be weak and fail, but at the base of my life is a love and desire for Jesus Christ. That's what He counts for my righteousness - my faith in Him!

**Q: Is there any doctrine or scriptural proof that would support being slain in the Spirit?**

**A:** Using the Bible as our final authority for all faith and practice, we would have to confess that the Bible lacks any solid, scriptural evidence for this experience of being slain in the Spirit. Those who advocate this experience seek to point out that Daniel fell on his face before the Lord when the angel of the Lord appeared to him.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked the soldiers, "Whom seek ye?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." He said, "I am He." after which the soldiers fell over backward. Some people refer to that as being slain in the Spirit. Then, they refer to Paul the apostle on the road to Damascus. But none of these cases are anything like the experience that people today refer to as being slain in the Spirit.

We don't read of Jesus laying hands on people and of them being slain in the Spirit. Nor do we find any teaching on it in the Book of Acts or in the epistles. Thus, I reject it as an unscriptural experience.

Is it of God? I don't know. There is one Scripture I find on the subject. It is in the Old Testament (II Kings 19:35). One night the angel of the Lord went through the camp of the Assyrians. In the morning, the Assyrians were all laying around dead. The angel of the Lord had smitten them that night. The Scripture says, "And the slain of the Lord were many." They were literally slain by the Spirit!

It is an experience, and there are those who would seek to create a doctrine on the basis of the experience. I run from such things. I really want no part of something for which I cannot give solid scriptural evidence.

## *9. Unto Us a Son is Given*

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Isaiah is looking at two aspects of the birth of Christ. First of all, he sees the human side. Isaiah declared, "For unto us a child is born." It must be recognized that the child who was born, and about whom Isaiah prophesied, was unlike any other child ever born. For this child had no human father. Isaiah had predicted this in the seventh chapter. "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The name Immanuel means "God with us."

The child who was born was the fulfillment of God's promise to man in the Garden of Eden. God had said that the woman's seed - intimating the virgin birth - would bruise the head, or authority, of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). This child was to destroy the power and authority of Satan in our lives and to bring us victory over the power of darkness.

This child who was born was unlike any child ever born. So many facets of His life were predicted in the Scriptures. Where He was to be born, the circumstances

around His birth, the events in His early childhood and in His ministry, etc. These events were predicted in more than 300 prophecies of the Old Testament. This child who was born was heralded by the angels. At the time of His birth there were in the same country shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said,

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:10-11,13-14).

This child who was born was destined for greatness. For we read in Isaiah's prophecy, "And the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." The power of God was to rest upon this child. He was to rule over the world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But this child who was born was also destined for suffering. Isaiah wrote, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:... he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3).

His suffering was also spoken of by Simeon the priest, the aged man who had a glorious secret of God within his heart. God had spoken to him and said, "You will not die until you see the Messiah." As Mary and Joseph brought this child to the temple to offer sacrifices for the first-born, to redeem him and to present him to the Lord, Simeon was brought to them by the Spirit. He took the child into his arms and lifted him up to heaven. He cried, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,...for mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29).

Then Simeon prophesied concerning the child. "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. And he shall be a light to the Gentiles." And then speaking directly to Mary, Simeon said, "And a sword shall also pierce through your own soul" - referring to the pain Mary would experience when she saw her child hanging on a cross, mocked, despised, and rejected by men.

The child was born to die upon a cross. When Pilate talked to Him, Jesus said, "To this end was I born, that I might be the King." Daniel prophesied that He would be cut off without receiving the kingdom (Daniel 9:26).

How can we reconcile a child destined for greatness and also destined for suffering? Destined to reign forever, yet destined to be cut off without receiving the kingdom? It is reconciled in the fact that this child who was born in Bethlehem is coming back again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Jesus said, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven:... and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). As Jesus left Earth from the Mount of Olives, the disciples saw the clouds receive Him until He went out of their sight. The men in white apparel said, "Men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner" (Acts 1:11). He is coming again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to establish it in judgment and justice from henceforth even forever. That portion of Isaiah's prophecy shall be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Unto us a child is born - destined to suffer, and yet destined to reign forever. That's looking at the birth of Jesus from the human side.

Looking at the birth of Jesus from the divine side, the prophet declared, "Unto us a son is given." This child who was born was, in reality, a Son who was given. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

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*God gave His Son, so that the Son might reveal to us  
the truth about the Father.*

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Man's concepts of God had become so totally garbled and confused that man no longer knew the truth about God. Just read the ideas about God in the Greek and Roman mythologies. You'll see how man lost all sense of truth about God. Even the nation Israel, the people God had revealed Himself to in the clearest fashion was confused about God. The teachers, scribes, and Pharisees, who pretended to know more about God than anybody else, were constantly rebuked by Jesus, because they taught the wrong things about God. They gave the people a totally wrong concept of God. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Luke 11:44). They completely misrepresented God to the people, and so the people didn't know or understand Him.

A Son was given to us to reveal the Father, so that we might know the Father in truth. The people had been taught to think of God as some cruel and vengeful judge ready and anxious to destroy them. In reality, He was a heartbroken Father, grieving because His children were lost

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*The essential truth that Jesus taught about God was that God has an undying love for you.*

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God wants to display and demonstrate all of His love to you in the fullest and richest way. "God is love" (I John 4:8).

### *The Purpose of the Son*

A Son is given so that He might teach us the truth about God and His love for us. A Son is given so that we might again have fellowship with God, that we might come back to God's first and original intent for man.

When God created man, His purpose was that man might enjoy constant and beautiful fellowship with Him. So, God placed man in the Garden of Eden. The Bible speaks about God coming into the Garden and walking with man, communing and talking with him. God's intent for man was fulfilled as Adam walked in fellowship with God.

But we read that Adam disobeyed and that sin entered the world. Adam's fellowship with God was broken as the result of sin. This is always the effect of sin. For Isaiah tells us that God's hand is not short that He cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that He cannot hear. But your sins have separated you from your God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Sin always separates a man from God.

A Son is given to bring us back into fellowship with God. In order to do that, He must take care of the sin problem. We read that God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God through Him (II Corinthians 5:21). "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have

turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Jesus came to us. He was given by God to remove from us the sin which had destroyed our fellowship with God, and to restore us to fellowship with God.

John wrote, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (I John 1:1-4).

If you say that you have fellowship with God and you're walking in darkness, you're lying. You don't know the truth. But if you walk in the light as He is in the light, then you have fellowship with God - and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, is continually cleansing you from all sin. Unto us a Son is given to bring us into fellowship with God by continually cleansing us from all sin, thus keeping us in continual fellowship with God.

A Son is given that He might be the Savior of the world. The whole world is lost in the darkness of sin, but the light of the world is Jesus. Paul said that the Gentiles were without God and without hope in the world. But

unto us a Son is given who might lead us from that darkness into the light of God, that through Him we might experience the love of God. He is that true light that lights every man who comes into the world.

### *The Reactions to the Son*

What was the world's reaction to this child who was born, this Son who was given? Jesus always evoked sharp emotional responses from people. They either hated Him or loved Him. Some people said, "We will not have Him rule over us!" They hated the light that He brought, because the light revealed the truth about themselves. The light revealed the fraud and sham of their own existence. They wouldn't come to that light, and they nailed the Son to the cross. As he hung on the cross, they mocked, jeered, and taunted Him. He was despised and rejected.

There was another crowd at the cross. It was much smaller. These people were weeping and sobbing, because they loved the Son, and He was suffering. They had submitted their lives to Him, to serve Him and to live for Him with everything they had.

There is a sharp contrast between the two reactions to the child who was born and the Son who was given.

Though 2,000 years have now passed, and man has supposedly made great strides in his cultural and social development, we find that these same two emotional responses are still evoked by Jesus Christ. Today, people either love Him or hate Him. Some people still become violent in their reactions to Him. If they could

they'd crucify Him again. They're still crying out, "We will not have Him to rule over us!" They would like to get rid of Christ and the influence of Christianity in the world today. For they love their darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil.

On the other hand, some have rejoiced in that light and have found glorious fellowship with God. They walk in the light, thanking God that they know and have fellowship with Him once again.

One of the saddest Scriptures in the Bible is found in the first chapter of John's Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3). Look around. Everything you see was made by Him. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (v. 4,9). And this is the Scripture that has such pathos and sorrow: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (v. 10).

Jesus was walking around, looking at all the life forms that He had created. He understood completely the genetic codes within the cells long before men stumbled onto these truths. But men had become so alienated from God in their minds and consciousness that when God walked among them they didn't recognize Him. The world "knew him not. He came unto his own [the Jewish people], and his own received

him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:10b-12).

Unto us a Son is given... to bring us into fellowship with God by taking away our sins and dying in our place. He thus became the light of the world and the hope of mankind.

Today, you are in one of two groups: those who have a right to celebrate Christmas, and those who through their celebration of Christmas are guilty of the greatest hypocrisy. If you have received the Christ of Christmas, then the joy and peace of fellowship with God is yours. For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. Have you received this, the greatest gift of all?

## *10. Where Are You?*

Genesis is the book of beginnings. The word "Genesis" means beginning. And thus, we have the beginning of the universe. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Then we have the beginning of life forms, and the beginning of man. When we come to man, we find that he is vastly different than the other life forms God created. With the other life forms, God spoke and they existed. But God formed man out of the dust of the earth, so that man actually became God's handiwork. God may speak other creatures into existence, but there was a special molding and shaping of man by God, as He formed him after His likeness and in His image.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

There is a touch of God upon every man, even today. A definite distinction exists between the body that God formed out of the earth and the life that God imparted into that body, for man is really spirit. The spirit was formed when God breathed into that body the breath of life. The body is the dwelling place, the house, where the spirit of man lives. Created in the likeness of God, man was created with the capacity for fellowship with God.

There is something beautiful about the story in Genesis 3:8-9 where we read, "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day"

(Genesis 3:8). God came down to commune with His creation. What a beautiful picture! But what a tragic picture as we continue to read,

And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God... And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (v. 9).

Why would Adam hide from the presence of God? It was neurotic behavior, because Adam possessed a guilty conscience. How futile for Adam to try to hide himself from the presence of God!

The psalmist David understood the futility of trying to hide from God.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7-10).

I can't escape from the presence of God. Yet whenever I feel guilty, a neurotic behavior pattern makes me think that I can hide my guilt from God.

Many people don't go to church simply because they have a guilty conscience. They figure that if they stay away from church they can hide from the presence of God, as though God dwelt in the church, as if you could just close your doors and pull the shades on God!

Paul the apostle said, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Job 12:10 says, "In



whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."

You might say the only way you can escape from God is to stop breathing, but even then you don't escape from Him. You'll enter into a clearer consciousness of His presence at that moment of death. There's no escaping from God! It's crazy to think that you can.

Psychologists today tell us that most neurotic behavior patterns stem from a guilt complex. It began with Adam. He felt a consciousness of his guilt, so he tried to hide from the presence of God. What caused the guilt complex? Adam disobeyed the command of God.

Looking at the overall story, God gave Adam the commandment for his own good and welfare. God knew the poison that was in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam was deceived into thinking that God was somehow trying to hold him back from a pleasant experience, that God didn't quite understand his real needs. Adam thought that by disobeying he could find a quality of life that God was withholding from him. But in reality, God knew what He was talking about. After Adam ate of that tree, he couldn't reverse his action. He couldn't go back and be innocent. To his dismay, he discovered that God was right all along!

There are men today who, like Adam, are deceived about the law of God. They look upon God's law as being very restrictive. "God's trying to hold back something good from me. He's trying to keep me from being happy." Men today are still willing to violate the

law of God, thinking that they know better than God the needs of their own lives. But then they discover that once they've violated the law of God, it's irreversible - they can't go back and undo what they've done. They realize that God was right all the time. But now they have that sense of guilt, and they try to avoid God. Worse than that, they've lost fellowship or contact with God, and their lives become dead, empty, and purposeless.

God's purpose in coming into the Garden of Eden was to restore fellowship. When God came into the Garden, Adam hid himself. God cried, "Where are you?" That wasn't the call of an arresting officer, but the heartbroken cry of a loving father whose child had gone astray.

It's wrong to assume that man doesn't know the truth about himself. Deep down inside, each of us is aware of where we are. We spend much of our lives trying to conceal the truth we know about ourselves. We'd be embarrassed if other people knew what we know about ourselves. So, we create an image for others to behold; we want them to admire us, look up to us, think well of us. We do our best to cleverly disguise the truth we know about ourselves. Sometimes we're so clever in our own deceptions that we actually deceive ourselves.

The Bible speaks about those who have deceived themselves, and the truth is not in them (I John 2:4). We actually begin to think, "Did God really say that? Well, God doesn't really care. Surely I can violate His laws, and it won't have any effect upon me. Surely I can

escape the judgment of God." Man begins to deceive himself. But deep down inside he's not fooled.

Deep down inside we hear the spirit of God crying out, "Where are you?" We try so hard to hide the truth, but the truth will win out. And though we may be successful in hiding the truth from other men, we cannot hide it from ourselves. The truth has its own way of working itself out - either in some form of emotional disturbance or in neurotic behavior patterns.

The Bible says, "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). To think that I'm hiding from God is sheer folly. So, when God's cry comes to me today "Where are you?" There are just two places I can be. I'm either in fellowship with Him, or I'm out of fellowship with Him.

God wants you to have full, rich fellowship with Him, because He knows the benefits that are yours by fellowshiping with Him. He wants you to share in his life and His glory. Instead of discarding Adam, God came to him and asked, "Where are you?" God doesn't forsake you and say, "Well, he had his chance." God comes to you and says, "Where are you?" - so that you might see yourself and evaluate yourself. As the Scripture said, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged of God" (I Corinthians 11:31). Therefore, let each man examine himself.

"Where are you?" With Adam, his sin had created a breach. It separated him from God. So, we have the beginnings of sin and the beginning of man's alienation

from God. Sin always alienates a man from God. Isaiah the prophet declared,

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated you and your God (Isaiah 59:1-2).

The effect of sin in man's life is always broken fellowship and alienation from God. Since God seeks to restore you, he has made provision for your sins. That which Adam lost in the Garden, that life and fellowship of God, has been restored to you through faith in Jesus Christ.

"Where are you?" You know the answer better than anybody else. But you don't have to remain where you are. You can find forgiveness. God has made possible the reversal of past actions He had made the elimination of past guilt possible. God has made such a total provision for forgiveness that the past is removed as though it never existed - in order that you might know the glory, blessing, and joy of fellowship with God.

"Adam, where are you?" Where are you today? Are you walking in harmony and in fellowship with God, or do you find yourself alienated from that life of God?

A life that is out of fellowship with God is out of harmony with its own nature, because God has created you for fellowship. There is a natural restlessness in that man who's apart from God. The Bible says,

The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked (Isaiah 57:20-21).

Yet, rest for your soul is exactly what Jesus has promised for you, if you would come to Him. He said,

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30).

Your mind is troubled by your life and the world around you. The turmoil that you see in our society has created the inner turmoil. "What's it all coming to? What should I do? How can I escape all these problems?"

There is a place of refuge, a place of strength, a place of fellowship with God. Though the worlds are moved around me, though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea, I need not fear - because God is with me, His presence, His power, His love. He will protect, guide, and sustain me.

Are you walking in fellowship with God today, or are you trying to hide from God? If you're trying to hide from God, it's sheer folly! You're doomed to failure. You'll never hide from Him. Better that you open up your life and heart to God, and find the forgiveness of your sins and the restoring of fellowship with Him, for you and your family's sake.

## *11. Return to Your First Love*

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Revelation 2:4-5).

The final messages of Jesus to His church are found in Revelation, chapters two and three, as Jesus addresses Himself to the seven churches of Asia. Over and over as He addressed Himself to the things within the Church, He exhorts, "He who hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." Perhaps some of the most important things for the Church to know and to understand today are these messages of Jesus to his Church.

### *Works*

As we look at the church in Ephesus, we find that it had a lot of things going for it. Jesus, first of all, speaks of its works and labors. It was a church of bustling activity. A lot of works in the name of the Lord were being wrought in Ephesus.

Ephesus was, no doubt, a well organized, well functioning church. They probably had their witness teams, visitation teams, pulpit committees, church growth committees - and all of them were functioning well. The Ephesians were a model of organization and structure, but they had one big problem. Though they

possessed a well-ordered machinery, God never wanted machines to do His work.

God never wants your work for Him to be mechanical. If God had wanted machines to do his work, he would have created machines to do his work. If God wanted your service to be mechanical, he would have created robots, and they could have done a better job than you're doing. God isn't interested in mechanical responses. God is interested in a loving response from your heart and from your life.

### *Patience*

The second characteristic of the church of Ephesus was its patience. Now, throughout the New Testament the churches had been exhorted towards patience, waiting upon the Lord to accomplish His work and to fulfill His promise.

Patience is certainly a desired virtue. How I wish I had more of it! How often I am impatient with the things of God. He isn't working quite as rapidly as I'd like Him to work, so I get in and try to help Him out, always with disastrous consequences.

Throughout the New Testament the Church was exhorted towards patience in waiting for the coming of the Lord. I wish the Lord would come soon. I look around, and I have to confess I'm excited; because I realize that the things happening in the world today could very well trigger the whole end times finale. The worldwide economic system is becoming computerized. ID numbers will be tattooed on your

wrist. Iran is falling apart and has taken an anti-Israel stand. The Soviet Union seems to be gearing up for a big move in the Middle East, with its takeover of Afghanistan. The whole thing is coming together!

I get impatient waiting for the Lord. "Lord, this is a great opportunity to return. You've got the whole thing lined up. Why don't You go for it?" And yet, the Lord has His perfect timing. James 5:7 says,

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until the early and latter rain.

There is yet a harvest to be reaped for the Kingdom of God. He is waiting for it. All I need is patience, as He waits for His complete harvest. I often get so impatient with some of the stubborn-headed people who are holding things up. I wish you'd get it on, so the Lord would get things over with!

### *Purging*

The church of Ephesus had patience, an admirable quality. Not only that, the church wouldn't tolerate evil persons. The Lord said of the church, "how that you cannot bear those that are evil."

One of the great weaknesses of the church today is that the church so often will tolerate evil people just because they're wealthy. Churches are often seeking to win the favor of the rich, and they'll sometimes tolerate evil people who are rich, or they'll allow the evil ones to become part of the fellowship because they're famous.



But there is always a weakening whenever evil or evil persons are tolerated within the Church.

When a church body becomes so weak that it can no longer purge itself of the poisons in its system, that body will soon die. The Church always needs to be strong. It needs to be able to purge the evil from its system, lest it die. The church of Ephesus had that quality. There was a certain purity there. They wouldn't tolerate those who were evil.

### *Discernment*

Finally, on the plus side, the Ephesians had a discerning spirit. The church could pick out those men who came along claiming apostleship, but were not apostles. The Ephesians wouldn't allow pretenders in the pulpit. John Todd would never have had a chance in Ephesus. (See Christianity Today, Feb. 2, 1979, for expose on Todd). He'd never have gotten in the pulpit there, because the church had a discerning spirit.

### *Love*

In spite of all of the good and positive aspects of the church, one negative aspect was so great that it nullified all the positives. The Lord said, "Nevertheless, in spite of all these positive factors, I have this against you - because you have left your first love."

You see, it is quite possible for a church to continue with all the motions, but be lacking in the chief emotion of the Christian experience. We must be careful, because the Lord is far more interested in what motivates our activity than in the activity itself.

Jesus tells us to take heed to ourselves, examine ourselves, and be careful when we do our righteous deeds so that the motive isn't to be seen by men, to be a people-pleaser.

So often in our service for God we're concerned about what people might think of us. Sometimes we're motivated by the desire for people to know how talented we are. I'll sing for the Lord or play an instrument for the Lord, so that people will see how talented or how sweet and good I really am. I want people to think well of me. I'll do certain things for God, so people will think that I'm just a fine fellow.

Our motivations are often people-oriented rather than God-oriented. I should be far more concerned about what God thinks of what I do, rather than what people think of the things that I do.

Jesus gave us a good test in the Sermon on the Mount: What do I do when nobody's looking? Do I only pray when people are watching? Do I only give when it can be observed by others? If my motives are right, I'll be praying in secret and giving in secret. I'll be doing things for God without fanfare or bringing any attention to myself. I'll be serving the Lord just as easily and readily when nobody knows and nobody sees, because my motivation now is God-oriented. As Paul spoke of his own prayer life, "God bears me witness."

God wants only one motivating force in your life, and that is love. If you cannot and do not serve God because you love Him, then don't serve Him. If you don't give to God because you love Him, then don't give. The last

time the plate went by you, you may have thought, "I don't want the people in the pew to think I am a skinflint. So, I'll put something in." If that was your attitude, then for God's sake get your money back, because God doesn't want anything done for Him except out of the love of your heart for God. Whatever you do - whatever you give of service, time, or goods - if you aren't giving out of a heart filled with love, then don't give it at all. God doesn't want it. In fact, it's an insult to God.

Any time you go around moaning about what you've given up for God, what you've given to God, or what you're sacrificing for God, then you're insulting God. And he says, "Keep it! I don't want it!" He doesn't want you going around complaining about what He requires or demands of you. If you can't do it with a heart of love, it's much better that you don't do it at all, because you'll find yourself in the place of Ephesus. You'll be doing all kinds of work for God, but you won't have the right emotion. You'll be going on in works, but God won't recognize them. God doesn't even want them.

Paul the apostle said, "For the love of Christ constraineth us" (II Corinthians 5:14). If your works don't come with God's constraining love in your heart, then surely you shouldn't be doing what you're doing, even if you're doing it in the name of Jesus. Anyone doing anything for the Lord must examine the motives of his own heart. "Why am I doing this?"

Paul said, "If we will judge ourselves, then we will not be judged of God." We're told that in the day of

judgment "our works are going to be tried by fire, to see what sort they are." What motivated me to do it? Unless the motivation was my love for Jesus, then the works that I've done will be burned. No credit, no reward.

This issue is so important that Jesus told the church that unless there were some immediate changes in Ephesus, he would come quickly and move the candlestick out of its place.

Now, what was the place of the candlestick?

These things saith He who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (Revelation 2:1).

The candlestick was in the presence of Jesus. Jesus is saying that though a church may do all kinds of works, may have great patience, may purge itself of evil, and be able to discern the false apostles - if they're not motivated by love, Jesus said, "I'm leaving."

The Lord isn't interested in all the hustle and bustle and activity of a church. He's interested in the love that comes forth. Only those works and gifts that are prompted by my love for Him will He accept at all. You may find many churches today with all kinds of social activities and concerns, worshipping in elaborate buildings with glorious choirs, and presenting tremendous lectures. But when you look around you won't see Jesus, except as He is depicted in the stained glass windows. The Lord has long departed their fellowship, and the people are worshipping in a tomb-

cold, dead, religious forms, lacking the vitality of the love and life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "Unless you turn, I'll leave. I'll not stay around, unless the love is there." God doesn't want anything from you apart from love. Love has to be the underlying motivating factor of whatever I do for God. Jesus first wants me to give Him my love. Whatever else comes must come as a result and in response to the love that I have. Otherwise there is no value to it whatsoever.

### *Remember*

The call of Jesus to His church was first of all to remember from whence they had fallen. Remember the first love that you had for the Lord? Remember those days when you first found Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour and realized that your sins had been washed away? Oh, how excited you were! You wanted to go out to the beach, out in the streets, everywhere to tell everybody about the love of Jesus. You were ready for any kind of a sacrifice and challenge, because the love of Christ was burning in your heart and soul. Jesus said, "Remember from whence thou art fallen" (Revelation 2:5).

It's always a tragic and telltale sign of spiritual decay if you can remember a time in your life when you were closer to the Lord than you are today. It means that you're on the spiritual decline.

### *Repent*

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent" (Revelation 2:5). To repent means to turn. Turn away from your cold indifference, mechanical responses, dead works, and let your love for Him again fill your heart to overflowing. Fall in love with Jesus all over again!

He said, "Do the first works." Remember, repent, repeat. Go back to that first love, back to those first works prompted by love, back to that reckless and careless abandon for Jesus Christ. It doesn't make any difference what they say. It doesn't make any difference what it costs. Ah, just the opportunity to serve the Lord - and my love for Him burning within, driving me, pushing me into those sacrifices and labors of love.

Unless the love took first place in Ephesus, the Lord said, "I'm leaving." You may stick around in a loveless church, but He won't. He wants your love more than anything else. If you can't give Him that, don't give Him anything.

Maybe it's time to say, "O God, I'm sorry!" Repent! Turn and offer yourself again to serve the Lord. Maybe the serving you've been doing has become old, stale routine. There's no life and joy in it anymore.

If your excitement and joy of serving the Lord has left, it's time to repent, time to go back to zero and start over. Return to your first love, that first excitement of relationship, that first overwhelming love and desire for Him. And may the things that you do for the Lord be prompted by a heart that is overflowing with love!



## *12. God's Plan for the Ages*

The Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). At some time after the initial creation, God created the angels who were assigned to various ranks. Some angels had higher positions than others, but all were under one government in the universe, the government of God.

### *Satan's Rebellion*

At some time deep in the past before God created the earth for man's existence, one of the high angels - called Lucifer, Satan, Dragon, Devil, Serpent - rebelled against the authority of God. Isaiah records this rebellion, which was an attempt by a created being to exalt himself above the Creator.

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Satan's claim was, "I will, I will, I will." This exercise of his will against God's will was the rebellion in the kingdom of God.

For an unknown number of years until this point, beautiful harmony existed in the universe. Now another government came into being, as Satan led a rebellion against this order of God and created within the universe a sub-government with himself in control. His is a government of death and darkness, against God's government of light and life.



## *Man*

The Book of Genesis declares,

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, but the earth became wasted and desolate; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved [brooded] over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:1-2).

In Genesis 1, God began His recreative acts, creating the earth and adapting it for man. When God had the earth ready, He "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7).

When God created man and placed him upon the earth, He created him with his spirit uppermost. Man was spirit, soul, and body. Basically a spiritual being, man was created in fellowship with God within the government of light and life.

## *Real Love*

Had He so desired, God could have created robots. He could have created each one of us with a built-in mechanism that would automatically respond to certain impulses from God. God could project a particular impulse through the universe that would hit my brain, my arms would automatically go up, and I'd say, "I love You! Praise Your name!" Then my hands would go down.

However, could God really get love from an automatic response like that? How much love do you feel when

you pull the string on a little toy doll that says, "I love you"? You know it's just an automatic response from a recorded message. You can't get much love from a mechanical object. You want a love from a freely-given response - and then the love is meaningful.

In order to have full fellowship with man and to receive real love from him, God created us as free moral agents. This means that man can do just what he pleases. No one is forcing him into a particular mold or response. Man is free to react and respond to God as he chooses.

### *Environmental Conditioning*

God created man, placed him on the earth, and surrounded him with every benefit and gift that would make for a happy, joyful life. God gave Adam a world full of pure water, clear skies, and abundant food. There was nothing around that would harm him.

A current philosophy claims that man's problems are due to his environment. All we have to do is improve a man's environment, and he can be changed from a slob into a prince. Improving the environment won't work with a pig. Change a pig's environment and what will he do? He'll be miserable until he gets back into the pigpen that he enjoys. Sociologically we can change a man's environment, but what happens? He's miserable until he gets back into the environment that he's used to.

By nature I'm a sinner. Change my environment by putting me around spiritual people and I'm miserable. "How long is that preacher going to talk? It's

uncomfortable in this place! Why did I ever come here?" When the sinner gets around the moving of the Spirit, he becomes so unhappy. He's in a beautiful environment, but what does it do for him? It makes him nervous, upset, and fidgety!

Man's environment isn't his problem. Man's problem is his heart. That's where his sin lies. Man doesn't need a change of environment. He needs a change of heart. This can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God.

### *Perfect Environment*

Man was placed in the Garden of Eden in a perfect environment. He didn't have to work. God said, "There it is, Adam! It's all yours. Enjoy it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the fields, and every living thing. I've made you the ruler. Be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth."

God also said,

Adam, in this garden there is a tree that you're not to touch. You're not to eat of that tree. For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:17b).

The death process will set in.

We know that Adam messed up the whole thing, and God's curse came upon man and the earth. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis 3:18a-19a). We know the result of man's failure in the Garden.

One day I was guiding a group of kids around Mt. Lemmon near Tucson. We had hiked up to the mining shaft and explored it. As we were hiking back down, one of the kids screamed out. He had brushed by an Ochoa cactus, commonly called the "jumping cactus," and it really clamped onto his wrist. I took a couple of sticks, carefully got them under the thorns of the cactus, and flipped the thing off his hand. As I was working to get the sticks underneath the thorns, this little kid was doing his best not to cry. He moaned, "That darn guy Adam!" I said, "You've had some good Bible teaching. You know where the thorns come from!"

Why did God put the forbidden tree in the Garden?  
Why didn't He just make a perfect environment  
without a tree to tempt man?

### *Man and Woman*

When God created man, He recognized that man by himself was incomplete. God said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18a). God created the woman so that in her man might find fulfillment. There is the beautiful completeness that comes in marriage and is ordained by God. One day, after he had rebelled against God and created the government of death and darkness, Satan came to the woman who was in the Garden of God.

And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall

not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die"  
(Genesis 3:13).

Satan replied, "Oh, you surely won't die! Don't you realize that God is afraid that you might eat of that tree. He knows that when you do, you'll be as smart as He is. He's trying to protect Himself! You'll be amazed at how good the fruit of that tree is! Why don't you give it a try? It'll blow your mind" (Genesis 3:4-5).

### *Two Questions*

Two questions: First, why did God put the tree there?  
Second, why did God leave Satan free?

The Bible says that ultimately a mighty angel will come from heaven, take a chain, bind Satan, and cast him into the abyss for a thousand years. After that Satan will be loosed for a little while and then he'll be cast into Gehenna, where he'll be out of commission forever (Revelation 20).

Since God will ultimately put Satan out of commission, since God has the power to bind Satan and bottle him up, why did God leave Satan loose in the beginning? Why didn't He bottle up Satan from the start, so we wouldn't have all these problems and troubles?

How beautiful it would be if there was no Devil! The world and the flesh could be very beautiful if Satan wasn't perverting it. The world is God's beautiful creation. "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:25c). But Satan came along and twisted, turned, and perverted it. We see our fallen world and fallen flesh today. Why did God allow Satan such freedom?

## *The Test of Love*

Why did God place the tree there? What did God want from man?

God wanted our love and fellowship. How could God know that we really loved Him and wanted to obey Him, if an alternative wasn't given? If there was no possible way to disobey or rebel against God, how could He know that we truly did love Him? How could God know how much we loved Him unless there was someone to exploit the alternative?

## *The Fall*

God has allowed man to be free. "You're free to enjoy the whole thing, Adam!" Satan comes along to exploit it. Imagine the joy God would have received if Eve had said, "Beat it, Satan! I wouldn't think of eating that. I'm going to obey God!" God would have surrounded Adam and Eve with His great love and showered it on them. Unfortunately, Eve believed the lie of the Devil. She was deceived, she ate, and all of a sudden her eyes were opened. She said, "Wow! Adam, give this a try!"

But Adam wasn't deceived. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he decided to join his wife. So he ate, and his eyes were opened. All of a sudden Adam and Eve realized right and wrong, the knowledge of good and evil. Up to this point all they had known was good, obedience, and the love of God. But they had obeyed the suggestion of Satan, and now they knew disobedience, evil, and hate.

By taking of the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve acted in a double manner. They disobeyed God, but by the same act they obeyed Satan. They transferred their allegiance from God to Satan, from this government of God to this sub-government of death and darkness ruled by Satan.

### *No Return*

There was no way to scramble back. God had said, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17b). God's Word had to be fulfilled. God was bound to put them to death for their sin. He allowed the death processes to set in upon man, the breakdown within the cell structure known as the aging process. Man now lives under the government of death and darkness. He's alienated from God and finds himself with no way back.

### *Hope in the Darkness*

God could have obliterated His entire experiment when Adam disobeyed, but He didn't give up on man. God would show His supreme love to man and bring him forgiveness. God would take upon Himself a body of flesh, live among men, take the guilt and responsibility of man's disobedience upon Himself, and die for it. Man's sin would be punished.

### *A New Nation*

To accomplish His plan of hope, God needed a race of people through which His Son would be born. One day God spoke to a man in Babylon and said, "Abraham, I want you to leave this land of your fathers and go to a land that I will show you. I'll make you the father of a

great nation, and out of your seed the Messiah, the Savior of the world, will come."

God guided this nation by sending it prophets who revealed God's plan more and more fully. They told where the Messiah would be born, the circumstances that would surround His birth, the miracles that would be accomplished, and the things He would do. In fact, the prophets foretold the very day that the Messiah would come to the nation.

Through the prophets God prepared this nation to look for their promised Savior. "When the fullness of the time was come" (Galatians 4:4), in God's perfect timing in the city of Bethlehem, there was born to a virgin a son. By instruction from the angel, the son was called Jehovah-Shuah, "God is salvation," for He was to save His people from their sins.

[God] was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

John wrote,

That which was from the beginning [with God], which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (I John 1:1).

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became



obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.  
Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him  
(Philippians 2:6-9a).

So Jesus, Jehovah-Shuah, came as God promised. The prophet had declared,

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him [Jesus Christ] the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

### *The Open Door*

Man exercised his own free choice in turning his life over to Satan and leaving the government of God. When Jesus Christ took the guilt of man's sin and died in his place, He opened the door so man could now leave this government of darkness and death and come back into God's government of light and life.

Even as man exercised his free choice to leave God's government for this other government, so must man exercise his power of free choice to come out of this government and return to God's government. By the tree of knowledge of good and evil man went from God's government to Satan's government. By another tree, the Cross of Christ, man can escape from Satan's control and return to God's government.

Again, it's a matter of free choice. God won't force you to obey him or to serve Him at this point. A day will come when "every knee shall bow and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11) For the present time, God is giving man the opportunity to

exercise his free choice. If he wants to come into the fellowship with God, the way is now made open.

This government of Satan is like a circle. You may say, "I'm a very honest person. I believe in doing the best that I can and in living morally." Great! You're so good that you're at the top of the circle. Doesn't that make you feel good? But friend, you're still in that circle! As long as you're in that circle, you're in no better shape than those at the bottom who are crawling around in the mud.

### *Purpose of Life*

God is giving everyone the opportunity to come into fellowship with Him. This is the purpose of life. Man feels frustrated and empty until he comes again into fellowship with God.

I have an awareness that life should be higher and finer than what I have yet found it to be. I'm reaching out for something. Then I try this, but no, that's not it. So I try something else. And I'm on another desperate trip. I'm looking for something to satisfy my inner thirst to take away this frustration, and give me a sense of "Wow! This is what life is all about!"

But as long as I'm in the circle of death and darkness, there is no way that I can find the full meaning of life.

Why? Because in the beginning God created me for fellowship with Him. There will always be a void in my life until God comes in and fills it. God created me for His purposes, and I'll never be satisfied living for my own purposes.

Through Jesus Christ I can come back into fellowship with God. All I have to do is exercise my free choice and say, "Jesus, I take you as my Lord and Savior." The moment I do, I come through Jesus Christ into glorious fellowship with God, the King of light and life. Once again I can return to the beautiful sense of fulfillment, purpose, and meaning of life, because I'm walking in fellowship with God. This is what God created me for.

### *His Return*

Very soon Jesus Christ will come back to this earth and set up God's kingdom. Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss. For 1,000 years there will be a beautiful experience on the earth, as it is restored to its Eden-like glory and Christ reigns and rules over it. For a short season Satan will be released, but finally he'll be cast into Gehenna, the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Revelation 20:10). Satan will be forever out of the way, and there'll be only one government in the universe, God's government of light and life.

Everything within the universe will be in harmony and fellowship with God. God started out "in the beginning" with one government. It's going to end one day again with one government, all in obedience and subjection to God. The question is, "Where will you be at that time?" The answer lies with you.

If you choose the government of death and darkness, of rebellion against God's authority and Word, then that's where you'll be. The Bible says that Satan and all who follow him will be cast into the lake burning with "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"

(Matthew 25:41b; Revelation 20:10,15). The lake of fire wasn't prepared for man. It was prepared for a rebellious Satan. However, those who have chosen Satan's government and revel with him will be thrown into that place of outer darkness.

You have a free choice. God won't force you to love Him, serve Him, or come into His kingdom. That would be violating the whole principle of free choice. God wouldn't know whether you really did love Him. The only way God can know that you want to serve Him and love Him is by your voluntarily accepting Jesus Christ and choosing to come into His fellowship.

You're the one who decides your destiny. You can never blame God for what will happen to you or to any man. God has given us all a free choice. If you so desire, you can know His fellowship and His life. God has opened the way for you to have eternal life, but it's up to you to make your choice. What will it be?

*May the Lord bless you and may His love fill your heart and life to overflowing. What a joy and blessing for us to share with you God's Word and God's love!*