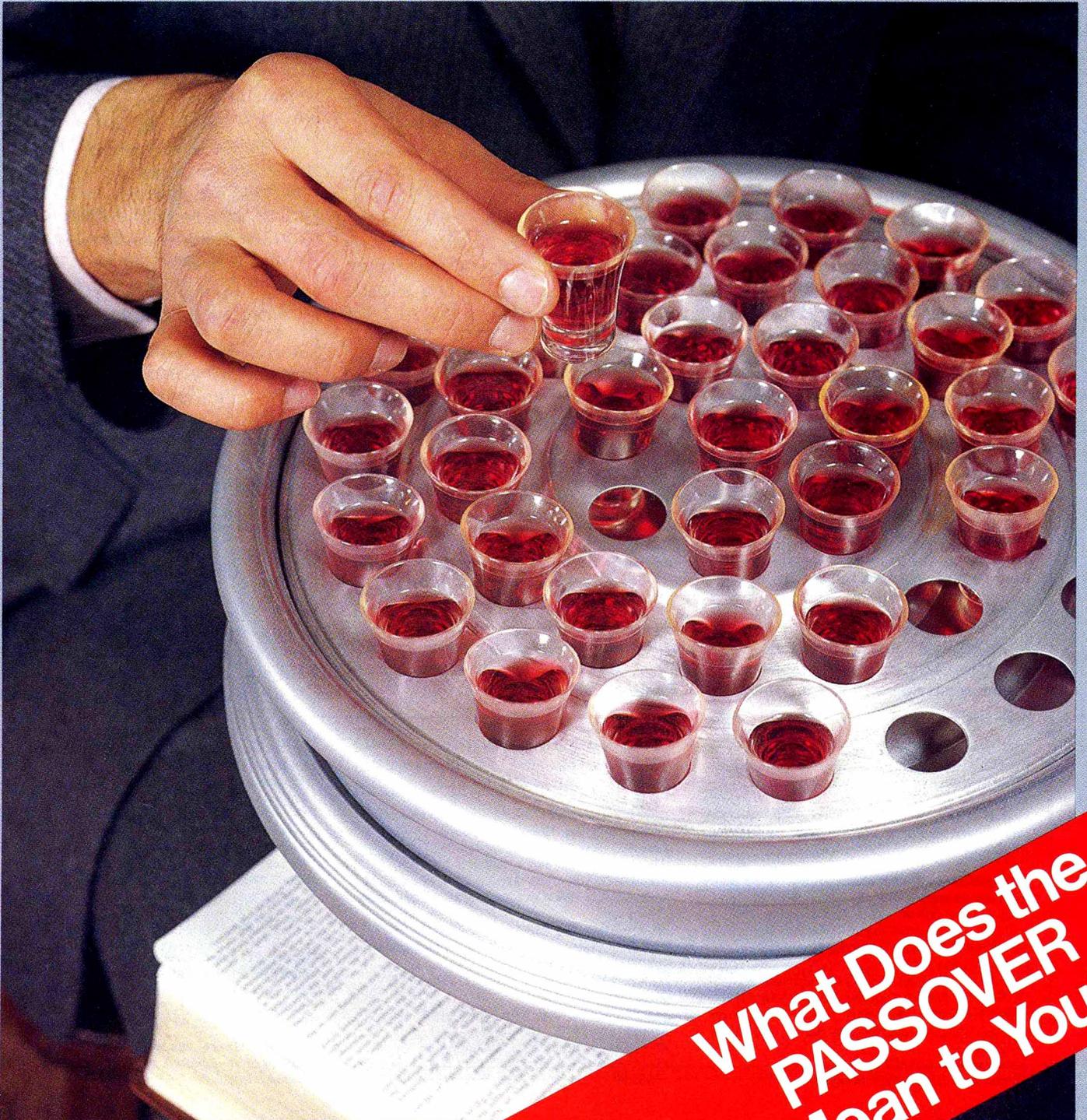


MARCH 1984

The Good News

OF THE WORLD TOMORROW



What Does the
PASSOVER
Mean to You?

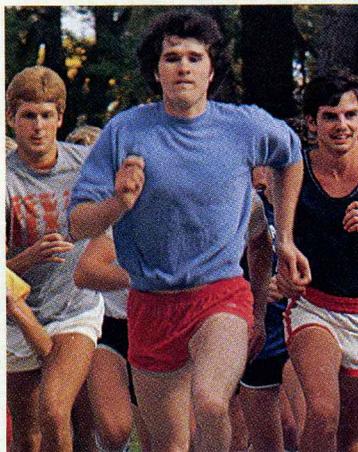
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**What Happens
If I Ask
for a Visit?
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COVER: Wine is a key symbol associated with the Passover, an annual reminder of the Christian's covenant with God. Wine pictures Jesus Christ's blood, shed for the remission of our sins. See page 3. Photo by G.A. Belluche Jr.

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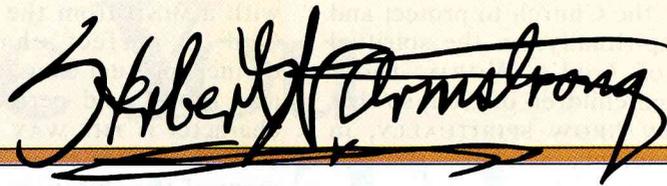
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Some of the teachings in the Bible are a little hard for the average thinking mind to understand.

James tells us to count it all joy when trials, ordeals, reverses, beset us (Jas. 1:2). *Troubles* a JOY? That's pretty hard to accept, isn't it? And, for the average person, a lot harder to put into practice.

Few find any pleasure, let alone JOY, in the obstacles and troubles they encounter. Yet this biblical teaching says we ought so to count them. There is a *reason*, although few understand it.

In one of the Psalms you'll read that the righteous are going to have to bear *many* afflictions. But, it promises, the Eternal will deliver us out of them all — *if* we believe and trust Him (Ps. 34:19)!

Again, it is through *much tribulation* that we must enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). WHY? There's a reason!

Now consider another biblical teaching hard for some to understand. We publish a booklet, available to the public at no charge, entitled *What Do You Mean — Born Again?* In the fifth chapter of Ephesians you find a husband-wife relationship pictured as corresponding to Christ and the Church. Scriptural teaching assures us that, at His coming, Christ is going to *marry* the Church.

Also, the Scriptures teach that the Church will, at His coming, be *born* of God, by a resurrection of all who have died, and the instantaneous conversion from mortal to immortal of those then living (I Cor. 15:50-53).

So one man reasons: Could a full-grown MAN marry an infant

girl baby, just born? If those in the Church are to be just then *born* of God, how can they marry Christ before they grow up?

This, too, seems difficult for some to comprehend. Yet the answer to James' teaching — the UNDERSTANDING of what James really means — is also the answer to this seeming inconsistency.

There is a third seeming inconsistency, hard for some to understand. I have previously explained how, contrary to the thinking of many, a Christian may — and too often does — actually commit sin *after* he is converted. He *should not*, of course. But too often he does, and yet he still remains a Christian.

The true explanation of James' teaching, first mentioned above, is also the explanation of this experience.

So let's understand!

WHY were we born, in the first place? What is the real PURPOSE of human life? God Almighty the Creator is reproducing Himself! As truly as we mortal humans have been given power to reproduce ourselves — to bring forth progeny in our own image, born with our very nature — even so the great God is bringing forth sons in *His* image, born with His very divine nature!

The very PURPOSE of our existence is that we be begotten as God's children, and ultimately become BORN of Him. And human reproduction is the very type of spiritual reproduction.

What God created at the time described in the first chapter of Genesis was a *physical* creation. You'll find nothing spiritual there. In physical man, made of the dust of the ground, God created the MATERIAL *with which* He may mold, shape, form and create the *spiritual* being. He pictures us as the clay, Himself as

the potter — forming us into the spiritual image of *His* designing.

Now human reproduction, I say again, pictures spiritual reproduction.

Each human, since Adam and Eve, started from a tiny egg, called an ovum, the size of a pin-point. It was produced in the body of the mother. The egg is *incomplete*, of itself. It has a life of only about 48 hours, according to some authorities. Unless fertilized by the life-giving sperm cell from the human father within that limited lifetime, it dies.

Each human, spiritually speaking, is like an egg. The average human lifetime is said to be 70 years. Adam was created *incomplete*, and each of us was BORN INCOMPLETE — that is, we were made to *need* the Holy Spirit of God. And unless, within our limited life span of some 70 years, we are begotten of God by His Spirit, which is His IMMORTAL, DIVINE LIFE, entering to impart eternal life to us, we shall die and that shall be the end, except that God has appointed a resurrection of all who have lived and, for those who reject His gift of eternal life, the final second death in the lake of fire.

But, in the case of the human ovum, once fertilized as a begotten human, the egg — now called an embryo — is kept within the body of the mother, and is nourished and fed material food through her and protected by her. And there it must grow, being fed physically through the mother, large enough to be born. After a number of weeks, the embryo is called a fetus, and at birth it is a human baby.

In like manner, the Bible calls the CHURCH the "mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). That is, the mother of Christians — those begotten of God. It is the func-

tion of the Church to protect and feed, spiritually, on the spiritual food of God's WORD, those begotten children of God, so that we may GROW SPIRITUALLY, in the divine character, ready to be born.

Surely this is a wonderful comparison. Yet types and antitypes are not always alike in every detail.

When a physical baby is born, it is not ready for marriage. When the spiritual child of God is *born*, he will be fully mature for the spiritual marriage. How can this be? This is what one thinking man could not see.

The unborn human fetus is only growing *physically*. At birth, the human baby knows nothing. He is helpless. He must be taught. He must learn. He is born merely with a mind *capable* of learning, knowing, thinking. He is not yet of mature size physically *or* mentally.

Many do marry who are still entirely immature spiritually and/or emotionally. But we do assume that one has reasonable maturity physically and mentally before marriage. In the human, this development takes place in the human state *after* the human birth.

Therefore, the human baby is not ready for marriage at birth.

But the spirit-born are different! Just as the fertilized ovum — the embryo that becomes the fetus — must grow *physically* from material food, so the Spirit-begotten child of God must grow *spiritually* before he can be born. *But there is a difference!*

The fetus does not attain to complete physical *maturity* before birth, and has no mental maturity. But, in the spiritual rebirth, one must attain reasonable spiritual maturity *before* he is spirit-born.

Now what *is* spiritual growth? Just as the physical embryo-fetus must *grow* physically large enough to be BORN, so the Spirit-begotten Christian must grow *spiritually* or he will never be *born* of God. But spiritual growth is CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

The Spirit-begotten starts out

with a MIND from the beginning. God *is* perfect character — divine, spiritual character. God is also LOVE. And perfect spiritual character is THE WAY of LOVE!

Such character is the attainment of the ability, in a separate, independent entity of free moral agency to be able to discern right from wrong — the true values from the false — truth from error — the right way from the wrong, and then to make the right CHOICE or DECISION, even against self-desire, impulse or temptation, plus the WILL and self-discipline to resist the wrong and to DO the right.

No human, with human nature, has the power — alone by himself — to do this. But God has made the spiritual power and help man lacks *available*. Man must desire to *know* — must hunger and thirst for truth; man must make his own decision, exercise his own will, even against the pulls of his nature. But without the help of God — without spiritual POWER from God — man is utterly unable.

That is why truly converted Christians sometimes actually *do sin*. They are like the apostle Paul, as he describes himself in Romans 7. With his mind he *wanted* to go the way of God's law, yet he found himself unable. Another law — human nature — warred within him against the good resolutions of his mind.

But the sequel to Romans 7 is Romans 8 — the Holy Spirit chapter. WHO, Paul cried out, could save him from this body of death he struggled against in vain? The answer is God, through His Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:24-25).

A true Christian doesn't want to sin — should not. But sometimes he finds himself caught in the vise of habit, or overwhelmed by temptation or by circumstances from which he is unable to free himself.

Surely, had such a one been *continually* praying, keeping himself *close to God* and detached from the world or its lures or the temptations of the flesh, he probably would have had sufficient divine help to have pre-

vented the sinning. But *only Jesus Christ* ever did keep that close to God!

God looks on the heart. In such a case, the Christian does not sin maliciously, with malice aforethought. He is merely caught in the vortex of a temptation that sucks him helplessly down into the sin. Then he is terribly sorry. He is disgusted with himself. He repents. He goes to work to overcome. He may not succeed, due to human weakness, at once. But he remains determined and finally does, with God's help, overcome completely.

Many a true Christian has had such a struggle over a particular human weakness and temptation, and after even several setbacks, finally, through God's power, won the victory and fought his way free.

God looks on the heart. God FORGIVES in such cases. The living Christ, our High Priest, has compassion, is filled with mercy — as long as the attitude is right, the *desire* of the inner man is to conquer the flesh and overcome the temptation and be FREE from it entirely.

In the end, it is GOD who gives the victory. But, in such a struggle, the Christian DEVELOPS CHARACTER.

Now character, I have said many times, is something God does not create automatically. It is *developed*, against the opposing pulls of human nature, with the decisions and wills and struggles of the individual, and through EXPERIENCE.

The development of that CHARACTER is the very PURPOSE of our being alive. Also the development of that character, unlike the purely physical growth of the unborn baby, actually is growing toward SPIRITUAL MATURITY, right now in the *begettal* stage prior to spirit BIRTH — in this present mortal human life.

Notice how the "mother of us all," the Church, is to protect and *feed* those in it, until they reach spiritual MATURITY.

In I Corinthians 12 you'll read how God gives spiritual gifts for
(Continued on page 21)

Are You Worthy to Take the Passover?

What does the Passover mean to you? Do you really know why Jesus had to suffer and die — and what is required of us?

By Allen L. Stout

Paul wrote to Christians: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.

“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (I Cor. 11:26-27).

Paul was writing about the Passover, the annual memorial of the death of Jesus Christ, which God commands His people to observe. How few professing Christians understand!

If you have not been aware of God’s annual festivals, write immediately for our free booklet *Pagan Holidays — or God’s Holy Days — Which?*

Many have not fully comprehended the significance of Paul’s warning. Some, feeling they were not worthy of Jesus’ sacrifice, have not taken the Passover. Others have taken the Passover in a casual or ritualistic manner.

It’s time we all understand!

The Passover is the first of the Christian festivals commanded by



God (Lev. 23:5). It is not to be taken lightly.

Purpose of the Passover

The Passover originally represented the turning point in the separation of Israel, God’s chosen people, from Egypt, which symbolized sin. The blood of the Passover lamb, sprinkled on the doorposts, distinguished those whom God was sparing (Ex. 12:13-14).

The Passover for Christians today is a memorial, an annual reminder or renewal of our spiritual covenant with God. It

reminds us not only of when God called ancient Israel out of Egypt, but, more important, of God calling us today out of sin.

Let’s make the meaning of Passover clear by examining what the Bible says.

What was required to free us from the bondage of sin? God’s sacrifice of His first-born, Jesus — the blood of the Lamb.

Why? Why couldn’t God just forgive our sins without a sacrifice? Why did Jesus have to give up His glory with God, take upon Himself the form of a servant, become a human being and suffer and die for our sins

(Phil. 2:7-8)?

Because there was no other way to save man from the consequence of sin.

God will not compromise His law

God *can do* all things, but God *will not* compromise His law (Matt. 19:26, 5:18).

God’s law is perfect (Ps. 19:7). It would, if kept, produce and maintain a peaceful and happy society. Tragically, no human has kept God’s law perfectly — all have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

The Bible likens sin to leaven

— if sin is not disposed of, it grows and spreads rapidly (I Cor. 5:6). The whole world is suffering under the curse of sin (Gal. 3:10)! Death is the penalty for sin — breaking God's law (Ezek. 18:4, 20, Rom. 6:23).

God will not allow anyone into His holy Family and Kingdom who will compromise His law (Gal. 5:19-21, I Cor. 6:9-10, Rev. 22:14-15).

God's law requires that blood be shed for the remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). Thus blood had to be shed in order that the sins of every human might be forgiven, upon repentance.

The sacrifice of Jesus

The only way God could redeem humanity — all of us! — from the death penalty without compromising His law was to have our penalty paid.

Enter Jesus Christ. Notice what God's Word says:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son . . . through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:8, 10-11).

Our sins had separated us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). We had the death penalty hanging over us. But Jesus' sacrifice paid the death penalty for sin in our stead (Rom. 3:24-25). Does Jesus' death save us, then? Let's see what the Bible tells us.

What is required of us?

What is our responsibility, given Jesus' sacrifice, in God's plan of salvation? Notice Acts 2:38: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus' sacrifice does not redeem us from the death penalty until we have repented of break-

ing God's law, turned from sin and accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master. We must submit to God's government over our lives and begin to live God's way. Then what happens? Notice Romans 8:1:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Jesus actually lives His life in us (verse 10). We strive to follow Jesus' example as revealed in the Bible (I Pet. 2:21). We shall, then, be saved by Jesus Christ's life (Rom. 5:10)!

By obeying God's law with the help of God's Holy Spirit and by submitting to God's government, we actually begin to take on God's very nature. We gradually overcome sin — sin no longer has power over us. We are God's servants rather than the servants of sin (Rom. 6:12-16).

We have embarked upon a new way of life that leads to every blessing and joy for eternity. To turn back from it — to reject God's way and Jesus' sacrifice, which paid our death penalty — brings the death penalty on us again, this time with no chance for redemption (Heb. 10:26-29).

Now what about observing the Passover?

Are you worthy?

God's redeemed people are commanded to observe the Passover annually, in its New Testament symbolism, as a memorial of Jesus' death and to picture what God has done in our lives (Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:14-20, John 13:2-5). And we are to do so in a “worthy” manner, as we have seen from I Corinthians 11:26-27.

What, exactly, does it mean to be worthy?

Paul warned, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup” (I Cor. 11:28).

What is your attitude? John wrote: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that

is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (I John 2:15-17).

As long as we live in this evil, Satan-ruled society, there will be tests and temptations to break God's law. We are tempted through our own lusts (Jas. 1:14) to cheat, to lie in business, to boast, to swear, to gossip, to commit adultery (Matt. 5:28) and to put other things before God.

And we as Christians — yes, as truly called and redeemed Christians — will slip occasionally and sin!

But, as long as we are repentant, striving to overcome sin, God accepts us, applying Jesus' sacrifice (I John 1:9). God continues to lead us. We live under grace (Eph. 2:8).

No one is worthy of Christ's sacrifice, but not to take the Passover is to deny Christ. To take the Passover in a worthy manner, we must repent of our evil desires and ways, come to hate the sin that Jesus had to suffer and die for and set our will not to compromise God's law.

“For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned [judged] with the world” (I Cor. 11:29-32).

Our goal, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 5:48, is to become perfect, as God the Father is perfect. Keeping the Passover and understanding all its pictures, as well as striving to keep all of God's other laws, is vital to attaining that perfection.

So, as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 5:8, “Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”! □



The Crucifixion Was Not on Friday Part Two

Easter Sunday does not commemorate the resurrection! Christ did not die on Good Friday! Here is the astounding truth, rejected by most of Christianity.

How shocking! The vast majority of Christians — theologians, scholars and lay members alike — today reject the only sign Jesus gave to prove He was the Messiah — the Savior of the world!

Jesus plainly stated: “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

There is no way to count more than a day and a half between sunset on Good Friday and Easter Sunday morning. Yet Jesus said He would be dead and buried for three days and three nights.

The plain truth is that the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition is a fable — or else you have no Savior!

Last month we learned that Jesus was indeed dead and buried for three days and three nights just as He said He would be, not a day and a half as most of Christianity today believes.

We discovered that Jesus was actually crucified on Wednesday and died late Wednesday afternoon, and that He was resurrected on Saturday just before sundown.

We also found that it was the so-called apostolic fathers, steeped in tradition, who propagated the Good Friday-Easter Sunday myth.

Only two matters are needed to prove when the crucifixion and the resurrection occurred. One is to determine the dates of the Passover during Christ’s ministry. The other is to determine the year of the crucifixion.

Now to continue with this second installment:

The Hebrew calendar tells when

Here is a chart verified by

Photo by Hal Finch

works on the “Jewish calendar” — actually God’s sacred calendar — absolutely correct according to the computation preserved since the days of Moses!

| Dates | Passover |
|---------|---------------------|
| A.D. 29 | Saturday, April 16 |
| A.D. 30 | Wednesday, April 5 |
| A.D. 31 | Wednesday, April 25 |
| A.D. 32 | Monday, April 14 |
| A.D. 33 | Friday, April 3 |

To place the Passover on a Friday in A.D. 30 is to violate one of the rules of the fixed calendar — that no common year of the sacred calendar may have 356 days. Common years of 12 months may be only 353, 354 or 355 days long, a fact you can verify in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Theologians place the Passover of A.D. 30 on Friday, April 7, 356 days after the Passover of A.D. 29. Count it for yourself! This date is two days late. The Passover in A.D. 30 was only 354 days after that of A.D. 29.

The 14th of the month Nisan could have occurred on Wednesday in A.D. 30, as well as in A.D. 31. Thus, if you want to believe that the crucifixion was in A.D. 30 — which it was not — you would still have to admit that Friday could not be the day of the crucifixion!

For the year A.D. 31 a few references, unacquainted with the rules of the Hebrew calendar, mistakenly give the Passover, Nisan 14, as Monday, March 26. But this is one month too early. The year A.D. 30-31 was intercalary — that is, it had 13 months — thus placing the Passover 30 days later in A.D. 31, and on a Wednesday.

The decree of Artaxerxes

There are several basic dates from which the exact year of Christ’s death may be determined. These dates are so precise that there can be no doubt that the Passover upon which Jesus was crucified occurred on Wednesday, April 25, in A.D. 31.

The first date is the year in which Artaxerxes issued his decree to restore and build Jeru-

salem (Ezra 7). Daniel 9:25-26 records that there would be 69 prophetic weeks till the Messiah would come, after which he would be “cut off” — crucified — “not for Himself” but for the sins of the whole world.

Sixty-nine prophetic weeks equals 483 years (69×7). This decree was first issued by Cyrus, king of Persia, in 538 B.C. It was set aside and reissued by Darius I, king of Persia, and again set aside and reissued by Artaxerxes I.

When we determine the year in which this decree was issued, we can locate the exact year, 483 years later, when Christ, the Messiah, began His ministry.

Records have been found that were written in the very month that Artaxerxes, under whose reign the decree was issued, came to power. The death of Xerxes occurred in late December, 465 B.C., and his son, Artaxerxes, came to the throne in that month.

According to the Persian spring-to-spring reckoning of regnal years, as recently translated business documents clearly show, Artaxerxes’ first year extended from April, 464, to April, 463 B.C. These same documents show that the Jewish autumn-to-autumn mode of reckoning placed the first year of Artaxerxes from September, 464, to September, 463 B.C.

The period of time from the day the new king ascended the throne to the first year of his reign was called his accession year and was regarded as completing the last regnal year of the previous king.

Astronomical tablets containing more than a dozen precise records of eclipses prove that the first year of Artaxerxes, according to the Jewish reckoning, was from 464 to 463 B.C.

The seventh year of Artaxerxes, the year in which he issued his decree (Ezra 7:8), would extend from about September, 458 B.C., to September, 457 B.C.

From the first month to the fifth month of God’s calendar —

from the latter part of March to the latter part of July, 457 B.C. — Ezra journeyed to Judea in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, at which time the decree went forth to build Jerusalem as the capital of the revised Jewish nation.

And just 483 years later would bring us to the autumn of A.D. 27 — the year when the Messiah would appear.

Age of Jesus at His baptism

Jesus, according to Daniel’s prophecy, was anointed the Messiah in A.D. 27, which was 483 years after the decree of Artaxerxes to restore Jerusalem. The next fact that we need to understand is the age of Jesus when He was baptized and entered upon His ministry.

The only historical account of this was written by Luke to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4). In this account it is plainly stated that when Jesus began His ministry He was “about thirty years of age” (Luke 3:23).

Luke did not say, “about 29,” or “about 31.” He records that Jesus was “about thirty” — and he meant it, for he was an inspired historian. Either this record is true or you might as well discard the Bible.

As Jesus was about 30 years old in the autumn of A.D. 27, then He must have been born in the autumn of 4 B.C.

The death of Herod

The time of Jesus’ birth is important. Jesus was born before the death of Herod the king (Matt. 2:15). When did Herod die? Again the critics are in confusion because they refuse to weigh all the facts.

According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, Herod died, “having reigned, since he had procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven” (*Antiquities*, XVII, viii, 1).

The two dates for the beginning of Herod’s reign are not disputed, but given as 37 B.C. and 40 B.C. respectively. Reckoning

as Josephus does, the last year of Herod's reign extended from about April, 4 B.C., to April, 3 B.C.

Josephus, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII, vi, 4, mentions an eclipse of the moon before the death of Herod. That eclipse, as calculated, occurred about March 13, 4 B.C. Yet it was some time after this that Herod went beyond the river Jordan to be cured of his diseases. Finding that the physicians couldn't cure him, he still revived sufficiently to return to Jericho. There, he gathered together and contrived the death of the principal men of the entire Jewish nation. And as if this were not enough, Herod had his son Antipater killed five days before his own death.

Since these and other events occurred after the eclipse mentioned by Josephus, and since Herod died prior to a Passover, according to Josephus, that Passover must have been 13 months after the eclipse and not one month later. The traditional date on the Hebrew calendar for the death of Herod places it late in the year 4-3 B.C., the only date that agrees with all the known facts of history.

As Jesus was about 30 years old in the early autumn of A.D. 27, then He must have been born in the early autumn of 4 B.C., shortly before the death of Herod.

Clearly, Jesus could not have been born before this time, or He would have been more than 30 years old at the beginning of His ministry. Neither could He have been born later in 2 B.C., as some assume, for He would have been only 28 years old at the beginning of His ministry. But Luke plainly said that He was about 30 years of age.

When did the wise men arrive?

But what are we going to do with the statement recorded in Matthew 2:16 that just before his death Herod had all the children in Bethlehem killed "from two years old and under"? This would

appear to indicate that Jesus may have been born one year earlier than He really was born.

Most people carelessly read this account by assuming that Herod knew the date of Jesus' birth. They assume he had the children killed because Jesus must have been between 1 and 2 years old.

Think for a moment how illogical this would be. Would a murderer like Herod wait for at least one whole year after the wise men left before attempting to kill the child Jesus? Of course not.

The truth is that Herod did not know the time of Jesus' birth. Notice what the Scripture states: As soon as Herod saw that the wise men didn't return to him he became very angry, ordering all those little children butchered "from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men" (Matt. 2:16).

Now what was the exact time that he learned from the wise men? Was it the date of Jesus' birth? No! Notice verse 7 of this same chapter: "Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared."

Of course!

The wise men or magi had come a great distance from the east. The star had appeared around the time of the conception by Mary of Jesus, in order for them to prepare to make their journey to Bethlehem while he was still very young.

Since the star appeared about one year previously, Herod took no chances, but had every infant killed up to 2 years of age.

Jesus was a few weeks old at the time of Herod's death. The latest possible date for the birth of Jesus was the autumn of 4 B.C., before winter arrived (Luke 2:8). This places the commencement of the ministry of Christ 30 years later in the autumn of the year 27.

The reign of Emperor Tiberius

One of the most vital keys to

the chronology of Christ's ministry — and yet one of the most universally misunderstood dates — is the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Luke tells us that John the Baptist began to preach in his 15th year (Luke 3:1).

When was this 15th year?

The trouble arises because it has been assumed there were several possible dates from which the reign of Tiberius Caesar was counted. Tiberius indeed was made coruler with Augustus Caesar at the very end of A.D. 11 or the beginning of A.D. 12. The exact month is not known, but it is not essential anyway, as the emperor did not count his official years from his joint rule with Augustus.

Tiberius reckoned his reign from his sole rule in August, A.D. 14. Tiberius' 15th year commenced Oct. 1, A.D. 27.

In the Near East, where Luke lived, the first year of Tiberius extended from August to the end of that calendar year — Sept. 30, A.D. 14. The second year of Tiberius began on Oct. 1 and extended through Sept. 30, A.D. 15. The official Syrian calendar then in use began with the autumn month of October.

At the beginning of this 15th year John the Baptist began to preach repentance around the Jordan River before Jesus was baptized by him. John's ministry occupied several weeks before the baptism of Jesus.

Notice how this dovetails with the next proof.

When was Pilate governor?

Luke names Pontius Pilate as governor of Judea when John received his call: "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea . . . the word of God came to John" (Luke 3:1-2). Pilate ruled for 10 years.

Pilate was deposed a few months before the Passover near the close of his 10th year. He hurriedly sailed for Rome to appeal to Emperor Tiberius. On

his way news came that Tiberius died. You will read this in Josephus' *Antiquities*, XVIII, iv, 2.

Since Pilate was in a great hurry to reach Rome, he must have left shortly before the death of the emperor, which occurred in March, A.D. 37.

Ten years before this is about the beginning of A.D. 27, at which time Pilate began his procuratorship.

Here is what the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says in its article "Pilate": The assumed date for Pilate is usually "from 26 to 36 A.D. . . . Tiberius died on March 16, 37 A.D. Such a delay [in Pilate's journey to Rome] is inconceivable in view of the circumstances; hence . . . the period of his procuratorship [is] 27-37 A.D."

The *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* states, under the article "Pilate": "He probably succeeded Gratus 27 A.D. and ended his procuratorship early in 37; it is not likely that Pilate required more than a year for his return journey to Rome . . . and he arrived there after Tiberius' death, which took place March 16, 37."

The appointment of Pilate may have occurred as early as November, A.D. 26, and he entered his office in Judea early in A.D. 27. As Pilate did not begin his governorship in Judea till about the commencement of A.D. 27 and as Tiberius' 15th year did not begin till October that year, John the Baptist must have begun his ministry in the first few days of October in A.D. 27.

Jesus, therefore, must have begun to preach in the autumn of A.D. 27. There is no other date that would be consistent with all the provable facts.

To find the date of the crucifixion, we now need only find how long the ministry of Jesus lasted.

How long was Jesus' ministry?

The prophet Daniel foretold that the length of Christ's ministry at His first coming, to con-

firm the New Covenant, would be one half of a prophetic week of seven years.

In the midst of that prophetic week He caused the need of sacrifices for sin to cease by offering Himself for the sins of the world. He was "cut off" in the midst of the week, making the ministry at His first coming three and one-half years (Dan. 9:25-27).

"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" — 69 prophetic weeks or 483 years in all.

It was 62 prophetic weeks or 434 years (62×7) from the decree of Artaxerxes I in 457 B.C. to the decision to prepare the stones for rebuilding the Temple. That occurred in the 15th year of Herod, 23 B.C. And it was seven prophetic weeks or 49 years (7×7) to A.D. 27.

"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself . . . then he shall confirm a covenant with many for a week" — this prophecy is not yet completely fulfilled.

Why? Because "in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering" — He died for the sins of the world in the middle of the week.

In a sense this is a dual prophecy. Christ died in the midst of the prophetic week of seven years, after three and one-half years of ministry, but He also died in the midst of the week — Wednesday!

Now let's turn to the gospels to find the proof that Jesus Christ's ministry was exactly three and one-half years. There would have to be three Passovers during the three years of His ministry, and a fourth on the last day of His earthly life — the crucifixion.

The first Passover occurred in A.D. 28 and is recorded in John 2:23. During the following weeks Jesus spent time baptizing in Judea (John 3:22).

The next note of time is found in John 4:35, a reference to four months till the next harvest sea-

son at Passover in A.D. 29. So this time reference is to the ninth month or Keslev in December, A.D. 28, only days before Jesus began to publicly announce the Gospel in the synagogues of Galilee after John the Baptist was imprisoned (Acts 10:37, John 4:43-45).

In Luke 6:1 is the next time reference — "the second Sabbath after the first." This is a reference to the seven Sabbaths that were counted from Passover to Pentecost. So here we see a second Passover, A.D. 29, in Jesus' ministry.

In John 6:4 is another Passover, which brings us to a Wednesday in the year A.D. 30: "Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." This was the third Passover in Jesus' ministry.

The fourth and final Passover is recorded by all the gospel writers. Notice John 11:55: "And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves."

This last Passover completed a ministry of three and one-half years, from autumn of A.D. 27 to the spring of A.D. 31, when the Passover upon which Christ was crucified fell on Wednesday.

Since Jesus began His three and one-half year ministry not later than A.D. 27, He could not have been crucified so late as A.D. 33. There was, therefore, no Passover that occurred on a Friday during His entire ministry!

Yes, history proves false the tradition that Jesus was crucified on Friday and rose on Easter Sunday!

In this two-part article we have given you the undeniable, absolute record of history and of the calendar that the crucifixion could not have been on Friday — that the resurrection was not on Sunday morning!

Now you should also read our two free booklets *The Plain Truth About Easter* and *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday*. You may have copies of these booklets by writing to our address nearest you. □

What Happens If I Ask for a Visit?

We recently received this letter from one of our readers in England:

Could I make a suggestion prompted by my own personal experience?

When I came into the unique knowledge of the Worldwide Church of God, I

someone does contact the Worldwide Church of God. Who will come? What should a person do? Does the visitor drink tea or coffee? What if my home is too humble to receive a minister?

There are so many things people wonder about, especially those who have previously had some contact with certain other religious organizations.

That is a good suggestion, and one that perhaps we should have thought of ourselves.

The Worldwide Church of God receives many thousands of requests for personal visits, and so our ministers and representatives are kept busy.

But — it's an intriguing thought — maybe they would be even busier if some people who would like to ask for a visit knew exactly what to expect.

Perhaps the people would be less reluctant to contact us.

Contacting a minister

The Worldwide Church of God has always had a policy of "no follow-up." That means nobody will ever call on you unless you yourself request it. However, we do have ministers and trained representatives ready to help if you ask for it. So, if you were to ask for a visit, this is what would

happen: Most requests for personal visits come to us through the mail, either to world headquarters in Pasadena or to one of our many regional offices where our ministers serve around the world. Also, many people, especially in North America, use the telephone instead of writing.

But whether your request comes by phone or mail, our procedure is the same. The message is sent immediately to our Personal Correspondence Department. Here it is given top-priority treatment.

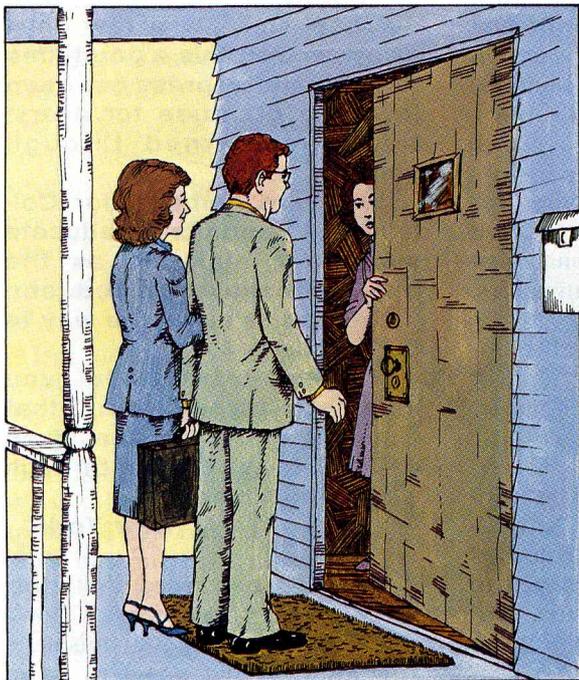
Quickly — usually by return mail — a letter will be sent to you, informing you of the telephone number of the closest authorized representative to your home. This representative will normally be the ordained minister who is pastoring the local congregation of the Worldwide Church of God.

You should call him as soon as possible and arrange a time that is mutually convenient for the visit, which will usually take place in your own home but elsewhere if you prefer. In some major cities the Worldwide Church of God may have a downtown office, which, of course, is a convenient place to meet.

If you would rather have our minister contact you, instead of you contacting him, let us know when asking for a visit.

The visit

Who will come? The minister himself, probably. He is trained and competent to answer your Bible questions and to help you with any personal counsel you may desire. He will be accompa-



wondered how different in other respects this organization might be. We are suspicious of the new, the foreign or the different. Our imagination begins to take over and adds to our already suspicious minds. So our suspicions cause us to do nothing positive.

What I would like to suggest is that you write an article on what happens when

nied by his wife, another minister or a senior member of the local congregation.

They will not be coming to argue religion with you. They won't give you the third degree or pry into your personal affairs. They will not try to get you to join something, nor will they have anything to sell. (However, they may suggest that you write for some of our *free* books and booklets. The Worldwide Church of God publishes a wide assortment of free literature on the Bible and topics related to successful living.) Our representatives will not accept money, either as direct payment or general contributions to God's work.

Usually, they will have planned to spend about an hour with you, for they have a busy schedule and many people to see. If you have many questions and think you may need more time, you should let our representative know when you first contact him so that he can plan his schedule for the day accordingly.

Our men will not be wearing strange clothes, nor will they embarrass you in any way. They will concentrate on answering your questions and just getting to know you the first time they come.

"First time!" you may exclaim. "You mean they will come back?"

That depends entirely on you. Not if you don't want them to. Our representatives will never pester or bother you. They won't visit again unless you specifically ask them. That is just not the way we do things.

Further contact

But if you do want more contact — and there are some subjects (like baptism, for instance) which you and the minister will need more than one visit to thoroughly discuss — then our ministers will be pleased to schedule further appointments.

Of course, there are still many areas of the world where we do not have full-time representatives. In some parts of Africa and

Asia, for example, one man may have to serve a whole country or even several countries. Phone service may be nonexistent and the postal service may be slow and unreliable.

In these cases, our procedure may not be quite so efficient. It may be several weeks or even months before the minister is due to visit your area. If you live far off the beaten track, he may have to ask you to meet him in a nearby town. But he will not ignore your request, and eventually he will meet you. Our ministers will go anywhere — the foothills of the Himalayas, up the Amazon, the North Slope of Alaska or the smallest islands of the South Pacific.

(The writer remembers that some years ago he was told by his superior "not to come back" until he had contacted a man who had been waiting for several years on a remote island several hundred miles from Fiji.)

Nothing to fear

So whoever you are, wherever you are, if you have wondered about asking for a personal visit from one of God's true ministers, don't be afraid to.

Here are some actual comments showing the reactions of readers who have been visited by God's ministers:

I was impressed by the minister's wide field of knowledge, not only in the Bible but the extension of it into the fields of human endeavor, and his attention to the principles of success.

God desires us to succeed, yet we need to be taught. Here is a man trained and dedicated to teaching us how to succeed in our lives, our marriages, our child rearing, our jobs, giving us the knowledge and counsel we need, helping us see where we are making mistakes, spending his life to help us become obedient to God's laws.

What a contrast to the "religious politicians," who are

like government politicians except they are in a different field!

Having a true minister of the living God near to call on is truly a great blessing and comfort. To know he is continually improving himself by acquiring additional understanding and knowledge, which automatically makes him even more capable to help, is a continually increasing blessing.

Thanks be to God for ministers of knowledge, understanding and compassion.

Washington

My husband and I are prospective members at the time of writing this letter, but by the time you receive it, we will be baptized members! With our baptism only a few days away, we felt this a good time to write and express our deep love and gratitude for everything we learned through you.

We hope Ambassador College will continue to educate such fine ministers as the ones who have helped and instructed us along the way to our baptism.

We just want to let you know how joyous we are that God has called us and given us you to guide us through these end times.

New York

Don't be concerned that your home is "not nice enough." Don't think you are being a nuisance. Don't worry that you will be in for a peculiar experience with some strange people. Don't be afraid that you will be "getting involved," or that pressure will be put on you to join something.

None of these things will happen. What will happen is that you will meet decent, friendly people who will consider it a privilege to be allowed to help you in any way they can.

Oh, yes: And they will drink a cup of coffee or tea if you care to offer it. □

'I Uphold My Integrity'

*It's human to try to justify ourselves — witness Job's example!
But what does God require of us in terms of righteousness?*

By Jerold W. Aust

Millions of professing Christians believe they can come to God "just as they are"!

They reason that Jesus Christ "did it all" for them at the cross. All one has to do now, they believe, is accept Jesus in the heart, profess to love Him and be "born again."

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

But does God's plan of salvation really work this way? Does Jesus' sacrifice remove all responsibility from us? Why, then, does the apostle Paul tell us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12)? And what does it mean, exactly,

to be born again? If you have not read our startling free booklet *Just What Do You Mean — Born Again?* write for a copy at our address nearest you.

Consider the driver who violates a traffic law. Suppose that when this driver appears in court to face sentencing, the judge instead forgives him — absolves him of guilt and sets him free.

Does that mean that the driver is free to go out and violate traffic laws at will from then on? No! The laws are still in force, and he will incur their penalties every time he breaks one.

Though the driver is freed from the penalty of this past

lawbreaking, he still has a responsibility!

So it is with Christians. Christ's death paid, in our stead, the penalty for our sins (Rom. 6:23, 5:8-10). But that does not free us from responsibility after we accept that sacrifice.

After all, God required even Jesus — who never sinned and thus did not bring the death penalty for sin on Himself — to suffer many trials in order to learn to obey His Father while in a physical state of existence (Heb. 5:8). And it just doesn't make good sense that that same God would not require any more from you and me than to say we love Him and "give our hearts" to Him.

Understand: God's Church definitely does *not* preach salvation by works. We are saved by God's grace through faith, and even that faith is not our own but Christ's faith, which God gives us through His Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:8).

But while we live under the grace of God, God requires

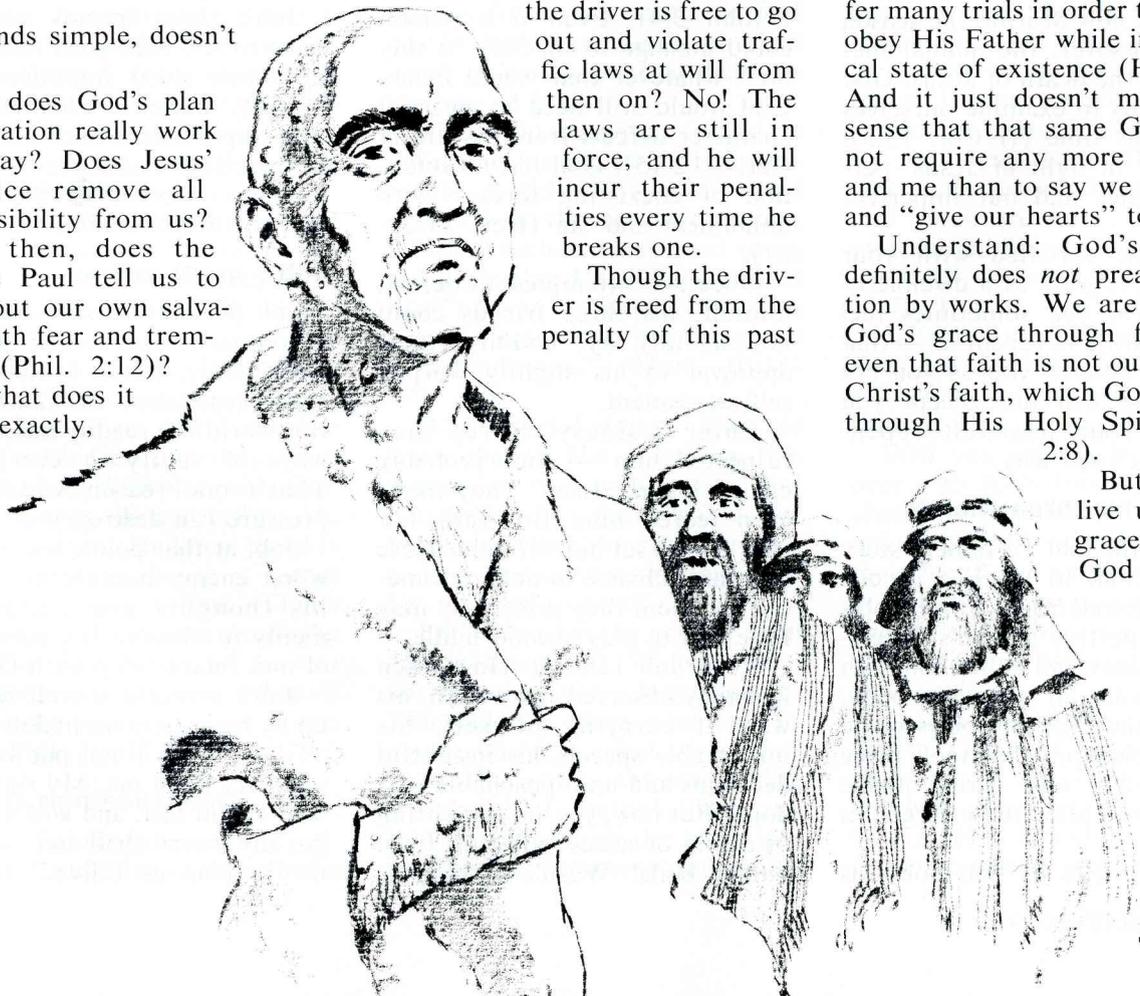


Illustration by Ken Tunnell

us to obey His commandments and perform Christian works. And those works determine what reward we shall receive in God's coming Kingdom. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), the servant who, symbolically, thought Christ's sacrifice had done it all and thus did nothing himself did not even qualify for salvation, let alone a reward!

How many times have you heard of parents who withheld a wayward son's inheritance until the son complied with their wishes? The inheritance is a gift. There is nothing the son can do to earn it — the parents give it to him freely. But the son must do certain things to qualify to receive that gift.

It is the same with salvation. Salvation is God's free gift to us. We don't earn it by any works. But there are certain things we must do to qualify to receive it.

The point is unmistakable: God will not accept you or me just as we are. He demands that we prove our love and obedience to Him (Jas. 2:18-20, I John 2:3-6, Jas. 1:21-27).

We are now nearing the season of the Passover, the annual memorial of the death of Jesus. God instructs us to examine ourselves during this time (II Cor. 13:5), especially in light of Jesus' perfect sacrifice and our imperfect conduct.

Are you satisfied with your spiritual progress as a disciple of Christ? Do you sometimes feel you have little to repent of — that God will receive you as you are now? God will not accept you without your heartfelt repentance. Let's see why.

Job and his three friends

Recall the Old Testament story of Job. God, to teach a special lesson, allowed Satan to kill Job's children, destroy all Job's material possessions and afflict Job with painful boils all over his body. Most of the book of Job is made up of a dialogue that took place between Job and three of his close friends after these tragedies occurred.

Job 1:3 tells us that Job was

the greatest person of the East. His friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, may well have been professional associates of his. The three came from, apparently, some little distance, each from his own place (Job. 2:11), to comfort Job:

"And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great" (verses 12-13).

Jealousy surfaces

Finally Job spoke. His torrent of unwitting words, though, only clouded the issue at hand. Why was Job being afflicted? After all, wasn't he a righteous person? Job went to lengths to try to substantiate his sinlessness.

No human other than Jesus was ever completely sinless. All humans sin — break God's holy, righteous laws (Rom. 3:23, I John 3:4). Even if a person could manage to sin only "a tiny bit," whatever that would mean, God would still need to clear all character defects from his life (I Cor. 3:12-15). God has no intention of coexisting forever with unholiness and sin (Rev. 21:22-27).

Once Job attempted to defend himself, his three friends could not sit idly by, nodding their approval to his slightly warped self-assessment.

Enter jealousy. Sure, they respected him — they probably envied his greatness. They likely even feared him. But they felt they had to set him straight. Here was their chance to deflate someone to whom they previously may have had to play second fiddle.

Read Job 15:9-10. How often had they observed his wealth, his way of carrying himself, his impeccable speech, his insightful decisions and unimpeachable wisdom? But now, yes, he was sitting in a pile of ashes suffering from putrid boils! Wasn't it obvious

that something was diabolically wrong with Job? How could they remain quiet?

Jealousy prevailed. Enter self-righteousness.

Self-righteousness prevails

What generally happens when one person is jealous of another? Often he will do his best to belittle the other. How? By extolling himself, for he, of course, is the standard by which he rates (and berates) others. When one does this, he is proclaiming his own righteousness (Prov. 20:6, 9, 21:2).

Notice what Eliphaz the Temanite said to Job: "Should a wise man answer with empty knowledge, and fill himself with the east wind? . . . What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not in us? . . . I will tell you, hear *me*; what *I* have seen *I* will declare" (Job 15:2, 9, 17).

When one is self-righteous, he does not recognize that he is self-righteous. He can't at the time, or he would not be so livid in his own defense.

Job's three friends no doubt came to Job with good intentions. But their good intentions were liberally mixed with their own self-importance and self-righteousness. We all suffer from this problem on occasion. We can be our own worst enemy!

Job's great enemy

Job did battle with a false god — himself! He had a problem with vanity. Satan is the author and perpetuator of vanity, and this world has readily adopted the ways of vanity in every area. That's one reason wrong peer pressure can destroy you.

Job, at that point, was his own worst enemy because he allowed his thoughts and accomplishments to obscure his perspective of and relationship with God.

Job's attitude is well summed up by his statement in Job 27:5-6: "Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live." Job was

saying, in effect, "I uphold my integrity!"

Silent-film star Charlie Chaplin once offered a humorous portrayal of the pompous, self-important attitudes displayed by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. In Chaplin's skit, these two Fascist leaders were seated on old-style, hand-cranked barber chairs. Each took turns cranking himself higher and higher in the chairs, until both were sitting at an absurd and perilous height. The lesson was clear: Both thought too highly of themselves.

Likewise, Job's enemy was his self-importance and self-righteousness: "Then Job answered and said: 'No doubt *you* are *the* people, and wisdom will die with you! But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Indeed, who does not know such things as these?'" (Job 12:1-3).

Job went so far as to even dare God to show him what his sins were (Job 13:23).

Here is the point about our weak condition as human beings: Had Job directed this specific question to God from sincere humility and a desire to correct error, God could have helped Job immediately. But Job was determined to defend himself and his supposed superiority.

A needless squabble had erupted between the three friends and Job over who was superior. Although each ostensibly admitted that God was, their responses to one another belied a deeper feeling of their own superiority.

The key is to daily compare oneself with God and only God. Jesus had no difficulty with this. He had been divine before He became human. He knew the difference between being a carnal human and being God. That's why when He experienced the weakness and frailty of human existence, He humbled Himself even to the point of death on the stake (Phil. 2:8).

What is righteousness?

The righteousness of God, clearly, has nothing to do with the

self-righteousness of man. Our own human righteousness is no better than filthy rags (Isa. 64:6)! We have seen that self-righteousness is worthless. What, then, is godly righteousness?

Notice Psalm 119:172: "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness." There it is! A direct and specific Bible definition. Could anything be plainer? Numerous other scriptures also show that true righteousness is God's way of life, as defined by God's commandments.

All God's commandments are summed up in two great commandments: love toward God and love toward neighbor (Matt. 22:35-40). And I John 5:3 tells us that we express love toward God by keeping His laws, specifically the great laws of love embodied in the Ten Commandments. We are to keep these Ten Commandments in the spirit as well as the letter of the law.

The apostle James calls God's commandments "the perfect law of liberty" (Jas. 1:25), and indeed, obeying these laws liberates us from pain, suffering and death, both premature physical death as well as eternal death in the lake of fire!

The righteousness of God is defined as keeping His commandments. A rich young ruler asked Jesus Christ the age-old question, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Jesus answered, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:16-17).

Was Jesus kidding? Did He later change His mind on this matter, so vital to salvation, and decide that His death would free humanity from the responsibility to keep the same commandments He referred to here?

Let's see what the apostle John said in about A.D. 95, more than six decades after Jesus' death: "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life [symbolic of eternal life], and may enter through the gates into the city [the heavenly Jerusalem,

symbolic of God's Kingdom]" (Rev. 22:14).

It's quite obvious that Jesus didn't change His mind, since that same Jesus is the one who delivered the messages in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:1)! Do you believe Him? You must, you know. God cannot allow anyone to live and rule with Him who will not agree with and obey Him. Would you?

You can't do it alone

Of course, you cannot obey God's commandments on your own power (Rom. 8:7). You can't make yourself righteous. It takes the power of God's Holy Spirit, which God only gives to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

God must impart to you His own righteousness — His own nature. You must allow Jesus Christ to live His life over in you (Gal. 2:20).

God's Holy Spirit helps us to perform God's righteousness — to obey His commandments. And when we fail — and we will from time to time — we must acknowledge those sins and repent before our God, and He will then apply the sinless, shed blood of our Savior to blot those sins out of existence (I John 1:8-10).

We are near the Passover season, and Jesus is our Passover (I Cor. 5:7). Especially at this crucial time, we are expected to examine ourselves to see whether we really are in the faith (I Cor. 11:28, II Cor. 13:5).

Job finally recognized he had not been as much "in the faith" as he previously had presumed (Job 42:1-6). Are you?

Will you approach this Passover with Job's former approach, challenging someone to specifically number your sins *if* they can find them? Or will you compare yourself to Jesus' perfect example and then ask God to help you see and overcome all your iniquities and sins?

If you will follow this latter course, God will pardon you and bless you as never before — He will help you overcome and qualify for His Kingdom. Of such things, salvation is made! □

An Important Reminder- **How Leaven Pictures Sin**

God offers Christians vital lessons through the Days of Unleavened Bread. What do these days picture, and how can they help you lead a happier life?

By George M. Kackos

The apostles were jolted! First, the sound of a violent windstorm filled the house where they were meeting. Then, almost before they had time to think, glowing flames of fire began leaping upon them.

God's Holy Spirit had entered them, and the power

of that Spirit was far greater than the forces of nature they had witnessed.

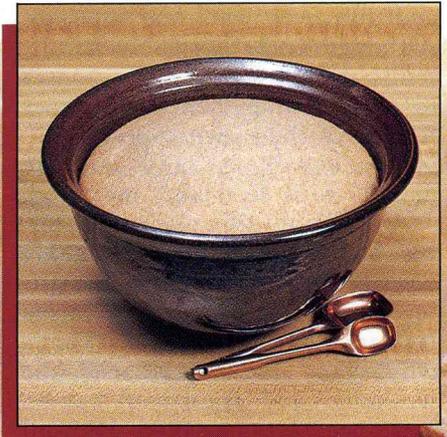
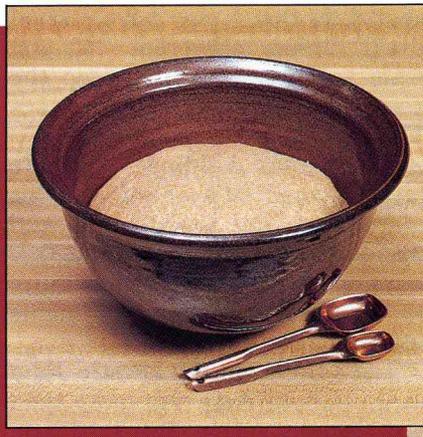
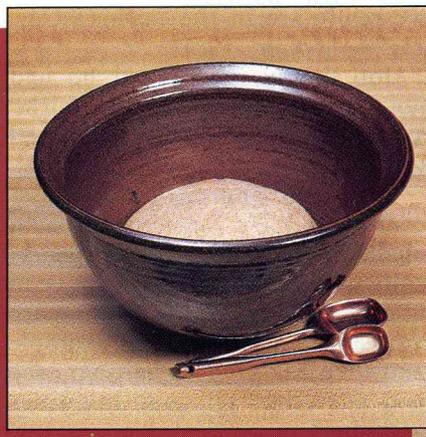
To their amazement, they could now speak words they had not spoken before. Quickly the news spread — here were men who could speak many languages.

Thousands speaking different languages eagerly gathered to hear the apostles. What they heard shocked them. Many were

deeply convicted by their guilt in the death of their Savior, Jesus Christ. A mighty urge to do something stirred within them, and they asked the apostles, "What shall we do?"

The reply echoed loud and clear: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Those early Christian converts



began something that God's true Church still practices — baptism for the forgiveness of sin.

But how, exactly, should a true Christian deal with sin, both before and after baptism? This question brings us to our subject, the Days of Unleavened Bread. To understand this Festival and its meaning and application to our lives, let's go back in history.

These days are commanded

Because of famine, the descendants of the patriarch Israel ended up in Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. There they became slaves (Ex. 1:8-11).

Through a series of miracles, God finally released the Israelites from bondage. Among the miracles was the death of the Egyptian firstborn. To protect their own firstborn, the Israelites were required to begin keeping the Festival called Passover (Ex. 12:3-14).

For Christians today, this Festival pictures our acceptance of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

For more information on the Passover and God's other festivals, and what each pictures, write for our free booklet *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?*

God instituted, just after the

Passover, another festival — the Days of Unleavened Bread. This seven-day festival pictured the release of Israel from Egypt (verses 15-17).

The Days of Unleavened Bread were held yearly during Abib, which is the first month of the Hebrew calendar. This month corresponds to the time of the Roman calendar months of March and April. Both the 15th and 21st of Abib, the first and last days of the Feast, are "holy convocations" — days of rest and worship (Lev. 23:6-8).

These days are still kept by true Christians today, and will also be kept after Jesus Christ's Second Coming (Ezek. 43:2, 7, 45:21). This year they fall on April 17 and 23.

Leaven symbolizes sin

During this Festival, all leaven and leavened foods are to be put out of your home and off your property (Ex. 12:15, 13:7). This includes yeast, baking soda, baking powder — all leavening agents, substances that produce fermentation and cause dough to rise. The products of leaven are bread, cake, some crackers, cer-

tain cookies and some prepared cereals and pies. A few candies and other foods also use leavening agents.

Of course, there is nothing sinful about these products themselves. Removing them from our homes is merely a symbolic enactment of removing sin from our lives.

Instead of eating these leavened foods, replace them with unleavened products (Ex. 12:15, 19-20, Lev. 23:6). These include matzos, hardtack and a number of flatbreads. But beware: Some foods that are sold as "kosher for Passover" contain leavening agents.

If you are in doubt about whether a product is leavened, check the list of ingredients on the wrapper. If you are still unsure, ask someone experienced or don't eat it. Remember: "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Whenever you eat bread during these days, it should be unleavened.

Far beyond the physical uses of leaven are the significant *spiritual* meanings.

After being jeered at and



tempted by the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus said to His own disciples, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). The disciples didn't know what He meant. Do you?

The disciples thought Jesus was talking about physical bread, but He wasn't. He was talking about the *doctrine* of the religious authorities, which led people into sin (Matt. 16:11-12, 23:13). By way of analogy, this leaven of false doctrine has spread through the whole world as a tool of Satan's deception (Rev. 12:9)!

The apostle Paul also used leaven as a symbol for sin. A certain Church member was committing a serious sin and making no progress toward repentance. Paul said this person was like a little leaven that would affect the whole lump — other Church members — with his sinful way of life. The person was put out of the Church.

Since Paul wrote to the brethren during the Days of Unleavened Bread, they would have already put out the physical leavening from their homes. Now he encouraged them to put out the leaven of malice and wickedness — sin. He told them to eat the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth — righteousness (I Cor. 5:1-8).

Sin versus righteousness

When you consider the nature of both leavened and unleavened bread, you can see several spiritual comparisons with sin and righteousness. Let's notice them:

- *Living in sin is easy; being righteous is hard.* Because of its soft texture, leavened bread is easier to eat than unleavened bread. Likewise, going the way of sin is easier than living righteously (Matt. 7:13-14). Obeying God is difficult even for a Christian, because you still have a carnal nature that wants to sin (Rom. 7:14-25).

- *Sin exalts the self; righteousness builds humility.* Leaven puffs bread up. The same is true of sin. It puffs up the sinner — his desire is to exalt himself rath-

er than allow God to rule him (Ps. 10:3). When you choose to live God's righteous way of life, you abase selfish desires.

- *Sin's pleasures are temporary; the benefits of righteousness endure.* Leavened bread left out soon becomes hard and moldy. Unleavened bread lasts much longer. Spiritually, the pleasures of sin soon pass away (Job 20:12-16). The end result is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Righteousness, in contrast, brings both temporal and eternal blessings (Deut. 28:1-13, Ps. 15).

- *Sin spreads easily; righteous-*



God is showing,
through the analogy of
leaven, that He wants
us to escape the
clutches of sin and
lead righteous lives.

- ness is built slowly. It doesn't take long for leaven to spread throughout a loaf of bread. This is the way sin is — it spreads rapidly (Gal. 5:9), whereas building right character takes a lifetime.

- *Sin is based on deceit; truth is the basis for righteousness.* What you see is not what you get with a loaf of leavened bread. Air pockets give the impression that there's more in the loaf than there really is. Sin also appears to be something it isn't, deceiving the sinner into thinking he is getting something worthwhile when he is only earning the death penalty (Heb. 3:13). With righteousness there is no deceit, only truth (Ps. 119:151, 172).

- *Sin is more prevalent than*

righteousness. Most people prefer leavened bread because they find its taste more desirable. Is it really better? Not necessarily — just more common. People are accustomed to it.

Spiritually, the same is true. Most people prefer to live in sin. But you must reject sin, and choose to live a righteous life (Deut. 30:19).

- *Sin builds a false image; righteousness builds true character.* As you have seen, leavened bread gives a false impression. So does the sinner. He may appear impressive on the outside, but is he? Read Matthew 23:27. True character is based on much more than outward appearance. It involves righteous living based on obedience to God's Word (I John 2:5).

Grow in righteousness

What God is showing us through the analogy of leaven and sin, particularly at this time of the Days of Unleavened Bread, is clear: He wants you to escape the clutches of sin and lead a righteous life. But how can you eliminate sin and grow in righteousness? The following "three Rs" — recognize, resist and repent — can help.

- 1) *Recognize sin.* Can you recognize sin? Many cannot. Why? Most people overlook God's simple, clear definition for sin: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, Authorized Version).

Discerning sin is a matter of applying God's law. At the basis of God's law are the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17, Deut. 5:6-21). Do you know what the Ten Commandments are? If not, how can you possibly expect to overcome and put sin — spiritual leaven — out of your life? God's laws are real, working forces that guarantee good results when you are in harmony with them. They were given to be lived and acted upon, not ignored or outrightly rejected!

Beyond the basic commandments, God requires obedience to
(Continued on page 22)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Is there any evidence, outside the Bible, that Jesus Christ really lived?

Actually, the accounts in the Bible, which is God's inspired revelation to humanity, are proof enough. But extrabiblical sources also amply attest that Jesus lived, was born of a young virgin, preached the Gospel, performed miracles and was condemned to execution.

Justin Martyr, a second-century theologian, wrote: "Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, 35 stadia from Jerusalem, in which Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from the registries of the taxing under Cyrenius your first procurator in Judea" (*First Apology*, chapter 34).

Justin was referring to public records that existed in his day to demonstrate that Jesus was born in Judea. Of course, one would expect that a religionist such as Justin would naturally support Jesus' authenticity as a historical person. But what about a historian who despised Christians?

Cornelius Tacitus, Roman historian, senator, consul and governor of the province of Asia, wrote concerning Jesus and Christians: "Nero . . . punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. But in spite of this temporary setback, the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome" (*The Annals of Imperial Rome*, xv, 44).

This was not a Christian writing, but a pagan Roman historian who hated everything Christian. Tacitus had access to government records. He had proof Jesus was crucified!

We also have the testimony of another Roman, the fourth-century emperor Julian the Apostate

(so called because he turned from Christianity after being brought up in it). He wrote a major work against Christianity in which he said this: "Jesus, whom you celebrate, was one of Caesar's subjects. If you dispute it, I will prove it by and by; but it may be as well done now. For yourselves allow, that he was enrolled with his father and mother in the time of Cyrenius. . . . But Jesus having persuaded a few among you, and those the worst of men, has now been celebrated about 300 years; having done nothing in his lifetime worthy of remembrance; unless anyone thinks it a mighty matter to heal lame and blind people, and exorcise demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany" (quoted in the polemic of Cyril of Alexandria against Julian, *Cyril Contra Julian*, vi, pages 213, 191).

If Julian could have demonstrated that Jesus was not an authentic figure, he would have done so. Instead, he asserted that the proof that Jesus was one of Caesar's subjects was still available (the census records were apparently still in the imperial archives). Rather than denying that Jesus performed miracles, Julian simply downplayed these miracles as not being a "mighty matter."

What about the Jews? If Jesus did not exist, the Jews would have had no reason to reject Him! Although they did not accept Jesus, they were forced by the very circumstance of His power to recognize Him in their records.

The Jewish historian Josephus admitted that Jesus, Jesus' disciples and John the Baptist lived. He called John the Baptist "the good man" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii, 5, 2). Scholars recognize the genuineness of Josephus' account concerning the death of James, "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ" (*Antiquities*, xx, 9, 1).

Jesus is also mentioned in the Talmud. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* terms as a mere "subterfuge" the attempt of atheists to deny those talmudic references that apply to Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Talmud, Jesus is called "Son of Pandera," which obscures that He was born of a young virgin. *Pandera*, a word meaning "panther" or "leopard," is an anagram for the Greek word *parthenos*, meaning "virgin." The reference makes Jesus, figuratively, the son of a panther or leopard (the Greek word for "panther" is *panther*, which Jewish usage corrupted into the form *pandera*).

The Talmud subtly calls the Gospel that Jesus preached an *avengil*, meaning a "blank paper," rather than referring to Jesus' message by the original word *evangel*, meaning "good news." Jesus brought the good news of the coming Kingdom of God!

There are records of Jesus healing the blind, the halt and the leprous. The Talmud also mentions His walking on the sea. Jesus' miracles were not denied by the Jews. Instead, those who saw Jesus perform those miracles said He learned sorcery in Egypt.

Jesus is called "dead dog," "the hanged one," "the sorcerer," "Balaam" and "Seducer." Notice the similarity between some of these epithets and the accusation in Matthew 12:24.

These facts, all from sources outside the Bible, clearly substantiate the existence of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not a myth — the Bible record is true. This world will soon see just how real Jesus Christ is today!

If you would like further information about Jesus Christ and the Gospel He came to announce, send immediately for our free reprint series "Is Jesus God?" and our free booklet *What Is the True Gospel?* □

Are You Self-Righteous?

Could you be guilty of this deadly, insidious sin? How can you be sure?

By Bernard W. Schnippert

I hate bugs. Always have. I guess the reason I hate bugs is that we didn't have bugs in our house when I was a kid.

Well, maybe an occasional ant wandered into our house, but a quick spray of ant killer put an end to that nonsense in a hurry. What I mean is that we never had any *bad* bugs — like roaches.

The fact that we had no bugs, while others did, made me feel superior — that I was even in a separate class above those who did have bugs. After all, I reasoned, our house was bug-free because it was clean. Other houses *must* be a mess or they wouldn't have bugs.

So you can imagine my concern (no, make that my horror) when, having grown up, married and just bought a new house, I arose late one night to get a glass of milk, only to turn on the light and discover bugs! In *my* house! Mine! Thousands of them. And they were the much-despised roaches!

I learned a lesson from this experience. I learned that everyone has bugs from time to time and may not even know it. Even me.

Even you.

But the bugs I want to write of here aren't the kind we get in our kitchens. Rather, they are spiritual pests; they are the sins we commit.

Of course, everyone has sins,

but the problem is that sometimes we don't think we have them (at least not the *bad* ones).

Spiritual bugs

How about you? Do you have spiritual bugs and not know it? If so, you may be engaged in a self-deception that could rob you of your eternal life.

Consider Paul's warning on the subject in Galatians 6:3: "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

Deceiving ourselves is the worst type of deception possible. Yet the capacity for self-deception lurks in every one of us. And consider for a moment the consequences of this self-deception. Read the account Jesus gave of the publican and the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14.

Here Jesus gives us a parable about "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (verse 9). Despising others is a common attitude of the person who is self-righteous.

The Pharisee thought he was righteous — full of virtues. He prayed and thanked God for all those supposed virtues. The publican, who knew he was a sinner, humbly prayed and confessed his sins before God.

And the results? God heard the prayer of the sinning publican, but not that of the "righteous" Pharisee. The Pharisee was not justified (his sins were

not forgiven) because he would admit to no sin in the first place (verse 14).

Could this be happening to you? Think about it! You could be like this Pharisee and not even know it. Your prayers could be hindered, and your sins could remain unforgiven.

This is serious! Jesus tells us, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

Do you want to enter God's Kingdom? Then you need to be sure that your righteousness is real and not *self*-righteousness.

Here's how.

All have sinned

To begin with, you must first see any possible self-righteousness. And to see self-righteousness, you must first know exactly what it is.

Self-righteousness is the attitude of believing you are not a "big" sinner. (Even a self-righteous person will occasionally admit in public or to himself that he might possibly be sinning in some area.)

The Pharisee of Jesus' parable is a classic example of self-righteousness. He clearly shows the attitude of "I'm not a sinner" (i.e., "I don't have any bugs — at least not any bad ones!").

Self-righteousness is insidious because it blinds itself to the facts. Jesus Christ pointed out

the deceptiveness of self-righteousness when He chastised the Pharisees (Matt. 23). He repeatedly pointed to the fact that they were blinded spiritually.

How you can know

If self-righteousness can blind you to itself, how can you know if you have it?

Start by admitting at least the possibility that you may have some self-righteousness, and then look at some of the telltale signs to see if they could apply to you.

Among the signs are the verbal expressions that the self-righteous person will find himself saying (or thinking, which is just as bad). These include expressions like "I would never do that" or "How can she be like that?" or "I can't believe that I've done anything wrong."

These are all expressions reminiscent of my "I would never have bugs" attitude and, although merely outward expressions, they show self-righteousness inside. Jesus plainly taught that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).

It may be that those who say these things are deceived, and sincerely believe that they are telling the truth. Perhaps we don't see ourselves as capable of committing a particular sin. If this is the case, it would pay us to examine ourselves carefully, for we may be committing the same sin we condemn in others (Rom. 2:1-3)!

There are also some telltale attitudes that indicate self-righteousness.

One is a condescending attitude. Such an attitude is the opposite of Jesus' attitude and comes from self-righteousness.

Judging — the act of passing an opinion (even to ourselves mentally) about the spiritual motives of a person when you don't have the facts or it's not your place to do so — is also wrong and shows self-righteousness. It is this very attitude that Jesus attempted to combat in the story of the mote and the beam (Matt. 7:1-6).

Harshness in dealing with

others is also an attitude indicating self-righteousness. Recall that Jesus told the parable of the publican and the Pharisee to combat the self-righteousness of some who "despised others" (Luke 18:9).

Despising others and treating them harshly because "they're not as good as you are" is a self-righteous attitude.

Related to harshness but slightly different is being overly strict. Sometimes we automatically require others to adhere to our strict interpretations so that they (like us, we think) will be righteous.

Paul showed the error in this type of reasoning when he stated: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness [i.e., self-righteousness], have not submitted to the righteousness of God [instead, they go by their own standards and rules]" (Rom. 10:3).

Recall that Jesus said it was not wrong for His disciples to pick a few handfuls of grain on the Sabbath to eat right then, whereas the self-righteous and overly strict Pharisees would have forbidden the disciples from doing so (Matt. 12:1-7).

Not only are thoughts and attitudes telltale signs of self-righteousness, but certain actions also indicate the problem.

The action of avoiding or refusing to visit or be seen with certain people even at church services may display self-righteousness (Gal. 2:11-13). Likewise, not speaking to some people can stem from a wrong attitude ("I don't want to get too close to them — they have bugs"). Refusing to help or be friends with some types of people can betray feelings that we are superior to or more righteous than they.

Proof that this frame of mind is wrong is found in Christ's much-cited and little-understood parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Read it and ask yourself whether you would have stopped to help the injured man or passed by.

Of course, this is not to say

that we are required to have fellowship with people who always influence us wrongly, or those recognized as harming or causing divisions in God's Church (Rom. 16:17).

Paul wrote that we should receive those weak in the faith, but not to "doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1, Authorized Version). This means we are not forced to be with those who are constantly in a negative attitude and prone to making us depressed, doubtful or skeptical of our Christian convictions.

By now, you may realize that all of us display a few of these telltale signs at least once in a while. If you don't see any of these things in yourself, that could indicate a problem, too.

How good can become bad

Where do these wrong feelings of self-righteousness and superiority come from? Paradoxically, an attitude of self-righteousness can spring from qualities that, of themselves, are good and even necessary in the Christian life.

For example, II Peter 3:18 commands us to grow in knowledge. But we can allow ourselves to have a wrong attitude of superiority because of our knowledge: "Knowledge puffs up" (I Cor. 8:1).

Likewise, a person can believe that he is righteous because he performs certain "works" — Christian actions of love and obedience to God's law.

Hand in hand with this delusion over works goes the false supposition that obedience "qualifies" one for God's Kingdom, and this belief can make one self-righteous (Gal. 5:4).

Likewise, physical prosperity can make a person feel he is superior, if he supposes that how much he has is a measure of his godliness (I Tim. 6:5, AV).

True righteousness

Of course, none of these attributes — knowledge, works, obedience, prosperity — is wrong in itself. The first three are important for salvation. But considering oneself righteous because one has

LETTERS

"Go to the Ant"

We want to take time to thank Rex J. Morgan for his fine article "Go to the Ant" (December). It made us think about our role and our responsibilities that God has given us, and that we must be about our Father's business with uttermost care.

Mr. and Mrs. Jay C. Vaughn
Chicago, Ill.

"Open Doors for Christ's Gospel"

I wish at this time to thank you for your wonderful *Good News* magazine, and to commend you on yet another excellent article, which was one of many I have read over the past year or so since I started my subscription.

Your article "Open Doors for Christ's Gospel" (December) was very direct and to the point. I applaud you for your great work of reaching out to others around the world who need to hear God's Word.

Even though I am only 27 years old, I feel that I have 50 years of knowledge. Your magazine has so much!

To quote you: "And no human power can stop it!"

Keep up the good work.

George V. Hill
Hillsboro, N.H.

Christmas for children?

I am writing this letter about your article "Christmas — Questions We Are Asked" (October-November). In my opinion, Christmas reminds us why we were born here on earth. Christmas is for the children of this earth.

I believe that when Christ was born,

people came from all over and offered gifts. We all know Christ is no longer with us, but if He were today, wouldn't we be giving the gifts to Him? Don't we like to feel that we are giving them to the Christ child, which reminds us that we should give rather than receive?

My question is, Is it a sin to celebrate Christmas and all its festivities? My younger sister also wants to know. Can we pray over it and then celebrate Christmas?

Terrribly Disillusioned
Los Angeles, Calif.

We encourage you to reread the article. The clear facts speak for themselves. And we again invite everyone who is not afraid of the truth to write for our free booklets The Plain Truth About Christmas and Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which? For our address nearest you, see the inside front cover.

Deals with relevant issues

You are certainly not avoiding the relevant issues of the day. I especially appreciated those articles on the importance of the home environment in the learning processes of the children. That is the most vital link in the education process and one that society as a whole tends to sweep under the rug and instead prefers to place the onus on the schools, teachers and society in general.

W.J. Skryha
Van Nuys, Calif.

The welding question heats up

In reply to Sherwin Scott's letter (September, 1983): Begging your pardon, but

may I submit that the definition of welding is the joining of metal together using heat? Therefore, if two pieces of metal are soft-soldered together using a soldering iron, they have been welded.

Fusion welding is not necessarily the strongest. It depends on the application and subsequent use of the component. Many brazing methods used in aero-engine production are far stronger than any other. It is necessary to know all the possible methods and then to select the best, taking into account all relevant parameters.

So with marriage: In courtship one should be learning to select the options. The subsequent "heat" of courtship should, with the least possible stress, strain or distortion, be sufficient to weld (or marry) the two "components" permanently together.

Jack Tayler
Bristol, England

Each issue stronger

Each time that I get hold of my new issue of *The Good News* I always feel joy, knowing that it will be richer and stronger than the preceding issue. There is just no way that I could fully express in words how grateful I am to God especially, to you, Mr. Armstrong, and to your staff for the wonderful and truly inspiring and enlightening articles that each issue brings.

I've always been putting off writing to give praise and thanks for the great job you are doing. Keep up the great work — God is certainly blessing it!

Isidoro S. Lagahit
Tacloban City, Philippines

these things or does these things is erroneous.

Righteousness comes by faith as a gift from God, who gives us His own righteousness by dwelling in us through His Spirit (Eph. 2:8). Righteousness is not something we can acquire or exhibit by what we do. Therefore, to compare our works or knowledge or other qualities with someone else's attributes is wrong (II Cor. 10:12), and a root cause of self-righteousness.

Such comparisons ignore God's admonitions concerning righteous judgment:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment

you judge, you will be judged" (Matt. 7:1-2).

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Now what if, after you have read this article, you feel that you may have some self-righteousness, but wish to see it even more clearly in order to conquer it? What then? What should you do?

In my case, when I bought my home with the bugs, I was not skilled enough to see the bugs before I bought. I should have brought in an expert.

You, too, should bring in an expert. And in this case you

should get the best expert around — one who can clearly see inside your heart — God.

You should pray, as did David: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults" (Ps. 19:12).

Pray this prayer, and ask God to exterminate any bug of self-righteousness.

I speak from experience when I say that there is only one thing worse than knowing you have bugs — *not* knowing. I have found that I do indeed have bugs — lots of them. And so do you. But now you know how to exterminate the bad bug of self-righteousness. □

PERSONAL

(Continued from page 2)

various administrations, or functions of service. Ephesians 4:11-13 shows that Christ has given special spiritual abilities or talents to certain ones in a chain of authority under Him in the Church — and notice for what PURPOSE:

“And his [Christ’s] gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ [the Church], UNTIL we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to mature manhood*, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Revised Standard Version).

In other words, *to full spiritual maturity!*

Now WHY should we count the troubles and problems and temptations that beset us as all JOY?

Simply because we *cannot* hurdle these obstacles successfully in our own power. They drive us to seek help from God.

To go to God for the wisdom to know *what* to do, and the power to be able to do it, requires FAITH. This is a *living* faith. It is ALIVE. It is active.

When we meet such trials, we often do not know what to do. We lack the WISDOM to make the right decision. So open your Bible to the first chapter of James. Notice verse 5.

If you lack wisdom in such trials, GO TO GOD for it! But ask IN FAITH — no wavering — no doubting. Be SURE God will not fail, but will give you this wisdom. Depend upon Him for it.

If you waver, you are like a wave in the ocean — tossed back and forth — going nowhere! So, instead of wavering, BE STEADFAST. And if you don’t get the answer immediately from God, have PATIENCE. Don’t give up. Trust Him.

Now notice verses 2-3: “Count it all JOY, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know

that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (RSV). These trials force you to your knees. You must have FAITH to meet them. They *test* your faith. They *develop* spiritual CHARACTER! In the Authorized Version, it says the trying of your faith produces patience. It produces that kind of patience that is steadfastness. THAT IS CHARACTER!

Sure, it may be unpleasant for a while. But, Paul assures us that if we suffer with Christ, we shall REIGN with Him — and the GLORY *to be* revealed in us is so incomparably greater than anything we now are that this promised future for eternity is something to REJOICE over!

Yes, count it all JOY! Even if unpleasant. It is maturing you, now, for the marriage to Christ. The CHURCH of God shall be BORN into the KINGDOM OF GOD!

The Kingdom of God will not be composed of spiritual know-nothings and infants.

When we are born again — born of God — resurrected in spirit bodies — those bodies will not be small, like a human physical infant that must *grow* to full physical size. We shall *look* as we do now, so far as form and shape and features are concerned. But the resurrected body will be a *different* body — composed of SPIRIT instead of flesh and blood (I Cor. 15:35-44).

The original 12 apostles were Christ’s *witnesses*. That is, they were actual eyewitnesses that Jesus rose from the dead — that the living, resurrected Christ was the *same* Jesus who had been crucified. They were with Him 40 days after His resurrection.

But nobody will be foolish enough to suggest that when Christ was BORN very Son of God by the resurrection (Rom. 1:4) that He was resurrected in a tiny infant’s body composed of spirit. He was resurrected FULL GROWN, as He had been when crucified.

How did the apostles *know* He was the *same* Jesus? Because they knew what Jesus had looked like — and in His born-again,

resurrected body *He looked the same*, except He now was composed of *spirit* instead of matter!

The resurrected Christ was PERFECT — He was very God! But He did not grow up into perfection *after* He was resurrected. It was during His human lifetime, setting us the example, that He *was made perfect*, as you read in Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8-9.

Thus it is plain that we must develop spiritual character, growing to spiritual adulthood, *during this life* — not after our resurrection in GLORY!

This is the *spiritual* growth, of which the *physical* growth of the unborn child, from tiny embryo to a size and weight of some six to eight pounds at birth, is a type. The physical growth of the unborn human is a growth of physical size and weight. The *spiritual* growth of the begotten but yet unborn *spiritual* child of God is a growth in spiritual CHARACTER, not of physical volume, size or weight.

The human baby merely grows large enough to be born prior to birth — NOT TO PHYSICAL OR MENTAL MATURITY. But he *does grow*.

And this physical growth is the TYPE of the spiritual growth by feeding on the Word of God, and prayer, and Christian fellowship, and participation in the Work of God in the life of the begotten child of God.

The *difference* is merely the difference between matter and spirit. One is a material growth. Material growth is measured by volume, size, weight. The other is spiritual growth, measured by character development.

Jesus was BORN very Son of God by His resurrection (Rom. 1:4). He was born fully *mature*. He was born in a spirit body, which was manifested to His apostles in the same apparent size and shape as when He died.

When He appears on earth the second time, in His spirit, glorified body, we shall be resurrected, or instantaneously changed, to a body that will be *like Him* (I John 3:2) — *full grown — adult!* □

Leaven

(Continued from page 16)

biblical principles referring to one's conduct. While some things are not written in the form of a direct command, the underlying principle or spirit of the law is nonetheless just as binding (Matt. 5:17-48, Rom. 13:9)! Under this category fall aspects of God's civil laws and statements made by His apostles and patriarchs.

Examine yourself, as II Corinthians 13:5 commands, and see how God's laws expose the "leaven" in your character. Are you REALLY putting God first in EVERYTHING? Are you humbly submitting to His authority? Can you admit when you're wrong?

For a thorough study of God's

basic law and how it applies in your life, write for our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

2) *Resist sin*. We have already seen through the analogy of leaven that sin spreads quickly and easily. Therefore you must resist temptation before it turns into sin (Jas. 1:13-15).

Doing this requires self-control — actively resisting wrong thoughts and replacing them with right thoughts (II Cor. 10:4-5).

In struggling against sin you may reach a point when you grow so battle weary that darts of self-pity and injustice pierce you. At such times it's easy to think you've done all you can. Don't be fooled. You can do more (Heb. 12:4).

Throughout the Bible we see the number 7 used as a symbol of

completeness (Gen. 2:2, Josh. 6:16, Rev. 16:17). In relationship to the Days of Unleavened Bread, the number 7 pictures the complete elimination of sin. You should earnestly strive to eliminate sin from your life (II Tim. 2:19).

3) *Repent of sin*. Even when you recognize sin and resist it, you will still find yourself falling into sin (I John 1:8). When this happens, what should you do?

Strive not to sin, but when you do, seek God's forgiveness. Upon real repentance — abandoning the wrong way and beginning to live the right way — God promises to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).

Some would say not to try so hard — to just rely on grace. But what does God say? "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Will you overcome all sins all at once? Absolutely not! Some sins are so deeply and habitually rooted that they may take years to totally overcome.

Don't use that as an excuse to continue, but don't dismay either. Ask yourself, Am I sinning as often as I once did? Does this sin have as much control over me as it once did?

If the answer is no, you're growing — making progress.

Today the world is in misery because of sin. Yet humanity rejects the very Festival — the Days of Unleavened Bread — that pictures the process that would lead them out of their sins.

What about you? Are you going to keep these special days as God has instructed His people to? Will you be learning the many important lessons that the Days of Unleavened Bread are meant to teach you?

If you do work at ridding your life of sin, you will be greatly blessed, now and in the future as a member of God's Family: "In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death" (Prov. 12:28). □

Are Some Sins Worse Than Others?

By George M. Kackos

Which of these sins is worse: kidnapping and murdering a 6-year-old child, or losing your temper?

Since death is the penalty for sin, we could conclude that there is no difference (Rom. 6:23).

But aren't we overlooking something? Throughout the Bible, God reveals that some sins are worse than others.

After Israel rebelled at Mt. Sinai, Moses said they had sinned a *great* sin (Ex. 32:30). Since there are great sins, there must be lesser sins. Christ's statement to Pilate validates this conclusion: "Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the *greater* sin'" (John 19:11).

Consider the system of punishment for broken laws in ancient Israel. Were all the punishments equal? No. For example, the punishment for kidnapping was death (Ex. 21:16), whereas the punishment for stealing livestock was their restoration (Ex. 22:1).

God's underlying basis for dealing with sin is by the principle of proportionate punishment, in which the punishment fits the crime: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn

for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:24-25).

Christ was explicit — certain things are more important! Included are the weightier matters of the law and the great commandments (Matt. 22:35-40, 23:23).

So what's the point? Don't fool yourself. Some sins you commit are worse than others. They do more damage to your character and the well-being of others. Put top priority on eliminating them. Extract them from your character. Don't tolerate major sins because you have chosen to work only on minor ones (Matt. 23:24).

But don't misunderstand. This is not to say that lesser sins should be overlooked. Jesus was emphatic: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19).

If you want to be great in God's Kingdom, face all your sins, no matter how big or small. By eliminating them, you will find yourself making rapid progress toward perfection and membership in God's Family. □

The Forgotten Law of Financial Success

Few people realize that financial success is governed by a living, dynamic law of God. Still fewer actually believe God's promise to bless those who comply with that law.

You can't afford to be unaware of this fundamental law of financial success — and of this law's spiritual implications! Let's understand the biblical truth about this forgotten law of God.

1. Does God reveal Himself as the Creator and Owner of all that we see around us? John 1:1-3, Ps. 24:1, Job 41:11. Does all the gold and silver belong to God? Hag. 2:8.

God created everything, and by virtue of that creation He owns it all. Therefore God also owns everything man produces on God's earth.

God's financial law can be compared to a contract. He wants us to understand that we are working with Him in a partnership. But how?

The Creator allows us to live and work on the earth — to cultivate the land and produce the food we eat. He allows us to use His raw materials in producing the many products we use. But God requires us to return to Him a small portion of what we produce and earn. And when we understand, that small portion is, in turn, actually spent for the benefit of mankind.

2. Was the patriarch Abraham obedient to God? Gen. 26:5. How did he honor the Creator and Owner of all things? Gen. 14:17-20, Heb. 7:1-4. Was Abraham blessed? Heb. 7:6.

Abraham was a *tither!* He gave a *tenth part* (*tithe* means "tenth") of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek, God's representative on earth at that time. The context of the verses we read in Genesis shows that God received His part before any further disposition of the goods was made to others. Abraham thus acknowledged that God was the source of all his blessings.

3. Was Melchizedek God's minister? Gen. 14:18, Heb. 7:1.

Tithing is revealed in the Bible as God's system for financing His ministry. Hundreds of years before the Levitical priesthood, the ministry was that of Melchizedek, who was none other than the member of the God Family who later became Jesus Christ. Melchizedek was God's representative on earth during patriarchal

times, and He received tithes from God's faithful servants. (For more information on the true identity of Melchizedek, write for our free reprint "The Mystery of Melchizedek Solved!")

4. What did Jacob, grandson of Abraham, promise God he would do with all of his increase? Gen. 28:20-22. Was he prospered? Gen. 30:43.

5. After Israel's deliverance from Egypt, God led them to Mt. Sinai. There He instructed Moses to formally write down His laws. Included was a command regarding the tithe. To whom and for what purpose were the people to tithe? Num. 18:21, 24.

Melchizedek (Christ, the "Lord" of the Old Testament) selected the Levites to be His ministers. But there was no commission to spread the Gospel at that time. The Levites were merely to teach the people the letter of God's laws, and to administer the rituals and sacrifices as reminders of sin. And the people were commanded to bring the tithe of their produce to the Levites. Christ (Melchizedek) thus transferred receipt of the tithe to the Levitical priesthood for their support.

6. Does the seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews show that tithing is not ceremonial or Levitical, having originated before Levi was born? Heb. 7:5, 8-10.

Hebrews 7 makes clear that tithing was practiced long before God instituted ancient Israel's civil law through Moses. Because tithing did not begin with the Levites, it therefore did *not end* when the Levitical priesthood ended.

Rather, according to Hebrews 7:11-17, God changed the priesthood back to the spiritual priesthood of Melchizedek. The Levitical priesthood was replaced by the priesthood of Jesus Christ — the Melchizedek priesthood restored. Therefore, a change as to *who* should receive the tithe was also made (verse 12). Christ has authorized His New Testament ministry to accept the tithe to finance the spiritual work of God's Church!

The New Testament era was ushered in when Melchizedek (Christ), who abides as our High Priest continually (Heb. 7:3, 4:14-16), became mortal so He could be sacrificed for the sins of

TITHING

mankind and make the Holy Spirit available to those whom God calls.

7. What is Jesus Christ's commission to His ministry? Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15. What Gospel would His ministers preach in this end time? Matt. 24:14.

Jesus Christ came to establish a spiritual ministry. It is a ministry of salvation, of prophecy and of warning, as well as of good news — of prophesying His glorious return as world ruler to rescue mankind from self-annihilation and bring world peace.

In these chaotic days approaching the end of this age, God's Church is reaching millions of people around the world with Jesus Christ's message. It is a huge undertaking requiring not only financial support for hundreds of ministers and other laborers, but also the use of expensive technological facilities — radio, television, printing presses — for proclaiming Jesus' Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God "to all the nations"!

Today, God provides for the financing of the globe-girdling work of His Church by the same system He has used for millennia — the tithing system.

8. Did Jesus uphold God's law of tithing? Matt. 23:23, especially the last part of this verse.

How clear! Jesus said that spiritual qualities such as judgment, love, mercy and faith are more important than strictly paying tithes on every little plant that might grow in your garden — especially when that strictness leads to self-righteousness. But Christ said *not* to leave the other undone — not to fail to pay your full tithe as God requires.

9. Did the apostle Paul clearly show that Jesus' New Testament ministry is to be supported just as the Levites were in ancient Israel? I Cor. 9:7-14, especially verses 13 and 14.

10. How have people literally stolen from God? Mal. 3:7-12, especially verses 8 and 9.

Can anyone afford to rob God? Stealing from God is a serious matter!

Although tithing is giving God a tenth of one's income, that tenth is *not yours* to give since it belongs to God.

In the Garden of Eden, God reserved just one tree for Himself. Adam and Eve had no right to eat of it. But Satan convinced them that this tree was also theirs to use (Gen. 3:1-6). When they took the fruit of that forbidden tree, they sinned — they stole from God. We likewise sin today if we hold back the tenth of our income that belongs to God.

Today, the same devil wants us to believe that *all* of our income is ours. But don't believe it!

God has put a "no-trespassing" sign on the first tenth of our earnings — it is reserved for

Him, to be used as He directs His ministry. It is our responsibility to acknowledge God's prior claim over that first tenth of our income by paying it to His representatives whom we have proved to be doing His work on earth.

11. What does one come under as a result of breaking this fundamental financial law of God? Mal. 3:9. How does one escape this financial curse? Verse 10.

12. What does God challenge us to do to prove Him — to see if He really will bless us? Verse 10, Prov. 3:9-10.

The simple equation is: Pay to God what you owe Him — the tenth that is His — and He will reward you with blessings. God does not promise to make you a millionaire, but if you work diligently and are faithful in returning His portion to Him, making Him your financial partner, He will work with you and bless your efforts. God will cause your partnership with Him to prosper.

13. What should be our attitude in paying God's representatives the tenth that belongs to Him, and even in giving offerings (Mal. 3:8) as we are able? II Cor. 9:6-7.

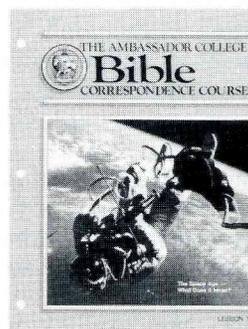
A generous attitude is fundamental to God's "give" way of life. God is a generous giver! He wants His children to reflect a like generosity within their comparatively limited means.

14. Does God promise that there are automatic blessings for living His "give" way of life? Prov. 11:24-25, Luke 6:38, Gal. 6:7.

15. What great spiritual principles did Jesus Christ reveal about the use of our money? Matt. 6:19-21.

Storing up spiritual "treasures in heaven" is far more important than being prospered physically. But God promises both! Why not prove God by acting on this important law? Make God your financial partner. Put God's tithe, your offerings and your heart into the great purpose He is performing on the earth today and receive His blessing.

For a comprehensive study of the subject of tithing, send for our free booklet *Ending Your Financial Worries*. □



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Are You Happy as a Christian?

True Christians should be the happiest of all people! Here's how you can be that way.

By Stanley M. McNeil

Is it possible to be happy in this world?

Most people aren't, because they don't know what real happiness is.

Most people feel happiness comes from pleasing the self, either through physical comforts such as food, shelter and material possessions or through psychological rewards such as being accepted and appreciated.

Failing to find happiness through these channels, increasing numbers are turning to alcohol, drugs or other forms of escapism to titillate the senses and provide temporary releases from unhappiness and futility.

But joy that comes from physical pleasure *is* only temporary, and isn't real happiness at all!

Jesus Christ, in some of His last instructions to His followers before His death, revealed how we can be truly happy: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:10-11).

God wants you to be full of happiness! And He explains that the only way you can be that way is through obeying Him, so that you can have His own joy inside

you. Real joy, the kind that permeates God's way of life (Ps. 16:11), comes only from God.

God gives us this joy in measure as we submit to and start practicing His way and begin to bear the fruits of His mind in our lives (Gal. 5:22). From the moment we truly turn to God, our happiness should be something that constantly deepens and grows.

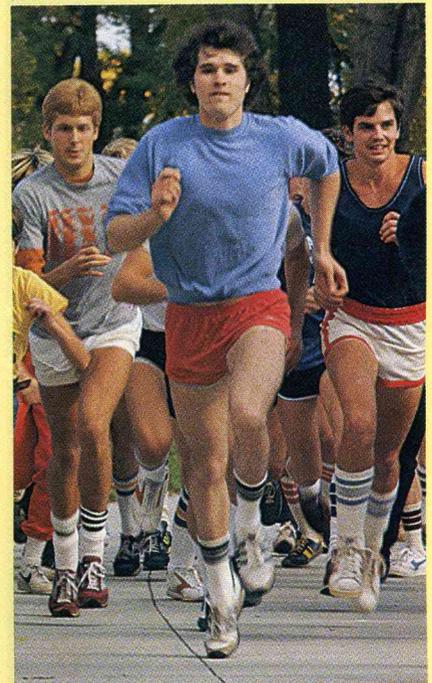
Look to the future

To be happy, we must look to the future. We have to keep our minds on the goal of character development and the end result of God's plan for us. God allows us to face occasional physical adversities to help us grow.

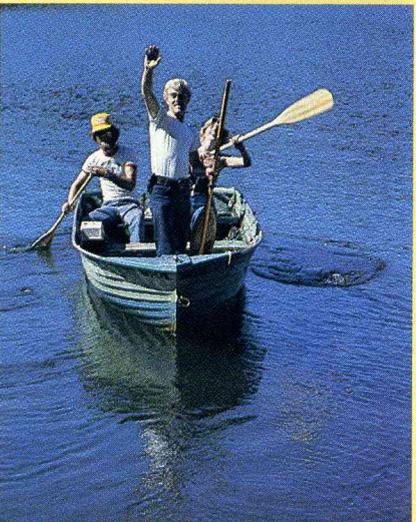
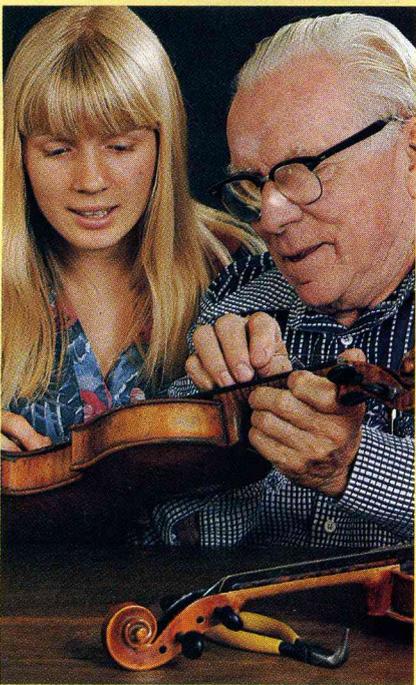
By concentrating on the big picture, we can faithfully and cheerfully endure difficulties that would be grievous if we didn't have this perspective (I Pet. 1:7-8, Jas. 1:2-4).

The apostle Paul was a man who rejoiced even in severe trials. Through terrible persecutions, beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, health problems and other personal trials in performing God's great commission, he was happy even though he suffered physically.

Why? Because Paul was spiritually oriented. Physically, he was depleted, but he was exceedingly happy because he saw the fruit of



Photos: from top, Good News; Jerry Patillo; Hal Finch



what God was doing with him (II Cor. 6:10).

Furthermore, Paul worked to help others experience joy (II Cor. 1:24), showing that Christians must control their thinking and develop positive, uplifting attitudes (Phil. 4:8).

Paul also warned against the folly of seeking escape through such means as excessive drinking. These means do not produce happiness. Rather, we should be filled with the Holy Spirit through meditating on God's plan and being thankful (Eph. 5:18-20). With the help of God's power, Paul was able to be happy in any circumstance.

Work toward happiness

This kind of joy doesn't come overnight. We must work toward it. We are warned to beware of the false happiness that comes from satiating physical or psychological desires. Even sin can be temporarily pleasurable (Heb. 11:25), but produces empty, unsatisfying results (Eccl. 2:11).

God's way is the way of *give*. That means we will develop joy, not to the extent that we try to *get* happiness, but to the extent that we *give* love and happiness to God and other people.

Giving requires us to overcome our natural human tendency to be selfish. Giving is often hard work! But Jesus said we will enter into eternal joy only after expending violent effort in overcoming (Matt. 25:21, 23, 11:12).

Jesus compared His own death and, by analogy, the process of conversion to the inevitable pain a woman experiences in giving birth to a child. Once the baby is born, the anguish is no longer remembered. Jesus said the occasional pains and sorrows that come with Christian growth always result in deeper joy that "no one will take from you" (John 16:20-23).

In other words, as we overcome our human nature by replacing it with God's character, we reap a bumper crop of happiness!

For our example

We today need to emulate the

power of the apostolic era of God's Church. The early Christians, though persecuted, knew real joy.

Let's get acquainted with a first-century Church member named Rhoda. Her story of jubilation is recorded in Acts 12.

These were difficult years in the fledgling Church. Facing government persecution at the violent hands of King Herod, one of the original disciples, James the brother of John, had been killed. Since this senseless killing pleased the public, Herod decided to imprison Peter, no doubt intending to execute him, also.

The Church had just lost one apostle, and now Peter, the chief apostle, was in danger. What to do? Their answer was to fervently pray, without ceasing, for Peter's release. Rhoda was among those who beseeched God on Peter's behalf.

The result? God miraculously answered by sending an angel to awaken Peter, break his chains, open the prison door and lead him into the city.

Peter went straight to the home where the members were still praying, and knocked on the door. Rhoda answered.

You can imagine her exultation! The Bible explains that "When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate" (Acts 12:14).

Rhoda was so overjoyed that she couldn't contain herself enough to open the door. After praying from the heart for Peter's release, God's answer gave her much reason to rejoice!

Answered prayer should have this effect for all of us today, especially as we pray for the work God is doing.

Another major cause for happiness in the early Church was their obvious appreciation for God's truth. Jesus described this joy as the receiving of the "pearl of great price" (Matt. 13:45-46). Paul described the Church's attitude this way: "You became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much

affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (I Thess. 1:6).

We should have this same attitude today, especially in light of the many truths God has revealed and restored to His Church. Jesus strongly admonishes His followers that we should never lose our love for the knowledge He has given us (Rev. 2:4).

Harmony among Christians

One more aspect that brought those early Church members so much happiness was their unity. As they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship," they were unified with "gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:42, 46, AV). They all shared the same leadership, spirit and way of life. God's purpose was more important to them than anything else.

They realized their responsibility was to back God's chosen apostles in spreading the Gospel message, and they were unified through God's government in the Church (Eph. 4:4, 11-16). This unity produced tremendous love and concern. Each member rejoiced as he saw fellow members experience blessings (I Cor. 12:26). In this way, one person's happiness multiplied to be shared by all.

As we today put aside any tendency we may have toward being independent or set apart from the work God is doing through His Church, we can experience more of the happiness He intends through togetherness. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

Along with unity and oneness of mind comes another spiritual quantity that produces happiness — spiritual fellowship and hospitality. The original Christians were with one another as much as possible, visiting in each others' homes for meals and fellowship. Paul commented that the ministry was comforted because the members served and shared with each other and also supported God's ministers in this way (II Cor. 7:13).

On one occasion, even mem-

bers in a poverty-stricken area collected goods to help the congregation in Jerusalem during a drought. These churches gave beyond their means and actually begged Paul to allow them to help (II Cor. 8:3-4).

Through this outstanding attitude of giving to help others, these members of the Church of God learned the meaning of real happiness. It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Expressing love brings much happiness to the giver.

Another joy these vibrant Christians experienced came from the prevalent attitude of repentance. Real repentance — total surrender to do God's will — is where real joy begins. Great joy also comes as we continue to repent when God corrects us (II Cor. 7:9-10), and our loving God will correct us when we need it. This chastisement isn't enjoyable at first, but a repentant response will be (Heb. 12:11).

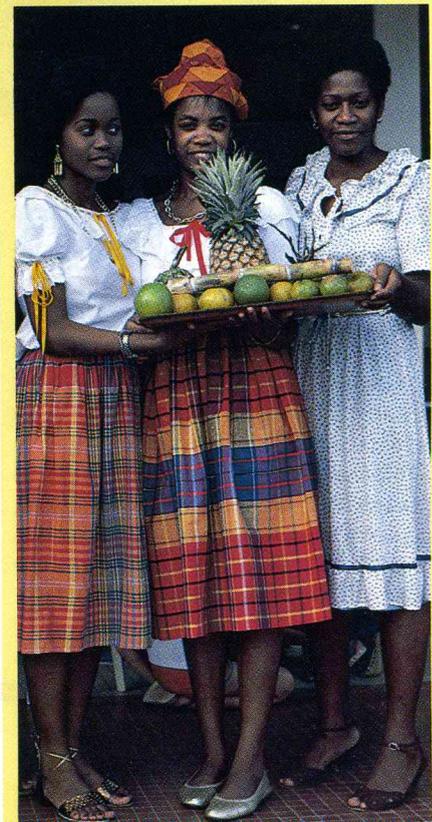
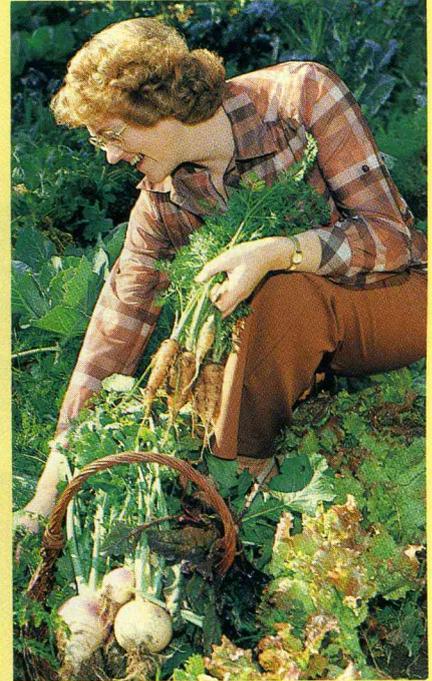
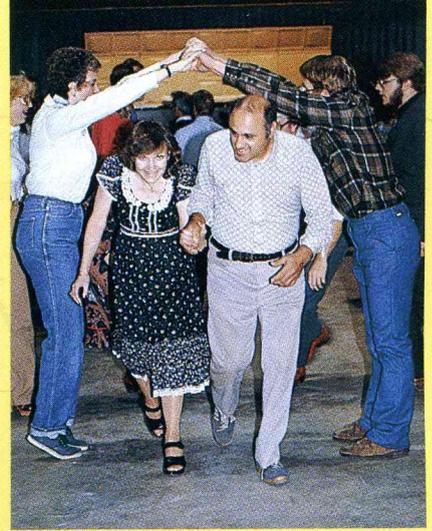
This kind of happiness can never come from satisfying our physical desires or going our own way. The happiness produced by a submissive and obedient attitude comes only from God. Nothing we do can make us or God really happy unless we have this attitude (Ps. 51:16-17, Isa. 66:2).

Our opportunities now

We today have all of the same opportunities that produced such deep happiness for the members of the early New Testament Church.

Jesus said His followers would be the light of the world, and that we should let our light shine before men (Matt. 5:14-16). Nothing brightens up a day more for someone than to be in contact with a begotten son of God who is unselfishly happy — who shares the same joys the members of the apostolic era experienced.

If you truly want to be happier, you can do something about it. Examine your priorities and your thoughts. Determine to make any necessary changes so you may reflect more of the lasting happiness now that God wants for you always! □



Photos, from top: John McMullin, Jr., Good News; David Hulme

Narrow Is the Way

Not far from my home in British Columbia, Canada, is the site of one of the great marvels of God's awesome creation — the sockeye salmon run in the Adams River.

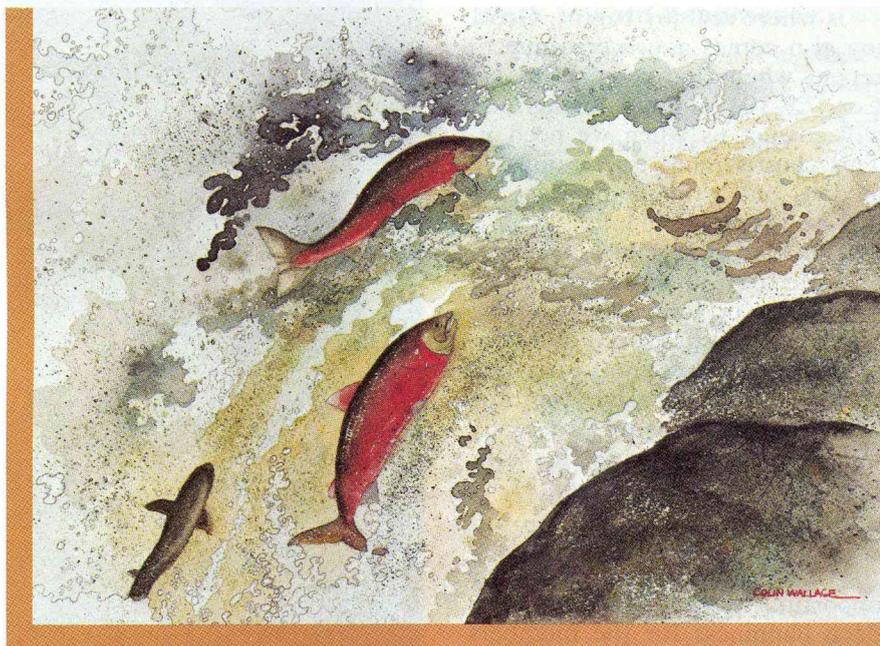
male and female, in a seething mass of crimson bodies. The females, swollen with eggs, flail the gravel river bottom with their worn tails to create deep nests. When everything is ready, males deposit sperm, called milt, and the females their clusters of eggs

salmon literally serving to their deaths.

An arduous journey

They have come a long way, overcoming many obstacles, and have endured to the end. They have fought the rapids, whirlpools, fallen logs, rock slides and pollutants from pulp mills. They have escaped the fishing fleets of two nations, which stalk them and reduce their population by up to 80 percent. They have escaped the native fishermen along the shores of the Fraser.

They have found their way from the far reaches of the Pacific Ocean and swum 300 miles upstream, fighting the swift currents of the mighty Fraser, and had their bodies battered for 17 days as they continued their final migration — and all of this to lay down their own lives so that



Every four years mature sockeye make their arduous 300-mile trip up the Fraser River, passing through the Thompson River and into Shuswap Lake by way of Little River. This leads to the Adams River, the spawning ground of between two million and three million salmon.

Crowds of up to 300,000 people come to view this majestic, spectacular phenomenon of nature when it occurs. Some time ago I had the chance to witness it myself.

What a sight! The fish pair off,

in the nests. Together they bury the eggs with gravel.

Soon afterward, after they have guarded the nests, the mature sockeye die, completing the cycle of life. Their bloated bodies float downstream and decompose, filling the air with a very disagreeable odor.

The silent spectacle has an almost mystical aura about it. You can actually get a lump in your throat as you watch the bruised and battered



the next generation might receive theirs.

One area the salmon have to

pass through is called Hell's Gate, a turbulent, raging chute of water in the Fraser Canyon, 110 feet wide at its narrowest point.

An average of 34 million gallons of water a minute rush through this narrow gorge. At times as much as 200 million gallons a minute have been recorded during runoffs, since water from 8,400 square miles of British Columbia has to drain off through this area.

Back in 1913, a rock slide virtually blocked Hell's Gate and only a small number of salmon somehow managed to get through to spawn upriver. In 1946, man-made fishways were completed, after which the salmon population slowly began to increase to the preslide levels.

Anyone who has stood on the viewing platforms over Hell's Gate has to admire the determination, strength and fortitude of the animated crimson arrows that leaped over this area without the aid of the fishways during the aftermath of the rock slide. Even with the fishways, it is a fantastic feat.

The sockeye salmon run of the Adams River survived because a tiny minority of overcomers defeated seemingly insurmountable odds and made it to their destination so that future generations might live.

There are many parallels of the sockeye salmon run to the Christian struggle. Let's look at some of them.

Our "Hell's Gate"

A Christian has to make it through the "Hell's Gate" and turbulence of this world to reach his final destination. God says, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

God's people have to exert violent effort to reach their God-given goal. Jesus stated, "And from the days of John the Baptist until

now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12). Christians are promised an upstream swim (II Tim. 3:12, John 16:33).

A Christian has to swim against currents polluted with immorality, escape the nets of materialism, resist the steady current of satanic influence and human nature and resist the whirlpools of negative peer pressure that constantly try to suck him under.

Tribulations along the way

Some of God's servants, just like the sockeye, have suffered much physical abuse in this colossal struggle.

Read Acts 14:19-22, for instance, where Paul commented, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Read in II Corinthians 11:23-33 or in II Corinthians 4:8-9 about the abuse Paul took. Yet he said: "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

Read in Hebrews 11 about God's faithful people. They "through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. . . . Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented" (verses 33-37).

God in His infinite mercy provides, along the way of life's struggles, occasional quiet pools where we can rest and gather strength for the next onslaught (Ps. 23:2-3).

He even builds paths around

our obstacles and problems for us (I Cor. 10:13).

God knows that if enough don't overcome life's obstacles and endure until the end, future generations will die (Matt. 24:13, 22). God's master plan will be upset!

No turning back

Just as salmon hover over their fertilized nest of eggs and protect it from other fish, a Christian has to protect his mind, which has been fertilized by God's Spirit, from those who would shipwreck his faith and drown him in the perdition of ungodliness (Matt. 10:35-39, 24:8-12, II Cor. 11:3-4, I Tim. 1:18-19).

The strong currents that God's people swim against help build strong resolve and character.

Jesus learned by what He suffered (Heb. 5:8). So do we. Paul agonized to bring his body into subjection (I Cor. 9:27). So do we. There is no turning back (Luke 9:62). A salmon wouldn't think of it. Neither can we.

Great rewards lay in store, but these are still upstream, in the quiet waters of the Kingdom of God (Rev. 2:26, 3:21). Trials and tests have to come first — and we have to overcome them.

The psalmist compared our struggle to that of mariners battling stormy oceans, and showed God's desire to help us: "They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven" (Ps. 107:26-30).

With God's help and with the navigational aids of His Word and His Church, all things are possible. We can make it through the "Hell's Gates" of this world into the placid waters of God's Kingdom (Rom. 8:16-23, 35-39)! □

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