



# The Good News

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**COVER:** A twisted bristlecone pine, part of a forest of trees that are the earth's oldest living things. Beginning on page 14, the article entitled "Earth's Oldest Living Things — What They Teach Us" explains the important lesson we can learn from these trees. Photo by Grant Heilman.

## Letters

### Faith reinforced

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your inspiring article in the October-November issue, "Are We Back on the Track? — When We Lack Faith?"

I have lost two daughters in the past year and have been depressed and overwhelmed. I realize now that I've allowed my grief to get the best of me. I have lacked the obvious understanding of Hebrews 11. Once again I am reminded, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." I pray for God's soon-coming Kingdom with more earnest than I ever did before. My babies will have the healing I so desperately prayed for, in the resurrection. My faith is once again reinforced!

Co-worker  
Western United States

### Festival issue

Just had to write a note and thank you all for the beautiful and inspiring Festival Good News [September]. . . . The articles on family are just wonderful. They show us just what it will be like to be in God's Family.

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert B. Brown Jr.  
Asheville, N.C.

### Carryovers'

First off, I want to say I enjoy and benefit from both the *Plain Truth* and the *Good News* magazines and read them from cover to cover, and I am very grateful to be receiving them.

However, I have often wondered why it is necessary to break the continuity by placing the ending in the back instead of having the article all together for continuous reading. Also, the "boxes" inserted in the middle of an article are distracting. Why can't they be put at the beginning or end of the article?

Mrs. Arthur Tall  
Punta Gorda, Fla.

We appreciate your comments. We try to complete articles on consecutive pages. However, many times articles do not fit exactly and we are forced to carry the extra copy over.

Also, the printing process we use and the rules of good graphics require that we begin and finish articles in certain sections of the magazines. This sometimes forces us to use carryovers.

The "boxes" feature intriguing statements or questions from the articles to grab the interest of those readers who may not otherwise read the articles.

Robert Armstrong

**D**ID YOU ever stop to ask, "How far may I safely go in doing what I want but know I ought not?"

In this column, where I can talk personally with our readers, I like to discuss things that give us something to think about.

Remember the Old Testament character Balaam, who, as you read in Revelation 2:14, in the words of Christ, caused ancient Israel to sin?

Let me give you some interesting new facts about this Balaam.

Balaam, it now appears, was in his time successor in office to Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-10), founder of the world's pagan civilization. Balaam was the greatest prophet of the time — in the pagan religion — the Pontifex Maximus of the pagan world — the chief oracle of paganism.

Does it, then, seem strange that he prayed to God and appeared to be a servant of God?

When King Balak of Moab sent emissaries to hire Balaam to put a curse on the people of Israel, Balaam asked the emissaries to remain overnight, so he could go aside and pray, and ask God if he might go with them. If he was the chief pagan prophet, actually sitting in SATAN'S SEAT, as head of Satan's religion on earth, WHY would he pray to God about it?

I feel quite sure that most people who have read this account have supposed Balaam to be a prophet of God — not of Satan. Did he not do right in consulting God? Surely Satan would not do that! Take just a quick look at the incident.

The children of Israel, under Moses, had pitched camp in the plains of Moab, on the east side of the Jordan River, near Jericho. The king of Moab, Balak, saw what these Israelites — there were at least two or

three million of them — had done to the Amorites. He was struck with fear. The Moabites were far outnumbered.

So King Balak sent messengers to Balaam, who lived at Pethor in Mesopotamia — far distant, near the Euphrates River. They took with them the fees for divination, to hire Balaam to curse the Israelites.

"They are too mighty for me," was Balak's message to Balaam, "for I wot [know] that he whom thou blest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed" (Num. 22:1-6).

When the elders of Moab and Midian, Balak's messengers, delivered the message to Balaam, notice what he said: "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam" (verse 8).

God said to Balaam, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed."

"And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you" (verses 12-13).

Again King Balak sent messengers to Balaam — this time more noble princes of higher rank, and more money. Again Balaam asked them to remain overnight, "that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more" (verse 19). This time God allowed him to go with them, but forbade him to curse Israel. Yet the angel of God stopped Balaam's donkey on the way. WHY?

Now doesn't all this sound as if Balaam were God's prophet, not Satan's? Yet, see what we read in the New Testament!

Peter speaks of false prophets "following the way of Balaam . . . who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (II Pet. 2:15).

Jude writes: "Woe unto them! for

they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward" (Jude 11).

Jesus Christ says to the Church of the Pergamos era: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel" (Rev. 2:14).

So Jesus Christ, Peter and Jude all tell us Balaam was a false prophet. When we research into his actual identity, we find that Pethor, where he resided, was the headquarters of the highest priest of the pagan Babylonian Mystery religion.

In reading through Numbers 22, 23 and 24, one might suppose Balaam was just some ordinary fellow of no consequence. Yet here was the king of a nation. He passed up his own highest priests, magicians and astrologers of the pagan religion. He sent his highest princes, with rich rewards and highest fees. He sent them a great distance to Pethor, near the Euphrates in Mesopotamia. He would not have sent them to any but the most powerful practitioner of divination.

Other scriptures show that these higher magicians of divination were often demon possessed. This Balaam could have been DEVIL possessed, so that it was actually Satan himself in possession of the human Balaam, working in and through him. WOULD SATAN CONSULT GOD ABOUT DOING THIS? The answer comes sharp and clear!

Satan himself would consult God, precisely as Balaam did, under such circumstances! Biblical "scholars" and commentators have assumed Balaam had been a true prophet of God originally. This is not true.

The answer is found in the first two chapters of the book of Job. Satan himself is here pictured in con-

(Continued on page 20)

# WHY God Hates Gossip!

*Do you know what scourge victimizes more people every year than all the sicknesses and accidents in the world? It is the deadly poison of gossip.*

By Dibar Apartian.

**T**he Bible reveals that Satan the devil is the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10).

But how does he accuse us? By spreading rumors and causing gossip.

Satan introduced gossip into the world shortly after the creation of Adam and Eve, when he spread rumors about God. Satan told Adam and Eve that God lied to them. He made them suspect God's loving concern and wonderful plan for all mankind to inherit eternal life.

God told the man, after putting him in the Garden of Eden: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17).

God's command was clear. But Satan put doubts in the first couple's minds. He made them question why God had forbidden them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He made them feel that God was keeping from them something that was good for them.

Notice how Eve answered Satan (who appeared to her in the form of a serpent), when she repeated God's order.

Eve told the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:2-3).

Why did Eve add the last part of that sentence? Where did she hear it? God didn't forbid her to touch the tree. He told the couple not to eat of it.

Yes, but in Eve's mind, twisting God's order was necessary to express her feelings toward what she believed to be unfair. Can you imagine? God wouldn't even allow them to touch the fruit of the tree! Satan had already influenced her mind and she began to shade what God had said.

She obviously also thought the penalty God imposed was too severe. The clear statement, "Thou shalt surely die," became, in her words, "lest ye die."

Quite possibly, the more Eve reasoned in her own mind, the more she believed she was right. She became convinced that she was telling the truth. The woman now "knew" that God was really harsh and unjust.

Just think: If you repeat something enough times, you end up believing it.

And in this case, that's just what Satan wanted Eve to do: believe God was unjust, so he could seduce her. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by taking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

## Why gossip?

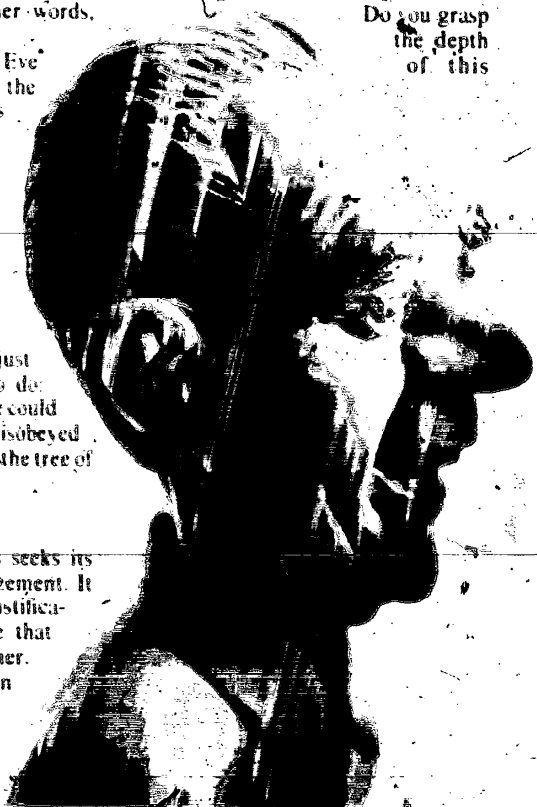
The carnal mind always seeks its own way, its own aggrandizement. It wants to be right. Self-justification is one way to achieve that goal. Accusation is another. Both help to shield our own

mistakes. The carnal mind likes to be exalted. It will distort facts or twist statements to preserve its own presumed integrity.

Do you realize that often, during conversations, you only hear what you want to hear, and not necessarily what was said? Likewise, when you repeat what you want to hear, you present the information in such a way that you end up appearing innocent of any errors.

But God commands, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 20:16).

Do you grasp the depth of this



commandment? Bearing false witness against someone can not only involve lying, but also accusing, gossiping and spreading rumors.

If you are truly a Christian, you should never take part in any of these activities. You should not accuse others, whether it be to defend yourself, to cover your mistakes or merely to make yourself look good in the eyes of others. In other words, the Ninth Commandment forbids lies, accusation, gossip and spreading rumors. That's what bearing false witness is!

As a true Christian, you are to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:39). But how can you love your neighbor if you accuse him or gossip about him? How can you love him if you have a part in breaking up his family or his home or in making him lose his friends?

Satan wants you to bear false witness. He would like to cause division between you and your brethren. He would like to destroy your home, and he would do anything to divide or destroy the Church.

When you gossip, you bear false witness against your neighbor, but God says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Rom. 13:9).

Stop and ask yourself.  
How



much of what you hear is true? And how much of what you say — or repeat — is true? We all tend to repeat what we hear — or believe it — without ever checking the facts. We take for granted what we hear or read.

But gossip is never the entire truth. It might be part of the truth, or a shaded truth, or a truth out of context, but it is never the whole truth. There is no such thing as "half-truth." A lie is a lie, whether white, black or shaded.

Here is a simple rule to remember: Before you say or repeat anything about your neighbor, be sure you have all the facts (and by definition the facts will be true). Then ask yourself, "Am I loving my neighbor as myself when I repeat this?" If not, you are breaking God's commandment.

Sometimes you can be unintentionally guilty of gossip. You may not think you are doing any harm, but gossip always harms. Whether you justify yourself by distorting the facts or accuse someone because he is accusing you, gossip is always destructive. Ultimately, the penalty for gossip is death.

#### The golden calf

Consider what happened when Moses, who was talking with God, delayed his return from the mountain. The Israelites were concerned about him — but especially about themselves. What would they do if something had happened to Moses? Who would lead them? How would they survive in the wilderness?

They had no faith. In their fear they began to doubt God's love for them, and decided to go after other gods. They told Aaron, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (Ex. 32:1).

The Israelites built a golden calf and began to worship it. They forgot the almighty God who, with tremendous miracles, brought them out of the land of Egypt. They forgot His loving promises.

"Go, get thee down," God instructed Moses, "for thy people,

which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them" (verses 7-8).

Moses, returning hurriedly, saw what was taking place and was horrified. He could not believe his eyes. "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Moses demanded of his brother Aaron (verse 21).

Aaron was in charge of the people in Moses' absence. He was therefore responsible for their conduct and behavior. He could have — and should have — stopped the making of the golden calf. But he was afraid of the people!

Did Aaron readily admit his guilt? Did he easily accept his share of responsibility — or did he justify himself?

He told Moses: "Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (verses 22-23).

Notice how Aaron justified himself. He thought his task impossible, since he was dealing with a rebellious, stiff-necked people whose minds were set on evil. How could anyone reason with such a people?

So what did Aaron do? He let them act as they pleased! And how did he explain the calf? Well, it just came into existence by itself, according to him!

Aaron told Moses: "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (verse 24).

Simple, isn't it? All you have to do to produce a golden calf is to gather all the gold you can find and cast it into a fire — and out will come a golden calf!

Strange as it may sound, it is with reasoning like this that the human mind tries to justify itself. It puts the blame on others, rather than acknowledge its own share of guilt or responsibility. Aaron's way of describing events is not much different from the way we would describe happenings in our own lives. We would,

Illustration by Robert R. Rinehart

chances are, picture ourselves as blameless in a parallel situation.

### Gossip about Jesus

Was Christ a drunkard? Of course not. But His persecutors claimed He was. They spread rumors about Him.

Actually, people saw wrong in whatever Christ did. When He drank wine, He became a drunkard in their eyes. When He ate with the publicans, He was classified as being one of them. Christ was accused no matter what He said or did. His enemies constantly spread rumors about Him.

As Christ said: "For John [the Baptist] came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:18-19).

Strangely enough, many of the people who accused Christ or spread rumors about Him had never seen Him. They only believed what they had heard, and they had heard from His enemies that Christ was a drunkard and a glutton.

Even though Christ never broke God's commandments, He was accused of breaking every last one of them. When He healed on the Sabbath, they said He broke the Sabbath. When He stated that those who did His Father's will were like members of His own family, people said Christ did not love His mother, brothers or sisters. People did not even believe Christ was born of the Holy Spirit; rather, they called Him a bastard — one born of fornication.

To His false accusers, Christ said: "If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:42-44).

Indeed, Christ's persecutors were unable to understand Christ. They

had for their father the devil, who is a liar. They believed the lies and not the truth. As one old saying goes, if you do not want people to believe you, just tell them the truth!

But there is no excuse for us in God's Church to behave like those who do not have God's Spirit. We must always tell the truth. We must never say anything that could hurt or harm our neighbors, never gossip, never spread rumors.

It is hard to believe, but people even accused Christ of being possessed by a demon (verse 48)!

Today the world still hates Christ, because it does not understand His teachings. People still spread false rumors about Him: His teachings and the message He brought from His Father.

"If ye were of the world," Christ told His disciples, "the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:19-20).

Today this prophecy is being fulfilled, much as it was in the days of the early Church. Not only unbelievers, but also those who once called themselves believers, are now persecuting the Church.

"It is impossible but that offences will come: but we unto him, though whom they come!" (Luke 17:1). We had better heed this strong warning.

### Rumors about Christ's resurrection

Enemies even spread lies and rumors about Christ's resurrection.

On several occasions, Christ foretold that He would be persecuted, arrested and crucified, but that He would rise again after three days and three nights. Did His persecutors believe Him? No! They thought He blasphemed God, and they used everything in their power to prove Him wrong.

After Christ's death the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate to ask him to prevent, by every possible means, the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy.

They told him: "Sir, we remember

that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matt. 27:63-64).

How curious! Not only did they not believe Christ, but they also suspected everyone else. They wanted definite action and assurance from the governor.

Pilate, as usual, found a way to shun his responsibilities. He turned the matter over to them and told them to do whatever they considered necessary. "So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch" (verse 66).

What happened then? Christ rose from the dead, just as He had prophesied. The guards were powerless to stop the Lord's angel from rolling back the stone and opening the door. When they returned to the city and told the chief priests what had taken place, the chief priests advised the guards to deny the events and to spread new rumors.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees "were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you" (Matt. 28:12-14).

Thus was this complete, heinous fabrication perpetuated (verse 15). Those who persecuted Christ stopped at nothing. They adopted every despicable means to cause division among the brethren and to stop the proclamation of the Gospel. Satan was their chief counselor. One way or the other, they let him lead them.

The same is true today. Satan still wants to divide the Church and stop the proclamation of the Gospel. Those who persecute the Church are once again led and influenced by him.

### Examine your heart

Remember, gossip's root cause may be self-justification, jealousy, a spirit of vengeance or simply vanity. But whatever the cause, gossip is sin.

(Continued on page 39)



# Now Is the Time to Sprint!

By Jack R. Elliott

**W**orld events are about to explode into a veritable holocaust.

If such devastation happened today, would you be ready?

World troubles are building to a crescendo—a climactic time of tribulation worse than ever before in human history (Matt. 24:21).

When that happens, as Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong has said,

the work of this Philadelphia era of God's Church will be finished. What if it happened today?

Can you say that you have done your part to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God? Have you grown in grace and knowledge and righteous character to the extent that you will be able to stand in the day of Christ's return? Are you clothed in the wedding garment of righteousness and ready to go into the wedding

feast of the Lamb with the rest of His Church (Rev. 19:7-8)?

When this time of world crisis erupts, it will be too late to publish the Gospel, and our time to participate will be over. If we are not ready, we will not be given protection, but will be plunged into the holocaust itself. Now is the time to work!

Mr. Armstrong has said that we are now in a stepped-up, homestretch

spurt of this end-time Work God has given us to do. Are you racing down the homestretch?

The goal lies just ahead. It is almost in sight. This is not the time to let down, to grow weary of well-doing, to decide that there is time to spare. It is our time of testing. It is our time to be judged to see what we will do with our calling, and whether we will finish the race to make ourselves ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb (1 Pet. 3:17).

### Our spiritual marathon

Our situation may well be likened to a marathon across terrain unfamiliar to the runners. We must stay on the racecourse — over a tortuous track filled with stumbling blocks, pitfalls and bottomless chasms — and we must run to the finish. Do you have the courage and determination to win?

My son John once ran such a race against 75 other contestants. The running course was most grueling, over paved streets and concrete steps, up and down the steepest hills in Los Angeles, Calif.

As the runners took off on that marathon, some started out quickly, gaining the lead, and others fell back as the pack spread out.

John, then a teenager, paced himself as he had trained to do and found himself at the very last place in the pack. Besides the older, more mature runners up ahead, there was another teenager John had often run against and who always beat him. Things did not look too good!

As the race went on, some runners began to fall back, and many gave up and quit. Those who paced themselves more wisely began to move up slowly. John passed one, then two or three, but the big pack was stretched out far in front of him.

The route was difficult and demanding. Along the way some of the hills were so steep that his ankles could not bend enough to match the hill and he had to turn around and run backwards.

Going downhill was just as bad. His toes were jammed down against the front of his shoes, causing blisters to form. The muscles in the front of his legs trembled under the strain.

Up and down, mile after mile, the race went on.

Finally, a quarter of a mile from the finish line, John came, tired and exhausted, within sight of the last great hill. The sock on his left foot was now soggy with blood oozing from where the blisters had formed and burst. One of his toenails had been torn off.

But now he was out in front of all the other runners. A crowd lined both sides of the street, cheering as he went up the hill. But all he could think about was the pain, and that there was very little strength left in his body.

He tried to respond to the crowd's cheers by speeding up, but it seemed he simply could not. Wishing that he could quit running and walk, wishing more than anything else that he could just stop, he forced himself onward.

Behind him he could hear footsteps drawing closer. He knew his No. 1 opponent was coming up from behind. John was giving it all he could, but the finish line was still 200 yards up the hill. And then he started vomiting — dry heaves.

Surely he had every right to quit. Surely his body had just taken all it could take. His opponent was just behind him now. The pain was intense. He had almost no energy left. The finish line was still a hundred yards away.

Then, amidst the clamor from the sidelines, he heard a familiar voice, that of his elder brother, shouting loud and clear: "He's going to pass you! Run!"

Summoning his last ounce of strength, John sprinted for all he was worth, and with that final burst of energy he crossed the finish line ahead of his opponent. He had won!

### A race for life

We, too, are running a marathon — a race for life, far more abundant life than we have ever known. Are you running for the finish as though your life depends on it?

If a marathon runner is willing to endure all he does to win a perishable prize, how can we not be willing to exert the effort and endure the hardship caused by running out of step with the world, in order to attain the prize of our great calling?

This temporary existence is drawing to an end for each of us. Our allotted time shortens with every passing day.

As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (Revised Standard Version): "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest . . . I myself should be disqualified."

You and I entered this race for life when God granted us repentance, we were baptized and God impregnated us with the Holy Spirit.

God is judging each of us, taking special note of what we are doing with this great gift. He is pulling for us, cheering us on, and He will help us if we follow His instructions with our hearts on the goal. But we must race to the finish.

Our calling is part of God's great plan of creating children in His own Family — beings who have minds of their own and who will have perfect, righteous character, who will look, act and think like God.

As Mr. Armstrong has explained, God can create all kinds of living beings, in all kinds of shapes and composition and with amazing knowledge and ability, but He cannot create them with perfect righteous character. They must first have power of mind and choice before that kind of character can be created in them. They must of their own free will choose to behave like God.

Godly character is the ability to choose the right way, as defined in God's law, and to follow that way, even against pressures to do otherwise. Those who have perfect godly character will choose the right thing at the right time, and will resist the wrong every time. That is the kind of character God has.

It is this holy, righteous character that God is creating in His children. These separately created beings will live with God and will help continue God's creative work throughout the universe. They will have great power



godly power, but God will never entrust such power to one who has not demonstrated that he will always use it rightly.

How does God build this character in us? First we must repent of doing things our way instead of God's way. Then, at the laying on of hands of God's ministers after baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit, which enables us to comprehend the things of God. Then, as we pursue God's ways and live by every word of God, thus allowing Christ to live His life within us (Gal. 2:20), we begin to grow in the character of God.

As we continue to pursue God's purpose, subordinating our will and seeking His will, we continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of how God does things. As we continue to use the Holy Spirit, godly character grows. All this time we are nourished in the body of the Church through Jesus Christ.

Paul illustrates how Christ does this: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

#### The engagement period

We are members of God's glorious Church if we have God's Spirit within us and are being prepared as a bride for her husband. We are in the engagement period, so to speak.

Since one does not marry a stranger, the engagement is a time when hours and days are spent together, getting to know one another. It is an exciting time when two make plans for the future. It is a time when the bride-to-be makes herself ready to leave one environment and her old way of life to begin living a new way with her husband.

Are you getting to know Jesus Christ? Do you spend enough time in prayer and Bible study with Him and the Father? Are you excited about planning a future together, running the race of life hand in hand with Jesus Christ?

Are you constantly developing holy,

righteous character, using the physical exercises of work, play, family togetherness, shopping — every situation that arises? Or do you leave God in the closet, saying a quick prayer before dropping off to sleep at night and only occasionally studying your Bible? Are you doing your own thing while your allotted time runs out?

#### Where is your heart?

If our hearts are really in God's Work we will be praying in real concern for all parts of it. God rewards heartfelt prayers with answers, and they do much good. By these prayers He also knows whether we are in the race for eternal life or not. Our tithes and offerings are another important way we can serve, and they prove where our heart is. So does our service and hospitality in our local congregations.

We have been given the opportunity to be among the firstfruits to receive eternal life. Time is running out on the important special mission that God has given us to do.

That mission, as Mr. Armstrong

the excitement we had when we started the race. It has been a long grind, laying down step after step. Our attention gets pulled away from winning and becomes centered on our pains — our economic pains, our poor health, our family problems.

We often get bogged down in self-imposed burdens that rob us of the time to do those things that will win the race. We are fighting a losing battle unless we elect to do the things that count toward winning. Some things can be put off — others cannot. Satan wants to trick us into putting off the wrong things.

My son ran up and down hills for eight miles against great opposition. You and I also have to run a course against opposition — opposition from one jealous of our winning because it manifests his loss. Satan is crafty. He puts obstacles in our course and digs pits for us to fall into.

We had better keep our eyes on our Leader and on the goal ahead, or our adversary will lure us into a trap.

We are a chosen people, greatly



has explained, is to get the Gospel out as a witness to the whole world. We need to renew our enthusiasm for the Work, pray more earnestly for it and contribute whatever we can to support it.

In short, we need to get in and run the race, and we need to run to win.

All of us have problems. The long run may have worn down some of our interest. We may have lost some of

blessed with great opportunity. We are plunged into this race for life. The prize is well worth our greatest effort, and many of us have come in long way down the course. The goal is almost in sight.

Run! Else Satan will gain on you! The finish line is just ahead. A voice is crying from the sidelines, "He's going to pass you!" Now is the time to sprint!

# Why Do Some Pillars

*The apostle Paul wrote that God's people should be "steadfast, unmovable" (1 Cor. 15:58). How can we develop this quality of steadfastness?*

By Victor Hood

Every visitor to the ruins of ancient Persepolis in southwest Iran is struck by the sight of 14 soaring stone pillars.

Of 100 original columns in Darius the Great's *Apadana*, or audience hall, only these 14 have stood firm and unmoved through two and a half millennia of ravaging desert winds, pouring sand storms and exhibit hunters from various museums.

Why did a few pillars remain standing, while others fell? No one knows for certain. Even the best architect could only venture an educated guess at whatever mysterious combination of chance and physical law was responsible.

Yet what if we apply this same question, by analogy, to God's Church today?

We call leading ministers and members "pillars of the Church." What enables some "pillars" to remain steadfast and stable through out the manifold trials and tests through the years, while others collapse?

We need to know the answer to this question! Remember, Jesus Christ said, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13).

Only those who remain standing after every trial in their lives will be deemed worthy of entering God's Kingdom, Paul advised the Ephesians

to put on the whole armor of God, that they might "be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

Fortunately for us, we can know the answer to this question. God, the Architect of the universe, stands in His Word how we can remain steadfast to the end.

## This wavering world

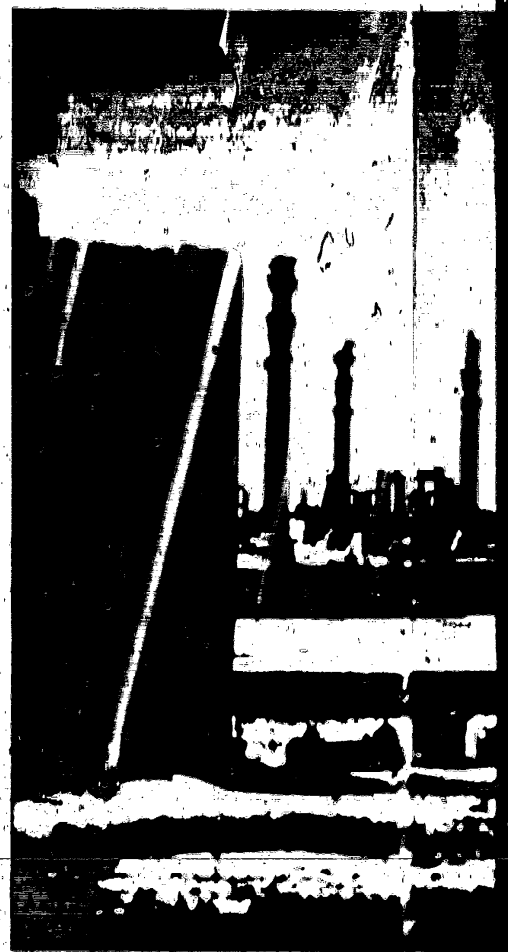
In this end time, steadfastness is a rare commodity. Why?

One reason is that, especially in the Western world, people are today more comfort-oriented than ever before. People feel challenges and adversity should be avoided at all costs.

Yet, for those whom God calls, mastering hardship is a very important challenge. A Christian's baptism is an outward sign that he has decided to handle hardship and trials differently than before.

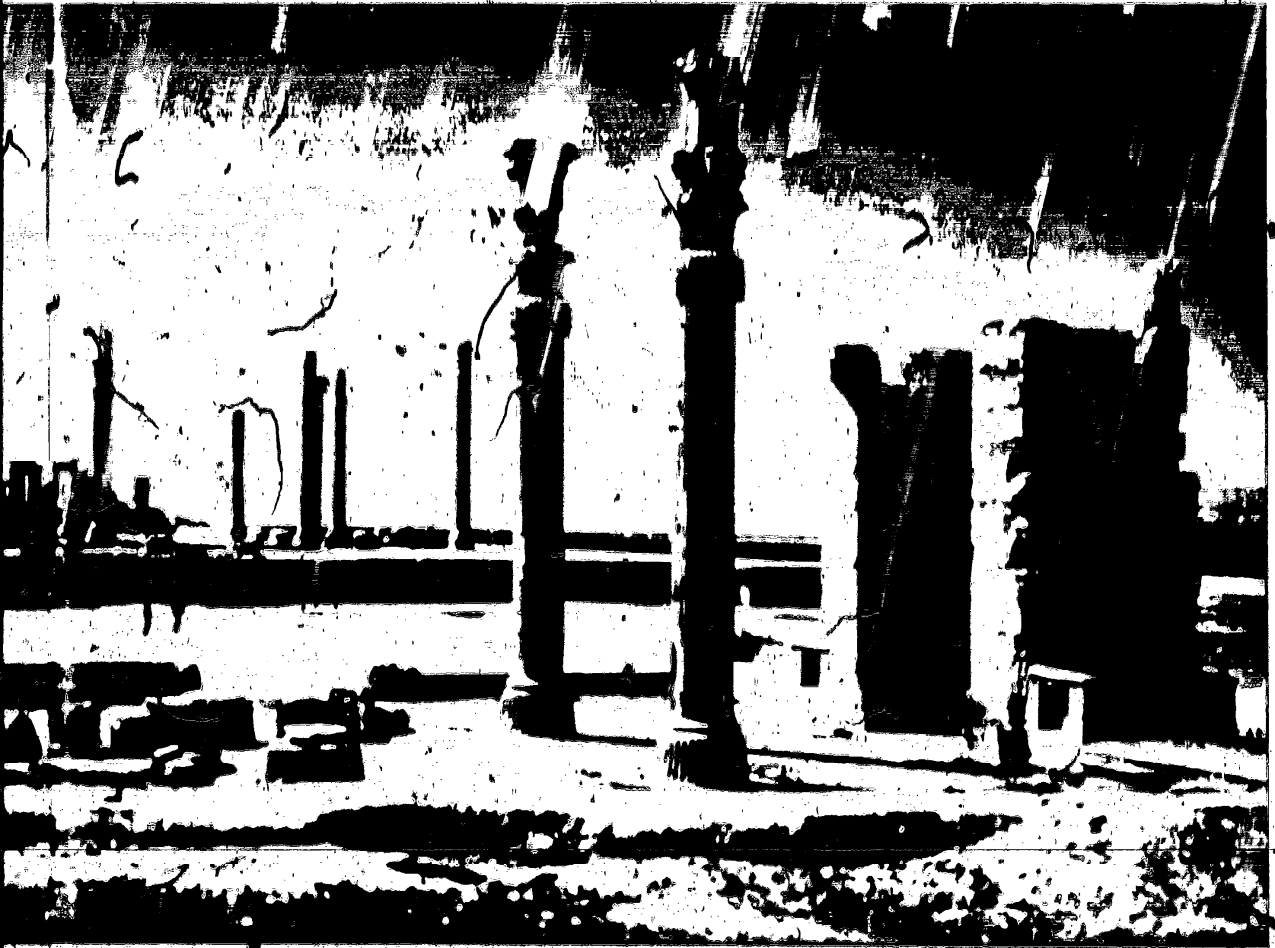
When Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy, he explained that every Christian is a soldier. "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. . . . Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2:1, 3). A soldier may wince and lay back on the enemy and flee them out; he must endure to the end of the battle.

Children and teens find it particularly difficult to develop this essential, godly trait of steadfastness, in part because they see people running away from their problems instead of persevering and solving them.



Take, for example, the social plague of divorce. When parents break up, their offspring get the message: "So need to stick around if problems crop up in marriage just get a divorce." Some are the days when newlyweds were expected to confront problems and make their marriages work. Today people take the "easy way out," namely divorce.

# lars Fall?



Young people suffer most from this approach to problem-solving. Their attitudes and character are still forming, and they absorb the behavior patterns of those around them.

Thus many youths adopt the approach that "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." If schoolwork gets tough, they drop out. If a job poses problems, they look for another. If mar-

riage makes demands, they "bail out" through divorce.

Yet God dearly wants everyone of us to stick it out, whatever trials we face. Paul admonished, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (1 Cor. 7:24).

The book of Proverbs offers some sage advice in this area: "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man

*Stone pillars at ruins of the city's synagogue are especially striking features of Jerusalem, Israeli capital of Israel. (U. I. U.) original copyright by U. I. U. used among the maps.*

that wandereth from his place" (Prov. 27:8). Those who imagine that a better job lies just beyond the horizon may be deceiving themselves. Perhaps a little more effort is the key to success right where they are at the moment! Prov-

erbs 10:4 chimes in: "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

It's easy to run away from tough competition; unfriendly colleagues and difficult assignments. But only mastering the challenges builds steadfast character like God's.

And if steadfastness of character is hard to develop in this world, steadfastness of belief is just as hard to come by.

Yes, being born into this wavering world makes it hard for the average person to believe God with the kind of simple, unwavering faith Jesus wants us to have. Why?

Think of the leading figures we encounter in this world. These can include teachers, the boss at the office, the policeman on the corner and politicians. Our experiences in the world with these figures of authority subtly influence concepts of God the Father in heaven.

Observing many, though not all, political figures shakes our confidence. As Winston Churchill wryly commented, "A politician needs the ability to foretell what will happen tomorrow, next week and next year; he also needs the ability to later explain why none of it happened."

Tragically, this disillusionment with society's leading figures all too often affects our readiness to believe God. This is why some pillars of God's Church topple and fall.

They simply forget that "God is not a man, that he should lie" (Num. 23:19). They aren't able to trust in Jesus' promise: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

#### Our Yellable God

Fortunately for us, our God knows how difficult it is for us to remain steadfast in character and belief.

Jesus Christ came to this earth as a human and knows we'd collapse if left to ourselves. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Christ understands our human tendency to waver, and has therefore blueprinted a "spiritual reinforcement program" to shore us up.

God works according to plan. God

shows us in His Word that He has a great plan in mind for mankind.

His transcendent purpose is to reproduce Himself through humanity. You and I are to become full members of God's own divine Family. (If you haven't already done so, be sure to order and read our free booklet, *Why Were You Born?*, right away.)

God's plan is the foundation of Christian steadfastness. Therefore God goes to great lengths to convince those He calls that He, and not blind coincidence, is working things out here below.

Notice the painstaking care God took with Abraham: "For when God made promise to Abraham . . . he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee" (Heb. 6:13-14).

God knew that men, distrustful as they are, often demand additional "security" regarding promises or agreements: "For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife" (verse 16).

So, because God realized even Abraham might at first find it hard to believe Him, God reassured him: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That . . . we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (verses 17-18).

#### Christ our example

The called can certainly take "strong consolation" in their knowledge of God's plan. Yet God goes even further to help us, in His ardent desire for us to endure to the end. He even sent His only begotten Son, to show us that it is possible to remain steadfast to the end:

"Let us run with patience [perseverance] the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contra-

diction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:1-3).

Our Father in heaven gives us the record of His own Son's excruciating trials, allowing us to compare our own sufferings with Christ's.

When we do, our problems seem far less intense. Sickness, job worries and inflation dwindle in significance. Remaining steadfast no longer seems so impossible. We comprehend that we "have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (verse 4).

God allows us to identify with His own Son. Yet this opportunity to identify with Jesus extends far beyond merely recognizing that He, like us, has suffered. Indeed, Jesus is our example in life's every facet: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

Are we consciously, every day, trying to live as Jesus Christ did? Do we study the biblical accounts of His life to see how He reacted to various challenges? Do we model our behavior upon His? Our ability to remain steadfast depends on doing so.

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught" (Col. 2:6-7).

#### Seize the hope

Another way God helps us remain steadfast is by pointing us constantly toward our goal: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3:14).

God realizes that rewards can positively motivate human beings. That's why He always reminds us of the glorious future ahead for those who remain steadfast in the faith: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience [endurance], that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Heb. 10:35-36).

God is saying, in effect: "Keep your eyes on the goal. I know how hard it is for you to stick it out and remain steadfast to the end. But it's worth it!"

"For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (verse 37).

In addition, God motivates us by giving us, His called-out people, a specific job to do: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

The Church of God is commissioned by God Almighty to proclaim to the world a solemn warning about where the world's sins are taking it, and to announce the good news of God's coming Kingdom in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is sure that the job will get done—sure enough to prophesy, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

Every Church member has a vital part in carrying out this great commission. God gives us the chance to support His Work through our prayers, tithes and offerings and our example of dedicated service within our church congregations.

Do we understand the awesome importance of this Work? Do our prayer lives and free time revolve around it? Do we really put our hearts into it? Our ability to be steadfast to the end depends largely on the answers to these questions.

#### "Understand the gifts"

Up to this point we haven't discussed the most important way God helps us remain steadfast. Yet without this help, nothing else we have discussed could really make us steadfast. Lacking this, we would see God's plan as only so much foolishness. Christ's example would seem 2,000 years away in the past and incomprehensible at that. God's rewards of eternal life and serving in the Kingdom would not motivate us. Nor would God's present Work on earth enthrall us to the point of devoted service.

What is this indispensable catalyst?

Paul gives us the answer in I Corinthians 2:12, 14 (Revised Standard Version): "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us

by God. . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Yes, God certainly wants to help us be steadfast. He gave man the certainty of His promises, the example of His own Son and now we see He gives to those called His own source of power: the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit helps us not only to understand God's truth, but also to develop steadfastness of character. How? Character involves the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and to choose the right.

Where does the ability to judge between right and wrong come from? The prophet Micah answers, "I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment" (Mic. 3:8).

However, God will give His Spirit of discernment only to those who have truly repented. Godly repentance involves the decision to unconditionally accept God's definitions of right and wrong as reflected in God's

Father that is vital to living faith: "We . . . have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18).

This access to God is conditional, though. The Spirit will keep the door open only if we seek God's guidance daily in fervent prayer coupled with intensive Bible study.

#### A pillar in the temple

Seeing God's boundless willingness to help us make it, we can agree with Paul when he exclaimed, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Yet each element of God's assistance presupposes our own active participation.

We must, for example, constantly study God's plan as revealed in the Bible. We must emulate Christ's example, not just admire it. God's promises to us remain inspiring only through regular, intensive Bible study. God's Spirit will shore us up only if we fervently, daily ask God to renew that Spirit within us.

God wants to create character within us as steadfast as His own. He will continue to help us do so for He



law. Only those who have set their wills to abide by God's definitions will receive the Holy Spirit, which "God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32).

The Holy Spirit is also the key to developing steadfastness of faith. The ability to believe God—faith—is a gift of the Spirit, according to Paul (Gal. 5:22). The Spirit allows us, in prayer, that intimate access to our

Father that is vital to living faith: "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

Are we willing to do our part and patiently strive for steadfastness?

Look what Jesus promises: "Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God" (Rev. 3:11-12). □

# Good News on God's Work in South Africa

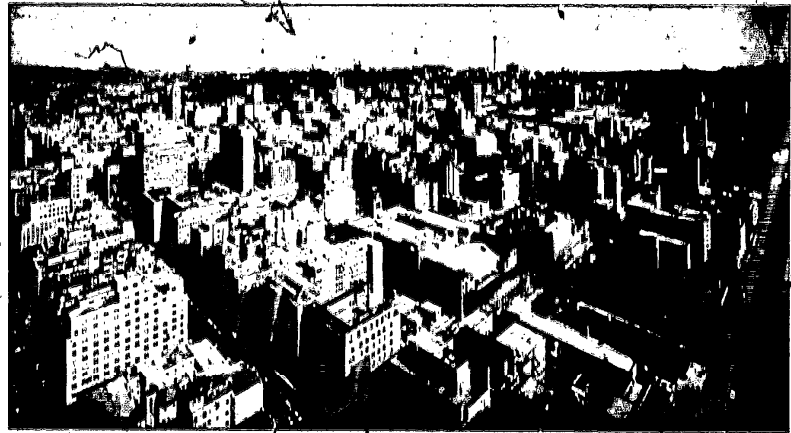
## How It Developed

The Work of God in this Philadelphia era was introduced into southern Africa in 1954 when the *World Tomorrow* program began to be broadcast over Radio Lourenço Marques in the then Portuguese colony of Mozambique. This broadcast continued until 1972, while the mailing list of *The Plain Truth* increased and readers corresponded with the office in Great Britain.

Evangelist Gerald Waterhouse conducted the first Church service in Johannesburg, South Africa, on March 18, 1963, with 33 people attending. A few weeks later 42 took the Passover, and the following year Mr. Waterhouse established the Johannesburg Office.

Through those early years members in southern Africa became firmly grounded in the doctrines of God's Church and the prophecies of God's Kingdom.

By 1967 *Plain Truth* subscribers numbered 9,000, with more than 800 readers taking the *Bible Correspondence Course*. Most new subscribers



The skyline of Johannesburg, South Africa, a bustling, modern city and the site of the Work's office in southern Africa. God's Work in southern Africa is enjoying substantial increases. (All photos, Good News)

learned about *The Plain Truth* through advertisements in the family magazine *Personality*.

In 1969, Robert Fahey was transferred from Australia to handle the responsibilities of the southern Africa office and Church.

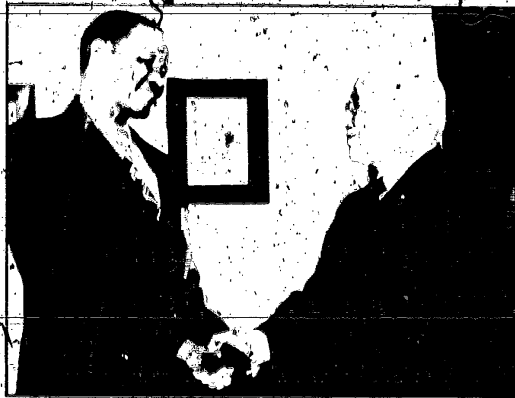
Beginning in 1971 the *World Tomorrow* television program was broadcast free on the government television station in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Four years later the *World Tomorrow* radio pro-

gram began to be broadcast weekly, free, by the government-owned Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation.

By 1975 the *Plain Truth* mailing list was up to 70,000 subscribers. Some of this growth was because of responses from a newsstand program at outlets throughout South Africa.

In July, 1978, after Mr. Fahey was transferred to Pasadena, Roy McCarthy was sent from the Dutch Office to serve as regional director in

southern Africa. Seventeen churches (1,349 members) and 31 Bible studies are now in southern Africa. The *Plain Truth* mailing list stands at 85,500, with 40,000 additional copies appearing on newsstands each month. Twenty-two employees, of which 15 are ordained ministers, serve in God's Work here; three local church elders assist. *The World Tomorrow* continues to be broadcast on the medium-wave and shortwave bands from Radio Swaziland.



Mr. Armstrong is greeted by Chief Kaizer Mantanzima of the Transkei at a 1976 meeting. Mr. Armstrong met several government officials.

## Mr. Armstrong's Visits

Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong's three trips to southern Africa have been highlights of God's Work here in recent years.

Mr. Armstrong was first here from May 26 to June 22, 1976, and spoke to both the late South African President Nico Diederichs and South African Prime Minister John Vorster. He also met Chief Kaizer Mantanzima of the Transkei and a number of South African cabinet ministers and members of Parliament.

The pastor general received wide press coverage during his travels. He gave five *Plain Truth* lectures, five lectures to prominent service clubs and a number of press, radio and television interviews.

The second visit, in November, 1976, was cut short when Mr. Armstrong sprained his ankle after addressing a meeting of *Plain Truth* readers in Port Elizabeth four days after arriving.

Robert Fahey continued the planned engagements.



which included meetings with government officials in Lesotho, the president and prime minister of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and lectures to service clubs.

Mr. Armstrong made his third visit during March, 1977, addressing the South-West African Constitutional Conference and the Transkeian Parliament.

He also conferred with King Sobhuza II of Swaziland and a number of South African leaders in government and industry.

## Regional Director

Roy McCarthy returned with his wife to South Africa in 1978 to become regional director for God's Work in southern Africa. He succeeded Robert Fahey, now Mr. Armstrong's executive assistant.

Both Dr. McCarthy and his wife, the former Tine Visser, graduated from the University of Cape Town. While Dr. McCarthy was studying medicine, his wife to be was studying for a degree in languages.

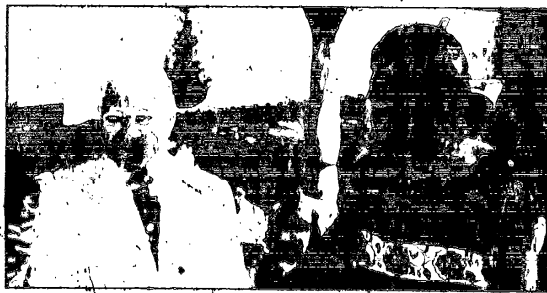
The McCarthys' first contact with God's Work was through listening to the



Roy McCarthy

*World Tomorrow* program on Radio Lourenço Marques. Two years of studying and checking into the Bible led Dr. McCarthy to give up his medical practice in 1966 and request baptism.

Then, in September, 1967, the McCarthys and their four children moved to Brickel



Mr. Armstrong conferred with King Sobhuza II of Swaziland in 1977, during one of three trips Mr. Armstrong made to southern Africa. Mr. Armstrong's trips have been the highlights of the Work in southern Africa in recent years.

Wood, England, to attend Ambassador College. (All four of the McCarthys' children later graduated from Ambassador.) Dr. McCarthy served in the office of student body president during the last of his three years at Ambassador.

After graduation he directed the Dutch arm of God's Work and supervised the Mail Processing Department in Britain. For four years Dr. McCarthy commuted from his home in England to the

Netherlands every week to conduct Church services.

In 1974, he and his wife moved to Holland to oversee the translation and distribution of *De Echte Waarheid* (the Dutch *Plain Truth*), as well as handle all advertising and correspondence. He also pastored two churches.

Dr. and Mrs. McCarthy are happy to be back in their home country and enjoy serving in this area of God's Work.

## Growth in Southern Africa

God's Work in southern Africa is enjoying substantial increases.

During 1981 mail income was up nearly 40 percent in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. Some 187,000 letters were received, and literature sent out from the Johannesburg office totaled 315,000 pieces.

In two years the *Plain Truth* mailing list has grown 64 percent to 85,000. This is largely due to a 1980 advertising campaign and to a steady flow of responses to the newsstand program. Some 26,000 new *Plain Truth* readers have been added to the list through 40 advertisements, 21 in newspapers and 19 in family and news magazines. Together these publications had a circulation of about four million.

*The Good News* is sent to more than 3,800 people, and more than 18,000 (21 percent of subscribers) have started the Bible Correspondence Course.

One earlier advertisement,

which quoted extensively from Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong's 1979 address to a group of ambassadors in Tokyo, Japan, brought exciting results.

Placed in the *Sunday Times* (circulation 480,000) in August, 1979, it drew 975 responses. Four hundred ninety-seven (51 percent) renewed their subscriptions after receiving a renewal letter, and after one year one was a member, 16 were co-workers, 36 were donors and 258 were studying the Bible Correspondence Course.

Newsstand outlets throughout southern Africa distributed 420,000 magazines in 1981; 19,000 people were added to the *Plain Truth* mailing list from this method of promotion.

In 1980, for the first time for this part of the world, more than one million *Plain Truths* were printed and distributed in all. In 1981 the number increased to 1,285,000.

## Zimbabwe, Mauritius and Zambia

The Johannesburg, South Africa, Office oversees the Church in Zimbabwe and handles the printing of *The Plain Truth* (17,500 copies) for that country. One full-time minister, Ron Stoddart, and a local church elder, George Esthivoulos, serve 211 brethren in Zimbabwe's two churches and two outlying Bible studies. Most of the members live in or near the two main towns, Salisbury and Bulawayo.

After several years of civil strife and bush war, the country is settling down to a more orderly way of life, although



Ron Stoddart

the friction between tribal groups is far from removed.

The Johannesburg Office also administers God's Work in the island nation of Mauritius and in Zambia. Thirty-three members live in Mauritius, and 24 live in Zambia. *Plain Truth* circulation in Mauritius is 1,900 and in Zambia is 1,100.

During 1980 and 1981 ministers from South Africa traveled to Mauritius to conduct the Feast of Tabernacles. In 1981, 63 people attended, with Sydney Hull from the Bloemfontein church officiating.

The 1981 Feast of Tabernacles was also observed on the Zambian-Zimbabwean border near Victoria Falls. For the first time all brethren from these two countries could meet together; attendance was 378. □

# Earth's Oldest Living Things - What They Teach Us

By John Hallford



On a windswept mountain in western Nevada, more than 8,000 feet above sea level, stands a forest of little trees - the bristlecone pines.

They aren't much to look at - just eroded stumps with one or two clumps of green pine needles to show that there is still a spark of life in them. Compared to the giant redwoods, the great sequoias, the cedars of Lebanon and most other trees, the bristlecone pines are insignificant indeed.

But these trees have one claim to fame. They are the oldest living things on earth.

Incredible as it may seem, some of the trees in the bristlecone pine forest are more than 4,000 years old! No, that is not a misprint - four thousand years old. The oldest, known as Methuselah, may have started its life about 4,600 years ago.

When Christ walked the earth, these trees had already lived two millennia. Even as Noah's ark was settling on the mountains of Ararat, the seeds of the bristlecones were perhaps beginning to sprout. And they have kept growing ever since.

It hasn't been an easy life. These mountains are not the most hospitable place on earth. But, incredibly, the bristlecone pines have stayed alive. Not only alive, but actively, productively and usefully alive. And, in that, there is a lesson for every member of God's Church.

## "A tree that grows"

A favorite hymn in the Worldwide Church of God hymnal is Psalm 1: "Blessed and happy is the man..." The third verse, you remember, goes: "He shall be a tree that grows, planted by the river's side, which in season yields its fruit, green its leaves, abide."

The psalmist, David, saw an analogy between a "blessed and happy man" and a tree. To fully understand that analogy, you need to know something about trees, how they live and what they do. So please bear with me for a short botany lesson.

Four main parts, make up a tree:

the roots, trunk, branches and leaves.

The roots anchor the tree in the soil and gather essential minerals and water from the soil so the tree may make the food it needs to live.

The trunk carries the moisture and minerals from the roots through the branches to the leaves and then carries food, in the form of sugars, back to the roots.

The branches have just one purpose: to make sure the leaves can reach the light. They will twist and turn in all directions so that their leaves can see the sun.

By a chemical reaction known as photosynthesis, the leaves transform the inorganic minerals from the soil into organic compounds that feed the tree. And, of course, trees produce, in season, the fruits and nuts by which they reproduce themselves.

But a tree does not live just for itself. Every function of a tree's existence has a beneficial effect, not only to the tree, but on its entire environment.

For instance, the roots not only anchor the tree in the ground, they anchor the soil itself, holding it in place against erosion.

Then, of course, the trunk and branches provide timber for building, and firewood for fuel.

We have already seen that a tree produces food through its leaves and fruit. In one sense, all physical life depends on this process, since animals and man cannot produce food from inorganic material as plants can.

The leaves have another vital function. They manufacture oxygen, thus helping to keep the atmosphere breathable. Animals and man, as you know, breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. So, without trees and other green plants, the air we breathe would soon be stale and unable to support life.

A tree does this as long as it lives. If it ever stops giving out, it dies.

Still with me? Then perhaps you are beginning to see why a "blessed and happy man" (or woman) is like a tree planted by the river's side.

Not only does such a person live a strong, healthy life, but he does not live it just for himself. Every aspect of his life is beneficial to others. His

work, his play, his prayers and all his activities benefit other people.

Like the tree, such a person does not just exist — his life brings success, happiness and comfort to all those around him.

He is indeed like a tree planted by a river, with an abundant supply of water and good, rich soil. He has resources and uses those resources. In season he "yields his fruit," and others benefit.

#### Not so fortunate?

"Oh," some will say, "that's fine — a beautiful analogy for those who are called in the prime of life with a good education, a mate in the Church, healthy children, a good income and a nice home for entertaining. But many of us whom God has called are old, alone, poor, sick, lacking in education, crippled, in prison or living in poor countries and barely able to scratch out a living."

Such brethren might feel they aren't exactly like "a tree planted by the river's side." They are more like a tree planted — well, on a barren mountaintop, for instance.

Which brings us back to the bristlecone pine. These patriarchs of the plant world have had to fight to maintain their hold on life.

Their roots have had to struggle for the sparse nutrients of the mountain soil. Their trunks and branches have had to withstand the ravages of thousands of winter storms and blizzards. They are torn, twisted and battered. Many of them have hardly any life left.

You'd think they were dead, until you look closely. Then you'll find one branch with a few pine needles connected to the roots by a narrow strip of living tissue.

But the point is that while the tree is alive, it does what a tree should do, and gives what a tree should give. The few leaves that



remain produce life-giving oxygen. The few seeds that are produced are of the same quality as those that come from trees thousands of years younger.

Even though the tree may be

old, living in harsh circumstances and crippled beyond recognition, it is not useless. It still produces good fruit. The quantity might not be the same as a tree "planted by the river's side," but the quality is the same.

#### You are useful

Here, then, is a lesson for the Christian who might feel he or she hasn't much to give.

Such a person might be old and infirm, living in the most wretched poverty or confined by disease or illness to a wheelchair. This article is probably being read by brethren who are separated from other Church members by great distances — the only converted person in a nation of millions, perhaps. Or maybe widows without transport, resources or health. Or a member whom God has called while that person is serving a long prison sentence.

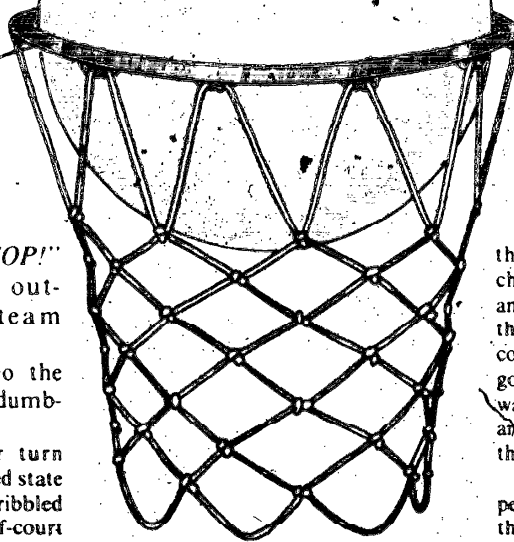
Such members might sometimes feel useless. But there is no such thing as a useless member of the Body of Christ, any more than there is such a thing as a useless tree. A tree, however humble, can serve as long as it is alive. And a member of God's Church, in whom the Spirit of God resides, can always help the Work.

Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong once told a group of Ambassador College faculty members, "God does not call people as a favor, but because He has something for them to do." I wrote it down in my Bible because I wanted to remember it. I think you will, too.

Your circumstances do not cut you off from being useful. Christ knows our circumstances and puts us to work in the Body of Christ as it

(Continued on page 25)

# Are You Headed Toward the Right Goal?



**"S**top! STOP! STOP!" screamed the outraged home-team fans.

"Turn around, Tom! Go the other way!" bellowed the dumb-founded basketball coach.

But Tom didn't stop or turn around. Instead, in a bewildered state of euphoria, Tom hurriedly dribbled the basketball across the half-court line to the free-throw line, then past the free-throw line to the three-second lane and finally laid the ball up into the basket to make a perfect goal — *for the other team!*

Yes, remarkable as it seemed, Tom, one of the best basketball players on the team, had become confused because of the intense excitement and screaming bedlam that filled the gymnasium during this important game. For one brief moment Tom became disoriented and actually scored a goal — two points — for the opposite side.

I was there. I saw the proud look on Tom's face melt into horror as he realized the basket went on the scoreboard for the competition.

But the real pity is not that Tom scored two points for the opposing team that day. After all, that event

By Bernie Schnippert

was a school basketball game that occurred 15 years ago. No, the real pity is that this story is relived over and over by some people in God's Church. It is relived because some people, in their spiritual lives, profess to make the Kingdom of God their all-encompassing goal when in reality they do not. In reality, they are scoring points for the other side.

#### Couldn't happen to you?

Be careful. Don't let yourself believe that you could not be one of these people. After all, Tom did not intentionally score that basket for the opposing side.

No, the frenzy of the packed gym,

the distractions of the shouting cheerleaders, the popcorn vendors and the pounding of tennis shoes on the floor all served to distract and confuse him. He believed he was going in the right direction when he was not. You, too, could believe you are "on track" and actually be going the wrong way.

If some of us think it couldn't happen to us, perhaps we have forgotten the parable of the rich man in Matthew 19.

This young man professed a willingness to do any "good thing" that would lead to eternal life (verse 16). But when Christ told him he should "go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor," the rich man became disheartened and "went away sorrowful" (verses 21-22). His response betrayed his true priorities. Although he professed to want the Kingdom of God, he was still seeking the riches and mammon of this life first.

Yes, it is possible to convince yourself that you are seeking first the Kingdom of God when indeed you are not. And you had better know for sure. Christ said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37).

Illustration by Terry Sarracino

In other words, he who has another person or another goal before the goal of the Kingdom of God is not worthy of Christ and will not be in God's Kingdom.

But how can you know for sure? How can you know whether you only believe you are heading toward the Kingdom of God while in reality you, like Tom, are "scoring points for the other side"?

#### Look for the symptoms

The answer is that you can know by looking, to see if you display the symptoms of going after the wrong goal.

And make no mistake, there are symptoms. Even Tom, in that basketball game, had symptoms or indicators that he was heading the wrong direction. The crowd was screaming at him, the coach was going wild and his teammates were running after him and desperately attempting to block his shot.

He should have realized something was wrong. He could certainly have realized his mistake had he hesitated just a moment. If he had stopped just long enough to collect his thoughts and reconfirm that he was heading the right way, he would have known better before it was too late.

Unfortunately, we, like Tom, tend to be the last to know that we are going in the wrong direction. But it's not too late to take stock of your direction if you only will. See if the following symptoms apply to you.

*Symptom: You are worried that people will find out what you're "really like."*

Of course, all of us hide our true selves to some extent. But if you have a conscious or overriding fear of people "finding out," then you are probably trying to hide things that show you are not living up to God's standards. You are constructing a veneer for people to see or hear while you cover motives, attitudes or actions that do not conform to God's way.

Such a religious veneer usually takes the form of trying to look and sound righteous — in other words, being with the right people at the right places or using the proper religious-sounding phrases or buzzwords

— but not really being the proper person. Such a state of mind is mere hypocrisy.

If this sounds like you, you could be in the same category as the scribes and Pharisees whom Christ upbraided. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt. 23:25-26).

One particularly insidious form of this hypocrisy occurs when the affected party doesn't know he is a hypocrite! He truly believes that external appearances are the totality of Christianity. He doesn't even see inside to his sins.

This type of person may even sincerely believe he is trying to seek the Kingdom of God first. What he really wants, however, is the adulation of men who think he is righteous. This type of person, however sincere, is not seeking God's Kingdom first. Rather, he is looking first for the recognition of other people.

*Symptom: You are not overcoming your faults or growing spiritually.*

A person truly moving toward God's true goal for man should be growing more and more as he progresses. It should be obvious to him and to others that he is getting closer to that goal. Since the path to God's Kingdom is developing holy, righteous character, we can know if we're on the road by looking for spiritual progress.

If you are not growing closer to the goal, then you are like the Jews who returned to the promised land after the captivity.

Commissioned to rebuild God's Temple, they did not make good progress. Instead, they worked on their own homes and built for themselves while they outwardly expressed spiritual intentions of wishing to do God's Work.

Therefore, God said to the prophet Haggai, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built [in other

words, they had excuses]. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:2-5).

How about you? Are you helping to build God's spiritual Temple? Is the working of God's Holy Spirit more and more evident in your life?

If not, you are not giving the goal of spiritual growth top priority in your life. If you're not getting closer to God, it is because you're not working on it.

#### Pursuing the physical

*Symptom: Your mind is usually on physical things.*

If your mind is constantly filled with thoughts of work or worries about food, shelter, clothing or luxuries, then your goals are no different from those of the unconverted world around you.

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:31-33).

What your mind is on can be a dead giveaway to identify what your goal really is. If your mind is on the Kingdom of God and things connected with it, then the Kingdom is your goal. If your mind is mostly on physical things, then perhaps they are your goal.

Maybe you are making God's Kingdom the most important thing in your life. But maybe you are not. Maybe the most important thing in your life is earning a living, buying a new car or a new house or finding a mate.

If so, read Christ's analogy in which He likens the Kingdom of heaven to a "treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt. 13:44).

Is God's Kingdom so important in your life that all other goals are secondary to it? Would you sell all that you had (if the time came when you

should) in order to seek first the Kingdom?

Read on in verses 45 and 46. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Are you like the man who found the pearl of great price? Is the pearl of God's Kingdom the most important thing in your life? Are you treating it so? If not, then God's Kingdom is not truly your greatest goal. You may be going in the wrong direction.

Those of us in the stands who incredulously watched Tom, the basketball player mentioned earlier, couldn't help but ask a similar question: "What is Tom thinking about?" we wondered.

And with good reason. His mind seemed to be somewhere else than on the game. Even 15 years later, those of us who sit around and tell the story of Tom and his basketball fiasco still wonder whether he was thinking about his girl friend or how his uniform fit when he should have been paying attention to the game. Don't let this happen to you.

• *Symptom: You spend most of your spare time on physical pursuits.*

What you do with your time tells exactly what you are doing with your life, for time is life. Do you spend time praying, studying, fasting, serving? Or do you spend time foolishly wandering after material pursuits to the neglect of your spiritual life? Or do you simply waste time?

Just as some people in this world are forever occupied with learning, yet never learn the truth, so are some people forever occupied, but not with the things that concern God's Kingdom.

How can you profess to love the things that be of God if you never — or too rarely — take the time to do things that will draw you close to God? You could be like the college student who professes to be majoring in French but spends all of his time on the ski slopes instead. At the end of his college career, he knows more about skiing than about the courses for which he paid.

How about you? Are you profess-

ing to "major" in the Kingdom, but putting your time elsewhere? Examine yourself to be sure.

• *Symptom: Your physical goals are incompatible with your spiritual goals.*

Even though the Kingdom should be our No. 1 goal, we should also have secondary, physical goals if we are to truly accomplish things in this life. But if your physical goals conflict with your spiritual goals, you will forsake the one for the other. You simply cannot go both directions at once.

For example, it would be pretty difficult for a person who says he embraces the ideals of God's Kingdom and wishes to love his brother as Christ taught to be a professional soldier.

And a businessman who ruthlessly exploits his employees or manipulates or cons his prospects is denying, by his actions, that his real goal is the Kingdom of God. He is just plain going in one direction while he professes that he is going in another. His behavior is inconsistent with his ideals.

Such behavior was typified, by the scribes and Pharisees of Christ's time, for Christ said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8).

If your physical actions conflict with your spiritual ideals, then the physical must be more important to you than the Kingdom.

#### Seek God's Kingdom

Now that you have analyzed the symptoms, what should you do if you find you are indeed seeking the wrong goal?

First, admit to yourself that you are headed off course, and resolve to change. Realize that your life is not your own and that whatever carnal desires you may have or wish to pursue, you have nonetheless been bought with the blood of Christ.

You are not your own person anymore. It is not your decision to make about what direction to go with your life.

"For," as the apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 6:20, "ye are bought

with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

If the realization that you have been bought by the blood of Christ is not enough to turn your goals around, then realize further this: All other goals besides the Kingdom of God are merely temporary anyway. The physical things — the material desires and wants that tend to draw us humans like magnets — will dissolve with the elements when this world passes away.

Take Christ's advice to "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" by seeking the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:19-20).

Be careful that you do not think the physical cares of this life are more important than the spiritual. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

And finally, realize that you will receive whatever physical things are good for you in this life if you do seek the Kingdom of God first. This great truth, expressed by Christ, is important to remember.

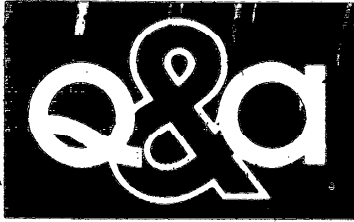
"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [your physical needs] shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

My old friend Tom the basketball player today lives somewhere in the United States. From time to time, I'm sure he must remember the day he blindly scored a perfect lay-up and added two points to the opposing team's score. I can imagine how he feels when he thinks about it: I'm certain that he desperately wishes he could turn back the clock, and this time listen to the coach who hollered to him from the sideline.

The game is not yet over for you. And the coach's advice to Tom 15 years ago is as good for us spiritually — if we are not seeking God's Kingdom first — as it was for Tom then. The coach's advice was this: "Stop! Turn around! Go the other way!"

Seek the Kingdom first! □





**Would you explain John 10:30? What did Christ mean when He said He and His Father are one?**

Jesus was revealing that there is one Godhead, or one God: Family, who are of one mind and purpose. But that Family is now composed of two individuals, God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. This is clearly stated in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The "Word" or "Spokesman" was the One who later became Jesus Christ (see verse 14).

Hebrews 1 also shows conclusively that Christ was and is now God: "God... Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:1-3). God says of Christ: "Let all the angels of God worship him" (verse 6). Only a member of the God Family is worthy of worship.

But the God Family is not limited to God the Father and Jesus Christ: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). Hebrews 2:7-8 shows that man, like Christ, was made for a while "a little lower than the angels," but that he is to be crowned "with glory and honour."

Everything is to be put "in subjection under his feet," but "now we see not, yet all things put under him" because the resurrection to immortality hasn't occurred yet.

So the Family of God will eventually be expanded to include all of mankind who choose to follow God's way. Christians "now are... the sons

of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). 1 Corinthians 15:53 adds, "For this... mortal must put on immortality."

Here the Bible says plainly that resurrected Christians are to be immortal like Christ. When we are changed, our mortal bodies will become spirit bodies like His (Phil. 3:20-21).

**Who was the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:21-25)?**

Some days after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, Peter engaged in an extended discourse with the risen Christ. Concluding the conversation: "Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the [last Passover] supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain [alive] until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!'" (John 21:20-22. Revised Standard Version).

Verse 24 then reveals the identity of this disciple and future apostle: "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things; and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true." This could be none other than the author of "the Gospel According to John."

John was also favored to be among the disciples who witnessed a foretaste of the Kingdom of God in vision (Matt. 17:1-6).

It was also John who was the first disciple to believe Christ had risen from the dead. Shortly after Christ's resurrection, Mary Magdalene came and saw that the tomb was empty. "So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved" (John 20:2, RSV).

John outran Simon Peter to the tomb, but impetuous Peter went in first (verses 3-7). "Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed" (verse 8).

**Would you explain what law Paul was referring to when he**

said, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rom. 3:20)?

Paul is referring to the whole system of law. No law-keeping of any kind can justify a person in God's sight — it takes the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. No law can justify sin. Only Christ's blood can pay for our sins and justify us to God. Even keeping the commandments perfectly for the rest of our lives would not pay for the sins we have committed in the past by breaking the law.

Sin is the breaking of God's laws (1 John 3:4). The penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The only way to have that penalty removed is through the grace of God. But, once forgiven, we must stop sinning — stop breaking God's laws (Rom. 6:1-2).

The same principle is applicable even in adherence to the laws of our land. Take a traffic violation, for example. When a person receives a citation for breaking the law by running a stop sign, a fine is usually imposed. Regardless of how many times a person continues to stop at the sign, having received the citation, the fine must still be paid.

This is the case with God's law. No matter how much we keep the law after having broken it, the penalty must still be paid. This is why Paul explains justification is apart from the keeping of the law.

Paul makes it quite plain that it is not obedience to the law that justifies us. Instead, it is the faith and sacrifice of Christ coupled with our belief in Him that justifies or makes us right with God. But this by no means implies that we must stop obeying the law. We must have active, living faith in God as Abraham had, which will even lead us to a more complete obedience to God's perfect and righteous law. We are to have good works, but we are not to depend on those works for our salvation.

The simplest way to understand the law and justification question is this: Only Christ's sacrifice and His life in us can forgive sin and save us (Rom. 5:10). But Christ will not save any unless they keep His laws (John 14:15, 15:10, 1 John 2:3-6). Faith without obedience is dead!

## PERSONAL

(Continued from page 1)

versation with God concerning the righteousness of Job.

God *allowed* Satan to afflict Job — but God placed a limit on *how far* Satan could go! God is SUPREME RULER of the universe.

At first, God allowed Satan to take all Job possessed, but not to harm Job's person. Job failed to crack under the test. Satan argued that a man would give up all he possessed to save his own life — but if only he could afflict Job's *person*, Job would turn against God. So God now gave Satan permission to go this much further — but to spare his life.

In like manner, the Satan-influenced (or Satan-possessed, as the case may be) Balaam well *knew* God had set limits to his powers. Satan is the god and invisible ruler of *this* world — yet, God is SUPREME RULER over all. Every ruler has authority and power *only* within his own boundary lines or jurisdiction. There are NO boundary lines on God's rulership — but there are on Satan's. And he well knows it! There could be no sin — no evil — unless God *allowed* it! And if God did not allow it, there could be no free moral agency — no free choice — and that would nullify God's PURPOSE!

Notice that even Satan's ministers talk about God, and masquerade as God's ministers (II Cor. 11:13-15). This high priest of Satan knew that Israel was God's own nation, under God's protection. This divine protection set a boundary line on his power to harm God's nation. Satan is well aware that there are limits set on his powers.

Balaam would have been overjoyed to be able to curse, harm or destroy Israel. But he *knew* — he was *fully aware* — that doing this was beyond his power — *unless*, as God allowed Satan to go further than originally allowed in afflicting Job, the Almighty would now allow him to curse and harm Israel. Balaam *wanted* to curse Israel. He *wanted* the fee!

Now, with this in mind, notice what Balaam said.

When the highest princes of Moab came, on the second visit, he said, "If Balak would give me his house full of

silver and gold, *I cannot go beyond* the word of the Lord" (Num. 22:18).

It was not a matter of Balaam being willing. He was willing to harm Israel. It was a matter of *having the power* to do so. After he went with the emissaries of Balak, he said to the king: "Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now *any power* at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall [must — Revised Standard Version] I speak" (verse 38).

Later, Balaam said that God had "blessed Israel, and *I cannot reverse*

You may be ABLE, if willing, to go further in sin or wrong ways.

You are a free moral agent. But to go as far as you dare IS THE WAY OF SATAN, not the way of GOD!

GOD'S WAY is to go . . . just as far in the RIGHT direction as possible.

it" (Num. 23:20). Of Israel, Balaam said: "The Lord *his God* is with him . . . there is NO ENCHANTMENT against Jacob, neither is there *any divination* against Israel" (verses 21, 23).

Notice, God is the God of Israel — Israel's God — not Balaam's God. Balaam practiced divination and enchantment — and God did not allow it AGAINST ISRAEL.

Balaam *wanted* to go JUST AS FAR in the *wrong way* as he dared.

That is Satan's way!

Now just *how far* may you safely go in doing what you *want* instead of what you *ought* to do?

Haven't you often compromised on this? Haven't you often *wanted* to do something you knew you really ought not? And haven't you sometimes gone at least *part way*, thinking that perhaps if you didn't go *all the way*

in doing wrong, you might "get away with it"?

How many, under temptation to commit fornication or adultery, go *part way* — perhaps just a little "necking"? And how often does that lead to going just a *little farther* — and then perhaps just a little farther still?

Going that first *part way* is already committing the act *spiritually* — according to the spirit or intent of the law! When you did that you were already GUILTY in God's sight.

Of course, Satan was *restrained*, and UNABLE to go further than he did against Job. Balaam was *restrained*, and UNABLE to go further than he did against the children of Israel.

You may be ABLE, if *willing*, to go further in sin or wrong ways. You are a free moral agent. But to go as far as you dare IS THE WAY OF SATAN, NOT THE WAY OF GOD!

GOD'S WAY is to go, sincerely, wholeheartedly, and earnestly, just as far in the RIGHT direction as possible. God's way is to do MORE than is required of you.

Jesus said: "Doth he [a master] thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:9-10).

If you do not even go as far in the wrong direction as you feel safe — if you do what is commanded — what God, through His Word, shows is YOUR DUTY, but do not go *even farther* in the RIGHT direction, doing MORE than your duty. Jesus Christ says you are an UNPROFITABLE SERVANT! Plainly, Christ expects us to do MORE than duty in the *right* direction! And what happens to the unprofitable servant?

In the parable of the talents, Jesus said of the one who kept what he had, but did not grow in knowledge and grace — did not overcome — did what was his duty and no more — "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30).

The Christian life is a life of growing, improving in character — of overcoming — of becoming more and more like Christ! □

## MINISTRY

# The 'Day of the Lord' Continues

Prepared by Richard Sedlitz

DAY OF THE LORD

The previous two ministudies covered prophesied events leading up to and including the first six trumpet plagues of the "Day of the Lord." This concluding study of the most eventful year of earth's history focuses on the final punishments God must bring upon a world that refuses to heed the chastisement of its loving Creator.

1. After the six trumpet plagues of God have exacted their toll upon the earth, will most of rebellious, hard-to-convince mankind remain unrepentant? Rev. 9:20-21.

2. But even during these plagues will God continue to plead with men to turn from their evil ways? Rev. 11:3-6.

Notice that the "two witnesses" are given spiritual protection as they deliver God's last warnings to all the earth.

3. Once the mission of the two witnesses is accomplished, will God allow the "beast" (the government of the final resurrection of the Roman Empire) to kill them? Verse 7. Where will their dead bodies be displayed? Verse 8. What will be the reaction of the world, especially of the people in the nations that will then be united under the Beast, when God's two witnesses are finally put to death? Verses 9-10.

4. What will God, who has the power over life and death, do for the two dead witnesses? Verses 11-12. Do some at this time begin to acknowledge God and give glory to Him? Verse 13. Do these events clearly take place at the end of the second woe, or sixth trumpet? Verse 14.

5. What happens when the seventh trumpet sounds and the third woe begins? Verse 15. Is this clearly the time of Christ's Second Coming to take over the governments of the world and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth? Same verse.

We saw that, following hard on the heels of the first four trumpet plagues, warfare will rage. Hundreds of millions will die. Mankind will now be facing cosmicolide — annihilation of the human race.

And so it is when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet that mankind will be saved from extinction by the return of Jesus Christ to intervene in

the titanic war that will be raging on earth — the war that would otherwise lead to the destruction of all life.

6. But what is the reaction of rebellious mankind at this time? Verse 18, first five words.

Jesus Christ, the new ruler of the world, will not be meekly accepted by the power-crazed nations already engaged in an all-out struggle for world domination. Men have never wanted God's rule — even though it is the only way to peace, happiness and joy. And so the nations are found angry at Christ's return.

7. What else occurs at the blowing of the seventh and last trumpet? Verses 14, 15. Notice the words "thy wrath is come" in verse 18.

The only thing described at the blowing of the seventh trumpet that could possibly be the third woe is the wrath of God. But all the trumpets have been plagues, pouring out the wrath of God — His punishments to bring this hell-bent world to its senses and to God. We will see that the seventh trumpet actually completes God's wrath.

8. Exactly what "fills up" or completes the wrath of God? Rev. 15:1. Are these plagues to be poured out in Christ's presence on earth? Rev. 11:15, 14:10.

All of the preceding six trumpets have heralded the unleashing of different types of grievous plagues upon this rebellious world. But notice that the seventh and last trumpet completes this wrath by ushering in the terrifying seven last plagues.

Just as the seventh seal is subdivided into the seven trumpets, so the seventh trumpet is divided into the seven last plagues, which are and constitute the seventh trumpet or third woe. Thus the seven last plagues are also a part of the seventh seal.

And the seven last plagues are poured out at Christ's coming — actually in the very presence of Jesus Christ and all the holy angels — immediately after He returns to save humanity from extinction in the warfare that constitutes the second woe.

9. Are these final plagues of wrath compared to "vials" about to be poured out? Rev. 15:7. On

# MINISTRY

what are they poured out? Rev. 16:1. Read the rest of this chapter to get the story flow.

10. Will these plagues be poured out in one day? Rev. 16:17.

This scripture indicates that all seven vials will be poured out in one 24-hour day. This day is the climactic part of the much longer "Day of the Lord" that will have begun with the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1) ushering in the seven consecutive trumpet plagues.

And it will be during this one day that the great false church - "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 17:5) that directed the Beast's empire - will be utterly destroyed.

11. Upon whom does the first vial cause excruciating sores? Rev. 16:2.

It will be poured upon all who are participating in this world's pagan civil religious system.

12. What will the second and third of these plagues do? Rev. 16:3-4. How just and righteous are these punishments of God upon mankind? Verses 5-7.

13. What great plague is produced as the fourth angel pours out his vial? Rev. 16:8. Does the Bible indicate how intense God will cause the light of the sun to become for a short time? Isa. 30:26. Will many repent as a result of this grievous plague, or will men curse God and continue to defy Him? Rev. 16:9.

14. What cumulative effect will all the plagues of God have on the earth's population? Isa. 24:8. Will comparatively few people be left at the start of Christ's rule? Same verse.

Note particularly that not all people will die. Millions will still be left alive. The Bible indicates that one tenth of the earth's population will survive (Amos 9:3; Isa. 6:13). With these as His subjects, Christ will begin His rule on earth.

15. What is the reason God must punish mankind so severely? Isa. 24:5.

Sin - disobedience to God's laws (1 John 3:4) - is the cause of all human suffering and woe. The world is in reality bringing this wrath upon itself by having lived in sin. And so, as pointed out before, our loving Creator will have to punish the world severely to bring it to its senses and to humble it so men will be teachable - to prepare them for repentance and obedience to God's government. Yet, in spite of the severity of the fourth plague, most still will not repent.

16. What happens throughout the kingdom of the Beast after the fifth angel empties his vial on the Beast's headquarters? Rev. 16:10. Will this plague finally compel people to repent of their evil deeds and submit to Christ? Rev. 16:11.

God's Word clearly shows that the earth's inhabitants will refuse to yield to Christ's authority when He returns. That is why Jesus Christ will have to powerfully subdue the world and force mankind, at first, to submit to His rule. It is amazing to see just how this world will react to the glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

17. Will the pouring out of the sixth vial begin preparation for the greatest battle in all human history? Rev. 16:12-16. Will Christ righteously judge and make war against these defiant men? Rev. 19:11; Isa. 11:4.

In a previous study we learned about the gathering of earth's armies at Armageddon and their subsequent march upon Jerusalem to fight Jesus Christ, only to be utterly defeated by the King of kings and His angelic host.

18. Will the earth be violently shaken by the mightiest earthquake ever to occur when the seventh and last plague is poured out? Rev. 16:17-18. Will even the islands of the sea be moved? Verse 20.

Many islands being dormant volcanic cones, will literally blow up and disappear as this final plague is unleashed.

The Day of the Lord is often described as a time of thick darkness and clouds (Zeph. 1:14-16). Just imagine what the smoke and ash from hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of erupting volcanoes can do to obscure the light of the sun.

19. Will part of God's final punishment of men be with gigantic hailstones? Rev. 16:21.

The weight of each hailstone will be about a talent - in excess of 100 pounds! Can you imagine the tremendous destruction this storm will cause on earth?

20. Will the nations of the earth finally begin to seek God and ask Him to teach them His ways? Isa. 2:1-4.

At last worldwide peace, security and happiness will be ushered in by the righteous rule of Jesus Christ, for the law of God will go out to all nations from Jerusalem during the Millennium.

In the meantime, the nations of this world have yet to suffer enormously and be humbled before they will finally acknowledge the true God, and before they will turn wholeheartedly to Him. But individually, each of us can receive God's divine protection during these prophesied worldwide catastrophes.

If we stay close to God and do our part in furthering the work of God's Church in this end time, He promises to deliver us from this terrifying time (Rev. 3:10, 12:14-16). □

# Are You a LIVING Sacrifice?

*Today we don't worship God by slaying a bull or a goat and offering it as a sacrifice. The sacrifice Christians are to offer is a living one. But what does that mean?*

By Clayton Stoop

**I**n Romans 12:1 the apostle Paul wrote that we should present our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God."

A "living sacrifice"? What was Paul talking about? Aren't sacrifices killed?

Well, they were in Old Testament times. Back then the slaying of an animal foreshadowed the time when the Lamb of God would be offered for the sins of the world. Since the death of Jesus we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices as part of our religious worship.

Even under the Old Covenant, though, animal sacrifices were only substitutes for what God really wanted. It wasn't that He needed animals offered to Him. He owns everything. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills," He declares (Ps. 50:10).

Samuel put his finger on what God really desires: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" he asked. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

The prophet Micah inquired: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my

firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic. 6:6-7).

Would these actions satisfy God?

Here is the answer: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (verse 8).

That's what God wants!

The sacrifices that truly please Him involve genuine repentance. "For thou desirest not [animal] sacrifice; else would I give it," David stated. "Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart; O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:16-17).

The problem was that without the Holy Spirit, carnal human beings could not fulfill the requirements for conversion. So the physical, Levitical system was set up, by which sin was acknowledged (but not paid for) by various sacrifices. Physical substitutions and profound ceremonial symbols were used to foreshadow the spiritual administration under the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit would be given to those God called.

## Physical types

Physical Israel had a physical tabernacle or temple. Today the Church is spiritual Israel. And the Church is the Temple. The Church in one sense is also a priesthood, as the apostle Peter pointed out in 1 Peter 2:5: "Ye

also, as lively [living] stones, are built up a spiritual house [not a physical temple], an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." Again in verse 9 he stated, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation."

Of course! For we are training to be kings and priests in the coming government of God (Rev. 1:6, 5:10). "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . . they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). What an awesome calling!

In view of that calling, one cannot help but notice many parallels between various aspects of the Old Testament priesthood and what our spiritual lives should be like.

Take, for example, the clothing the priests wore. It was to be made of fine linen garments "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:40-43, 39:27-31). Revelation 19:8 tells us that "fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Fine white linen represents God's righteousness — the keeping of commandments (Ps. 119:172). David exclaimed, "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness" (Ps. 132:9).

The priests' clothing was given to them. They had to put off their own. In the same way we must get rid of our own righteousness, which is as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), and let God clothe us with His righteousness (Isa. 61:10).

Jesus — the Eternal — is our righteousness (Jer. 23:6). That's why we

are told to "put off" the deeds of the flesh and to "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14, Gal. 3:27).

#### God's Spirit is Unique

Some mistakenly think there are other churches similar to God's Church. Actually, there is no such thing as being "almost" God's Church. Either it is God's Church with God's Spirit, or it is as far from it as death is from life. The Holy Spirit makes the difference. There is no substitute for God's Spirit.

This is made clear by the holy anointing oil — symbol of the Holy Spirit — with which the Levitical priests were anointed. It was a special blend of prize spices and oil, not to be duplicated for any other use (Ex. 30:22-33).

If you have received the Holy Spirit and are letting it lead you, stop and think how vastly different it makes you from those who do not have it — the way you think and act and react, the fruits borne in your life. We are different. God's Spirit sets us apart and makes us holy. We are "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," "partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 3:1, 6:4), for we "have been anointed by the Holy One" (1 John 2:20, Revised Standard Version).

Not just everybody could be a priest. No one else could "join" the priesthood. Only those chosen by God — the descendants of Aaron in the tribe of Levi.

When God told Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons, He pointed out that "their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations" (Ex. 40:15). We, too, have been anointed to serve God forever — throughout all eternity.

The priests in ancient Israel had to be totally familiar with God's laws, statutes and judgments so they could teach others the right way (Deut. 47:9-12, Lev. 10:10-11).

In the government of the world tomorrow, the Church and state will not be separate. One government will enforce both civil and religious laws, because the principles overlap. That's why we will be kings and priests. Do you know God's spiritual and physical laws well enough that you will be able to teach the world in that day?

God told Moses, "Aaron and his

sons shall bring unto the door of the tabernacle . . . and shall wash them with water" (Ex. 29:4). They had to be clean to be consecrated to God, just as we must be cleansed by the waters of baptism. Not only that, they had to continually cleanse themselves when they appeared before God. (Otherwise they would die (Ex. 30:19-21).)

"Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord," Isaiah 52:11 admonishes. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (11 Cor. 7:1).

#### Spiritual sacrifices

What about the "spiritual sacrifices" we are to offer (1 Pet. 2:5)? Here, too, Old Testament types are instructive.

The offerings performed by the Levitical priests particularly foreshadowed facets of Jesus Christ's life and death. Of special interest to us here is the burnt offering.

In this sacrifice an entire animal (except the skin of the larger animals) was burned upon the altar. It was not classified as an offering for sin; it had a different spiritual significance. It was a voluntary offering of a sweet savor to God (Lev. 1:3, 9), sweet because God loves voluntary giving. Not all sacrifices were voluntary. Not all were of a sweet savor (Lev. 4:6-7).

Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of the burnt offering. He was without blemish (Lev. 1:4). He gave Himself completely to God. He was completely consumed in dedication to God.

We are to follow His example.

Notice, in Leviticus 1:8-9, how the different parts of a burnt offering are listed: the head (having the eyes, ears and mouth, as well as the mind and thoughts), the fat (the health and well-being), the inwards (the feelings, emotions and affections) and the legs (the path of way of walking). The total being — this is what we must offer to God when we "present our bodies" to Him (Rom. 12:1).

We are expected to give our lives, emotions, thoughts, desires, plans — all that makes up us — as a voluntary offering to God, to be totally burned up in service to Him.

When the brethren at Philippi performed a good work by sending help

to the apostle Paul, he wrote back: "I have [received] all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18).

Of course, we are not "without blemish" as burnt offerings were supposed to be and as Christ was. But God has provided for that. Jesus, our great High Priest, typified by Aaron (Ex. 28), appears before God on our behalf. On Him is the divine seal of approval that He is "Holiness to the Lord" (verses 36-37).

As far as we are concerned, even our best efforts are often imperfect. But God looks on the heart. And Jesus is, as Aaron was, before God to "bear the iniquity [the imperfection] of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts . . . that they may be accepted before the Lord" (verse 38).

That is how our spiritual sacrifices are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

#### The "give" way of life

Voluntary sacrifices, such as those even under the Old Covenant, typified the way of life called the way of giving. To take a choice, spotless animal from one's herd or flock and slay it was an expensive proposition. It was indeed a sacrifice.

Voluntarily giving the best to God — that is the kind of offering God wants.

Obedying God has a price. There is a sacrifice: We must lay down our own lives. And not just once — we must do it repeatedly.

God commanded that the fire on the sacrificial altar was never to go out. The priests had to keep it burning constantly (Lev. 6:12-13). There was to be a "continual burnt offering" — a sacrifice totally consumed twice a day, evening and morning, day in and day out (Ex. 29:38-42).

Our prayers ascend before God's throne as ceremonial incense once did. David prayed, "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 141:2). How sweet smelling and pleasing it is to God when a human being sincerely offers himself totally to God daily. Or why not even twice a day, as the



evening and morning sacrifices were offered?

An animal sacrifice died once. And that was that. We are to be living sacrifices, offered anew every day. And if we are ever called on to give up even these physical lives for God, we, like the apostle Paul, must be "ready to be offered" (11 Tim. 4:6) in that manner also.

Notice what Jesus is recorded as saying to God: "Sacrifice and offering [of animals] thou wouldst not [that's not what God is really after], but a body hast thou prepared me [a human body in which He could do the Work of God, giving Himself daily in service, fulfilling God's will in everything and finally laying down His life for the sins of mankind]; In [animal] burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come [and here is what really matters] . . . to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7).

Our lives are made up of time. It takes time to visit the sick. It takes time to pray for others. It takes time to help those who need help. A Christian life is a life of outgoing giving — sacrificing selfish, personal desires.

Not that we should go around looking at everything we do for God as a painful exercise in sacrificing, feeling sorry for ourselves as though life should be a bed of nails. Our sacrifices should be "sacrifices of joy" (Ps. 27:6), "sacrifices of thanksgiving" (Ps. 107:22, 116:17) and sacrifices "of praise" (Heb. 13:15).

It is an honor and privilege to sacrifice anything for the One who gave more to us than we can ever give to Him. David asked, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" (Ps. 116:12). God wants us to serve Him "with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart" (Deut. 28:47) — not begrudgingly.

A Christian should totally offer himself to God every day, seeking to obey Him and to live a life based on the principles of the way of give, "for there is one God; and there is none other but he; And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love [one's] neighbour as himself, is more than all whole [ceremonial] burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:32-33).

Yes, it is a living sacrifice! □

## Oldest Things

(Continued from page 15)

pleases Him (1 Cor. 12:18). Christ knows you whether you are a leading minister or a lonely widow, and He expects you to produce.

"If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body . . . [or] if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? . . . And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; no, again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (verses 15-16, 21).

Can we say we don't need our members in such and such a place because they are poor? Can we do without the widows, the crippled or the members in prison?

No! Verse 22 explains why. Those members are necessary. Although in this life those of you in those categories may be sorely tried, you are building valuable experience that one day will be needed in the Kingdom of God. Even your prayers and hard-won tithes and offerings add something to the resources of the Kingdom of God that no one else could give. After all, it takes a widow to give a "widow's mite."

God is interested in the quality of faith He sees (Matt. 17:20). So there is no such thing as a vestigial organ on the Body of Christ. All members are needed, and by working together effectively, they help the Work (Eph. 4:16).

### Do what you can

Take a look at the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). Christ recognizes that we have different circumstances and opportunities to serve. So, in the parable, the master gives his servants talents according to their abilities to use them. One gets five, another two and one gets but a single talent (verse 15).

The servants who receive five and two talents respectively go to work and each increases 100 percent (verses 16-17). But the man with one talent doesn't produce. His attitude is "What good am I? I have hardly any talents." So he goes off and buries the little he has (verse 18).

Then the lord returns. He rewards the two servants who, with their two

different opportunities, produced. Since each has shown a 100 percent increase, he rewards them in the same way. Notice that the words of verse 21 and verse 23 are exactly the same. God looks on the heart, not the bank balance, race, nationality or job description.

But what of the one who buried his talent? Read verses 24 to 30. He lost out. If the servant who had only one talent had done as the others did and produced something, the story would have been different.

Let's learn from this. God made no mistake in calling you and begetting you as His child. You should add your strength to the Work of God. Don't feel badly about what you can't do — do what you can do. You might be surprised at how much that is.

Any one of God's ministers could tell you stories of people who have risen above their apparent limitations. Like widows who have prayer lists half a block long, or paraplegics who give stirring attack speeches in Spokesman Club.

Here's one from my experience: A little, hunchbacked lady who could walk only with the aid of two canes counseled with me for baptism some years ago.

"When I am in God's Church," she asked, "should I give up my involvement with the 'Meals on Wheels' service for the elderly?"

"Not necessarily, ma'am," I told her. "Just be sure they don't bring you any unclean food."

"Bring me? What do you mean, bring me?" she replied. "I mean, should I give up going to the kitchen to help prepare the meals and taking them to the old folks who need them? What do you think I am, handicapped or something?"

Don't ever think you are useless. Each of us can give God and His Work 100 percent quality service, in our example and our prayers.

If you are a tree planted by the river's side, thank God for it and work all the harder.

But if not, still do your part. When a tree stops giving, it dies. But a tree can live for 4,000 years, high on a mountain, away from all other trees, and still make a contribution. A quality contribution — that's what counts.

That is the lesson of the bristlecone pines. □

# STORIES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

Chapter 9

## The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached

By Jeffrey King Johnson

**T**he 12 disciples found that their calling required stamina as well as dedication.

Jesus' fame became so great that, wherever He appeared, He was thronged with multitudes who came to be healed or to watch Him just out of curiosity.

And there were religious enemies. They kept to the fringes of the crowd, ready with trick questions and watching for evidence of wrongdoing. They wanted Jesus imprisoned or even put to death to silence Him.

One day after Jesus had ministered to a multitude of people from all the surrounding areas, He slipped away from the crowds. Taking His newly chosen 12, He led them up a mountain slope to a secluded place. There they sat down and Jesus talked to them privately. The 12 heard the greatest sermon ever preached (Matt. 5-7). Jesus urged them to practice right-



teousness and to strive for perfection.

"Blessed," He said, "are those who are concerned for fellow humans and who are merciful in their attitude toward their neighbors." He promised that their reward would be great in the Kingdom of God.

Explaining that He had come to keep His Father's law perfectly and to magnify it further, He set forth requirements for a standard of excellence higher than the letter of the law required. His Father would observe the intents of the heart,

the inner motivations and desires.

Jesus spoke of murder, adultery, swearing, revenge, hatred and needless anxieties. He discussed attitudes that govern the amount men give in tithes and offerings. He gave an outline

*Jesus led His 12 disciples to a secluded spot on a mountain and taught them privately about His way of life.*

Jesus was astounded. "Nowhere in Israel have I found such faith!" He exclaimed. . . . He turned back to the officer's friends. "Go back to the centurion. His servant will be healed just as he believed."

for prayer and warned the disciples (and us) to not use memorized words. He explained how to fast. He cautioned against judging other people or harboring critical attitudes.

Encouraging His disciples to seek the Kingdom of God above all else, He assured them that their needs would be provided. He made it plain that those who follow Him must go above and beyond a normal concern for others and maintain single-hearted devotion and obedience to God the Father.

#### **A gentile servant is healed**

Jesus returned to His own home in Capernaum. Again He was deluged with followers.

One day a group of the Jewish elders arrived to see Jesus. They had come on behalf of a Roman centurion, or captain over 100 men. "We have come to ask you to heal the centurion's servant," the elders explained. "This officer has built us a new synagogue. He loves our nation and he's a popular fellow among our people. He deserves your help."

Jesus arose. "I'll go and heal his servant."

As the elders escorted Jesus from His house and started along the street, they were met by friends of the centurion.

"Hello, sir!" greeted one of the group. "May we speak with you for a moment?"

"Hello. Yes, of course. How may I help you?" Jesus stopped and the elders paused behind Him.

Jesus' warm greeting put the man at ease. "A good friend of ours, a centurion, needs your help," the man began. "A servant whom he cherishes is critically ill."

"Earlier he sent these gentlemen to bring you to his house," he said, nodding at the elders. "But since then he has reconsidered, and he asked us to bring you this message: 'I must not trouble you, Lord. It would be presumptuous of me to ask you to come to my house, let alone to

step under my roof. I am not worthy. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. I know that the disease he has will be as obedient to you as my soldiers are to me. I tell them to go, and they go! I say to come, and they come!'"

Jesus was astounded. "Nowhere in Israel have I found such faith!" He exclaimed. Turning to the group, He told them: "Many gentiles will come from the east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, but some of the children of Israel will be on the outside where they will weep with regret. Others will grind their teeth in anger."

He turned back to the officer's friends. "Go back to the centurion. His servant will be healed just as he believed."

"Thank you very much, Lord."

And it was true. The servant was healed within the hour (Matt. 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10).

#### **Jesus raises the dead**

Continuing His Galilean ministry, Jesus traveled to Nain to preach the Gospel there. With His disciples and the, by now normal crowd trailing behind, He began the journey.

As they approached the gates of Nain, a funeral procession was winding its way out to a cemetery. A widow followed the bier of her only son, and many of the town's citizens mourned with her.

Jesus waited until they began to pass along the road where He had respectfully paused with His disciples. Falling into step beside the weeping mother, He touched the bier and signaled those who carried it to put it down. The procession came to a stop.

"Don't cry," He told the mother. She looked up to see who had spoken, wiped her eyes and stopped sobbing.

Jesus drew back the shawl that covered the boy's face. "Wake up, young man. Arise!"

As though waking from a deep sleep, the lad opened his eyes and looked about in bewilder-

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Simon . . . was embarrassed. Why has this woman, a sinner, come? he wondered to himself. If this man Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman is touching Him. She is a sinner!

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ment. He sat up. A cry of awe and fear went up from those who were gathered about and several people screamed. One fainted. The mother clasped the boy to her bosom as happy tears streamed down her face.

"He's a prophet," exclaimed one citizen of Nain. "God has come down to earth!" said another.

The details of the miracle swept the countryside (Luke 7:11-17).

The news that Jesus had miraculously raised the dead to life reached John the Baptist in a fortress near the Dead Sea, where John had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas. John sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, "Are you the Messiah — or not?" (Matt. 11:2-15, Luke 7:18-28).

In response, Jesus instructed John's disciples to report to John the miracles they had seen: The blind received their sight, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the deaf were given hearing, the dead were raised and the Gospel was preached. Jesus tried to reassure and encourage John, reminding him, "Blessed is he, who is not offended in me."

Jesus praised His cousin, adding that there was no man greater than John, and that John had ministered in the office of Elijah.

#### **A woman honors Jesus**

The Pharisees were influential religious leaders and well known in their communities. They not only interpreted the law precisely, but they added many traditions that they kept even more strictly. Jesus denounced those traditions.

A Pharisee named Simon asked Jesus to his home for dinner and Jesus accepted.

As they reclined on a couch at a table during the meal, a woman came to Jesus and broke open a box of ointment. With loving hands she began to smooth the perfumed oil over His feet (Luke 7:36-50). She wept softly as she knelt beside

Him, and her tears mingled with the oil. It was an act of adoration and Jesus did not prevent her from performing this service of love.

But the host, Simon, was embarrassed. Why has this woman, a sinner, come? he wondered to himself. If this man Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman is touching Him. She is a sinner!

Simon leaned lower on an elbow, his head down. It was too late to order his servants to put her out — it would create too much attention. Better to pretend to ignore it. He selected a date from a dish, and nibbled on it.

"Simon, I want to tell you something," Jesus said.

Simon looked up. "Tell me, rabbi."

"There were two men who owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him 500 pence. The other owed him only 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back so he canceled the debts of both. Which of those two men would love him more?"

"I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled loved him more."

"That is correct," Jesus nodded His head. "Do you see this woman?" He gestured. "I came into your house and you provided no water for my feet to be washed. She's washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss in greeting but this woman has kissed my feet constantly and oiled them with ointment. Her many sins are forgiven. She loves much. He who is forgiven little will love little in return."

Turning, Jesus spoke directly to her. "Because of your faith, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

Giving His feet a final kiss, the woman thanked Him and went out, her face radiant.

Simon's face was dark with resentment. As soon as the meal was over Jesus excused Himself and left the house. □

# Gossip

(Continued from page 4)

It breaks the Ninth Commandment. God hates gossip.

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Prov. 6:16-19).

Practically every one of the seven things mentioned in these verses has something to do with lying, gossiping, spreading rumors and sowing discord among the brethren.

God told His people: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:16-18).

As God's people, His Church, it is high time we wake up and obey His commandments seriously and from the heart. It is high time brethren everywhere stop spreading rumors, seeking vengeance or bearing grudges against each other.

## Stopping gossip

Has gossip become such an ingrained habit in your life that you don't know how to eradicate it? Do you really want to change? Since gossip is one of Satan's tools, you can only overcome it by using the tools of love God gives you through His Holy Spirit.

Satan will put evil thoughts into your mind. He will incite you to justify yourself, to blame others and accuse them. God wants you to recognize your mistakes and repent of your sins. God tells you not to justify yourself, not to judge others, not to accuse. God alone is the Judge, and vengeance is His.

Get down on your knees and ask God daily to help you examine your heart, to help you stop gossiping. Don't ever say anything that will hurt

your brother. Keep your mind constantly on God and His Gospel.

The Gospel is good news — gossip is bad news. Idleness often produces gossip. Therefore, be so busy doing what is right in God's sight that you will not have time to be idle. Replace gossip with Gospel!

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to Titus, tells us how to overcome gossip, whatever our age or occupation.

He tells the older men, "Be sober, grave [serious], temperate, sound in faith, in charity [love], in patience" (Tit. 2:2). If older men would follow this advice, they would never have time to gossip.

To the older women, Paul writes: "Likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (verses 3-5).

Those are not just words. They are commandments of God.

To the young people, Paul writes: "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (verses 6-8).

If we all show ourselves, in all things, patterns of good works, there won't be any gossip in the Church of God.

Do you want to have good friends? If so, then be a good friend yourself. Do you want other people to speak well of you? Speak well of them. If you want to be helped, first help others. If you want brethren in the Church to be better Christians, be a better Christian yourself.

Simple, isn't it? The truth is always simple, but the carnal mind makes it seem complicated.

## Three simple rules

Here are three simple rules that will help you stop gossip.

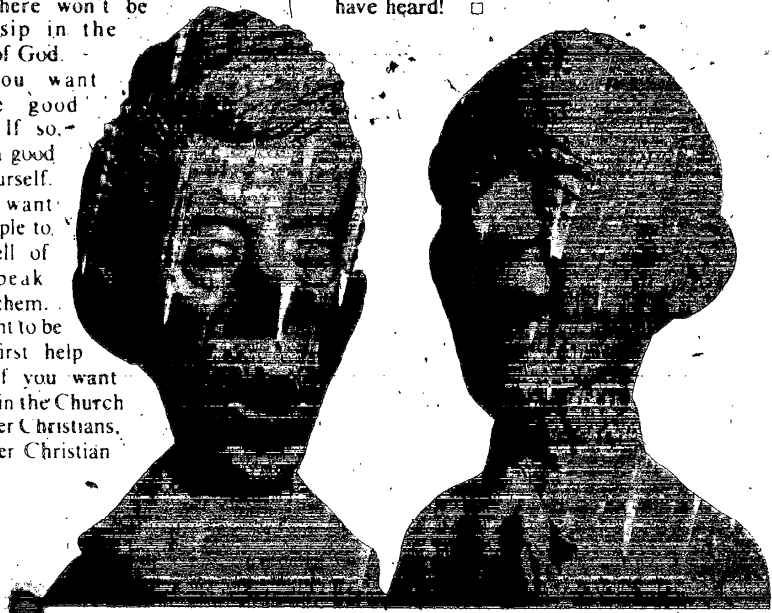
First, before you repeat anything about anyone, ask yourself, "Do I have all the facts?" If not, what you say may not be true. You will be spreading rumors. God commands you to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

Second, before you repeat anything you have heard about anyone, ask yourself, "Can I tell this thing in the presence of the person involved?" If you cannot, then you should not tell it in his absence. In other words, don't say anything about anyone that you would not be willing to say to that person's face.

Christ said that only the merciful shall obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7). But how can you be merciful if you spread rumors about your neighbor? Christ also said that the peacemakers shall be called the sons of God (verse 9). A gossip is not a peacemaker.

The third rule is just as simple as the first two. After you have obtained all the facts and after you have ascertained, in all honesty, that you can repeat in the presence of the person involved what you have heard about him, ask yourself: "Will saying this do any good? Will it help? Is it really beneficial?"

If the answer to any of these questions is no, don't repeat what you have heard! □



# Can You Explain

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# THE

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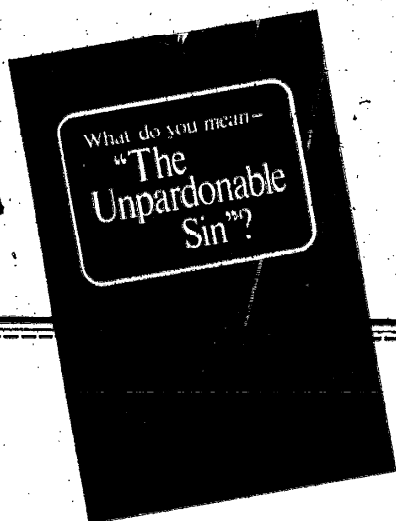
# UNPARDONABLE

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# SIN?

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- Is there ever a time when it is too late to repent?
- Can you commit a particular sin repeatedly and expect to be forgiven by God?
- Can an unconverted person commit an unforgivable sin?
- You've heard about the Christian "backslider" — does God grant full repentance to and forgive one who has turned his back on God's way?
- If a Christian knowingly consents in his mind to commit sin, can that sin be forgiven?
- In what two ways can a person commit the unpardonable sin?
- How can you determine if you have committed the unpardonable sin — what is the one true test?



If you're not absolutely sure of all the answers, it's been too long since you've read the vital booklet, *What do you mean — "The Unpardonable Sin"?* Why not get it out and review it? Or if you've never read it, why not send today for a free copy? Simply write to the *Good News* office at the address nearest you.