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REMEMBER THE WIDOW!

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ABOUT OUR COVER

As far as the mainstream of society is concerned, a widow is as "dead" as her husband. The widow, ignored and left only with her memories, is often a victim of callous disregard. The widow's plight is a subject on which God's Word has much to say (see article, page 25).

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The Church of God today lives and breathes and moves in a vastly different and much more highly complex mechanized world than that of the first-century Church. It must deal daily with computers, highly intricate mailing machines, the very latest in TV technology (including a first-of-its-kind traveling video pod) and many of the other technical paraphernalia and accouterments that go hand in hand with a world that is only six hours from New York to London.

The future shock of modern life even in a mechanized sense has necessitated different Church procedures and up-to-date methods of organization and operation. Yet the basic biblical faith and way of life remain the same. True Christianity is a *way of life!* (See Acts 9:1-2; 18:26; 19:9.) It has everything to do with your business practices, your basic appearance, your day-in and day-out associations

The jet age has ushered in the ultimate in "financial sophistication." Many banks now offer five or ten different savings plans individually tailored to a wide range of personal financial needs. Notwithstanding, the largest city on the face of this continent is flat broke! The fiscal woes of corporate America (the REA, W.T. Grant, the Penn Central, the Rock Island, etc.) fill the pages of our financial journals. We live in an age of delinquent mortgages, a mountain of governmental, private and corporate debt — all in the midst of general monetary confusion! There is, however, a living financial law that will pay off for the modern man and woman even in the challenging Space Age. This article explains.

WHY TITHE IN THE 20TH CENTURY?

by Garner Ted Armstrong

with others, and even, believe it or not, the way you handle your money.

Work of God. God has held out His way of life — His way of doing things — to all the generations that have ever etched their footprints in the earth. He has always had a work that was giving a warning and witness to this world — fearlessly condemning its evil practices and promising a better world to come.

Jude preserved a vital prophecy attributed to the ancient patriarch Enoch: "And Enoch also, *the seventh from Adam*, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince [convict] all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed . . ." (Jude 14, 15).

But anyway you want to count it (see Gen. 5:4-24; 1 Chron. 1:1-3;

Luke 3:37-38), Enoch is *not* chronologically the seventh from Adam. The indications are that he was the seventh of eight pre-Flood patriarchs who fearlessly proclaimed the way of God to the chaotic and oftentimes violent antediluvian world. And one of the cardinal precepts of proclaiming God's way of life revolves around what we have called "the give way."

God's Great Law of Giving. The creation itself is mute testimony to the existence of physical law — unchangeable, immutable, irrevocable (see Romans 1 and Psalm 19). And God Himself is the great Lawgiver! "There is *one lawgiver*, who is able to save and destroy . . ." (James 4:12).

Here James obviously is primarily referring to the giving of spiritual law. My point is that God is the author of unseen, and yet very active, spiritual laws that regulate man's relationship with his neighbor — and most importantly with his God. A vital aspect of this great spiritual law involves man's financial well-being.

Righteous Abel may well have been the very first human being to fully exemplify this great natural financial law. Notice the apostle Paul's brief comment in Hebrews 11: "By faith Abel *offered* unto God a *more excellent sacrifice* than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of *his gifts*: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (verse 4).

Abel was a shepherd; his brother Cain was a farmer. Notice Genesis 4:3-5: "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the *firstlings* of his flock and of the *fat thereof*. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. . . ."

Note the italicized words carefully. They both gave gifts to God — but Abel put his God before all, he gave God the first, the choicest, and the fattest. Cain carelessly threw together a quick offering out of his harvest; apparently it was neither the first nor the best.

Abel obeyed the greatest of

God's commandments. "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). Jesus Christ of Nazareth called this *the first and great commandment* (Matt. 22:37-38).

You can sum up the financial aspect of this great commandment this way: *Give of your best to God first!* Giving is a living natural law — not only to God, but to your neighbor (see Lev. 19:18).

Abraham Follows Abel. God is the great Lawgiver! And he expects His people to be obedient and submissive to law — natural, physical and spiritual. The patriarch Abraham was just such a person. Like Abel before him, he was a righteous man: "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5). God spoke this scripture to Isaac after Abraham's death; it was a sort of epitaph on the manner in which Abraham conducted his life.

In a financial way, Abraham specifically expressed his thanksgiving to God as follows: "Abraham gave *the tenth* of the spoils [to God]" (Heb. 7:4). *Abraham was a tither* (see Gen. 14:17-24). The context of these verses in Genesis clearly shows that God received His due before any further disposition was made. Abraham knew on which side his bread was buttered; he knew that God was the source of all his blessings — "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, *the possessor of heaven and earth*" (verse 22). He was an exceedingly prosperous man, one who was mightily blessed of God. His attitude of giving was one of the main reasons why.

Jacob's Example. His son Isaac and grandson Jacob followed in his footsteps. Jacob privately told his Creator in prayer: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment [clothing] to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of *all that thou shalt give me* I will surely give *the tenth* unto thee" (Gen. 28:20-22).

Jacob promised to tithe while only a young man — before he had really made a "thin dime" away from home. Notice now a follow-up scripture when Jacob was 147 years old — the last year of his life. Did God fulfill His part of the "bargain" and bless Jacob throughout most of his life with material prosperity? "And he [Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, *the God which fed me all my life long unto this day*" (Gen. 48:15).

Jacob had a deeply personal appreciation to God for all his blessings. God had given him a great deal; there was hardly enough space in the country for all his cattle (see Gen. 36:7). Jacob evidently expressed this deep appreciation *by tithing!* "Of *all* that thou shalt give me *I will surely give the tenth unto thee.*"

Tithing Means Giving. Some people claim tithing is *not* giving, and is, in fact, opposed to giving. But this is merely a play on words intended to *divide* and *confuse* God's people! Years ago I read in a little religious "tract" an example of this kind of reasoning. The writer went to great lengths to explain how his wife loved him, and he loved her. He then explained how it was not necessary for him to post a "ten commandments" of behavior on the walls of his home when he left for a trip. He was teaching *against* having to "arbitrarily" obey God's law! He pled for "grace" *in place* of "law"! Not that he taught disobedience — far be it from any professing minister to go so far as to openly claim he may *disobey* God and still receive eternal life — but the clever approach was one of whether his obedience was "voluntary" or whether it was "commanded." He did *not*, he said, need to post orders on the wall which told his wife, "When I am gone, thou shalt not entertain the milkman, the grocery man, the television repairman, or the garbage collector in my home." His wife would just "naturally" do none of these things — voluntarily — because she loved him!

Beautiful, subtle, *human* reasoning!

"Arbitrary" Tithing? But — supposing his wife did invite the garbage man in for a drink, and maybe more — according to this man's reasoning, had she broken any law? Was there any automatic penalty? Apparently not.

Those who reason against "tithing" — and who cleverly try to persuade people against "arbitrary" tithing — or a "system" of tithing, or "tithing to a computer" are using the same subtle, and satanic, reasoning.

"Tithing" merely means "tenthing." It is giving — *voluntarily* — one full, first tenth of one's increase to God. God Almighty reserves the right to tell you and me *what* is sin. We are given the God-granted privilege of deciding *whether* or not to sin! God reserves the right to place His prior claim on the first tenth of our incomes — and grants us the full freedom to decide whether we will voluntarily, freely, cheerfully *give* to God what He claims! He will never take it! He will never "exact" or "extract" it! But He *will* completely withdraw His protection and His blessing from one who disobeys His plainly spoken prior claim.

Attitude of Rebellion.

This attitude of deciding "I will obey — but only when I get good and ready" — only when I decide to voluntarily obey — is the attitude of complete rebellion! *Rebellion*, according to the divine Word of God, is "as the sin of witchcraft"! (1 Sam. 15:22-23.)

Child psychologists attempt to persuade timorous parents to use this type of reasoning when dealing with their children. Never "tell" the child when to go to bed, when to get up, when to come in from play, when to take a bath, they reason, but ask him if he is "ready" to do these things, or if he might "like" to do them.

Thus, you avoid building up a spirit of "resentment" and *rebellion* in the child. If the child can make his own decisions, they reason, he will be far more mature. But following his parents' orders will clearly warp a child's development, they claim.

What an abominable teaching! And how *evident* are the automatic, evil fruits being suffered by whole nations, who are seeing, daily, the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "As for my people, *children* are their op-

and vanity in the lofty pronouncement of his own goodness to have *given* (!) tithes.

God says to *obey* is better than the fat of rams (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

But to the one who says, "No, Lord — I will give only when I get good and ready — I will never give when you *tell* me to — only when I *decide* to . . .," I say you will be standing with those who look in wonderment and beg Jesus Christ to be admitted into His Kingdom, while He says, "I never knew you. . . ."

Jacob said he was going to *give* God the tithe! Tithing means "tenthing," and it is "*giving*!" **A Code of Giving.** God has always used giving as an ongoing principle to conduct whatever *work* (at whatever time in history) He was conducting through human instruments on this earth. By the time of the exodus out of Egypt, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had grown from a small patriarchal family of several hundreds (including servants and herdsman) to a great multitude of from two to five million people. The weight of sheer numbers dictated that a code of law in writing was obviously necessary to govern such a great multitude of people. Yet the principles of giving *remained the same* as before.

Notice Numbers

18:21. "And, behold, I have *given* the children of Levi *all the tenth* ["giving" is used in connection with tithing once again] in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."

Here God turned *His tithe* over to the Levitical priesthood for their use in the administration and conduct of His work in the time of Moses.

Its origins, however, clearly were *not* Levitical. Notice: "And *all the tithe* of the land . . . is the Lord's . . ." (Lev. 27:30). Tithing



Should You Tithe?

It is well known that tithing originated in Old Testament times. But most people — among those who think about it at all — don't know whether tithing is required, or even desirable, today. For an in-depth explanation of the Bible's teaching on this subject, read the free booklet, *Tithing*. Send your request to Good News, Pasadena, California, 91123.

TITHING

pressors, and women rule over them" (Isa. 3:12).

One who reasons this way attempts to exalt himself *above God*! He wishes to bask in his own super-spiritual aura of goodness by pridefully rejoicing in his great sacrifice of *giving*! He is exactly like the man in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican who boasted, "I give tithes of all that I possess. . . ." Instead of the attitude of humble obedience to divine law, and to divinely revealed principle and the God-ordained way of life, there was pride

The Giving Principle

II Cor. 9:6, 7. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Acts 20:35. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Deut. 16:17. "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee."

Luke 6:38. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Prov. 3:9, 10. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

Matt. 6:20, 21. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Mal. 3:10. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Matt. 10:8. "Freely ye have received, freely give."

Eccl. 11:1, 2. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."

Prov. 11:24, 25. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Prov. 13:7. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches."

I Tim. 6:17-20. "The rich in this world . . . are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed."

goes all the way back to the Melchizedek Priesthood (which *may* have begun as far back as Adam).

To Melchizedek, Levi's great grandfather Abraham "gave a tenth part of all" (Heb. 7:2). The apostle Paul here makes it crystal clear that tithing is not Levitical in the sense that it began (and by implication has to end) with the administration of the Levites. "And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he [Melchizedek — the One who became Christ] whose descent is not counted from them [the Levites] received tithes of Abraham. . . . And here men [the Levites] that die receive tithes Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes [before he or his children were born] in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his [great grand]father, when Melchizedek met him" (verses 5-6, 8-10).

So tithing had long been an ongoing financial proposition by the time God formally instituted ancient Israel's civil law through Moses. It was not a "new idea of Moses" that completely revolutionized their monetary system.

A Spiritual Reawakening. Time took a quick toll on the willingness of ancient Israel to tithe and obey God's laws. Soon that "united" nation split into two nations. It finally got so bad that God had to disinherit the northern ten-nation kingdom (II Kings 17). Meanwhile, conditions rapidly worsened in the southern nation of Judah.

However, King Hezekiah, a righteous ruler, came to the throne to temporarily stem the tide. He presided over a national house-cleaning. Pagan idols and carved images of alien gods (objects of idolatry) were smashed into pieces (II Chron. 31:1).

Tithing was quickly reinstituted! "And as soon as the commandment [from Hezekiah] came abroad, the children of Israel brought in . . . all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. And concerning the children of Israel and Judah,

that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in *the tithe* of oxen and sheep, and *the tithe* of holy things which were consecrated unto the Lord their God, and *laid them by heaps* . . . And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord, and his people Israel" (verses 5-6, 8).

A couple of verses at the end of this chapter sum up the results of Hezekiah's widespread reform movement. "And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered" (verses 20-21).

As long as the nation of Judah obeyed God's laws and faithfully *paid their tithes*, they were BLESSED almost beyond belief. Unfortunately, they soon went backwards spiritually and all too quickly joined their northern neighbors in the tragic exercise of national slavery to a foreign power. A mistaken belief that tithing "was no longer necessary" contributed heavily to their nationwide apostasy.

Message of Malachi. God sternly warned them through the prophet Malachi: "Will a man *rob God*? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? *In tithes and offerings*. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even this whole nation*. Bring ye *all the tithes* into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and *prove me now herewith*, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. . . . And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 3:8-10, 12).

Here God holds out His test — His challenge to mankind in general and every Christian in particular. God says to "Prove me now herewith." He says to *put Him to the test* and see if He won't bless you in many unexpected ways. Sometimes God's blessings are readily appar-

ent, obvious, tangible, easily discernible; others are intangible, spiritual, but *just as real!*

In the August 1974 number of the GN, I published several letters out of the great stack of literally thousands we have received as the years go by, from people just like you, who have found how wonderfully God blesses those who are willing to give.

Tithing in the Christian Era. There is a great *tithing principle* in God's Word which transcends and supercedes the mere giving of a tenth of all one's increase. The entire question revolves around whether a person is of a *willing* and *obedient* SPIRIT, and really desires to *obey* His God and Creator, who gives him every breath of air he breathes, or whether one wishes to be a pharasaical "nitpicker" and must, like a balky mule, be forced or dragged with the threat of a whip into doing every single task set before him.

It is a matter of *conversion* and of *attitude!*

The question revolves around whether or not we are willing and eager to do all our heavenly Father commands us (as well as being instantly responsive to even those things which He may *suggest* for our good), or whether we are always carefully approaching the study of His Word from the point of view of "Just how much *must* I do?"

In the "Sermon on the Mount" there is one scripture in particular that bears heavily on this question. Jesus told His disciples privately (and we are privileged to have it preserved in writing for our example and learning today): "Think *not* that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am *not* come to destroy, but to fulfill. [Jesus came *not* to annul, rescind, or do away with the law, but to fulfill it — that is, to fill it to the full, like filling up a bottle with water.] For verily [truly] I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever *shall do and teach them*, the same shall be

called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19).

One verse in Luke's account adds a great deal of emphasis to this vitally important point: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17).

Then Jesus went on to show in the rest of the fifth chapter of Matthew just how He magnified God's law. Using only about six different illustrations, He first paraphrased an Old Testament law or principle and then gave its real intended meaning.

But my point is this: Jesus Christ of Nazareth did *not* specifically deal with the tithing law anywhere in the "Sermon on the Mount." And it is not dealt with that specifically and pointedly anywhere else in the New Testament. In most cases, the mentioning of tithing in the New Testament is incidental to another main subject being discussed. Perhaps this is because tithing may have been universally accepted and was not generally being questioned in that time. It was not a "theological issue" as was physical circumcision and the eating of meats in an idol's temple.

So what we are left with is the modern application and expansion of the Old Testament principles and laws (which Jesus specifically said He did *not* come to rescind or annul) related to tithing in particular.

A Living Witness. God is alive. Jesus Christ is a living, functioning, active High Priest. God's Holy Spirit is living and powerful *today*, and the Bible is a living witness — *not* a dead one that hasn't been really alive and applicable for nearly 2,000 years.

No one should assume that unless you can read a specific command somewhere in the New Testament, God's expressed and implied will (and His desire in our lives, as well as the examples of the "holy men of old") is automatically obliterated!

God does not need to speak directly to His children twice! If God clearly expresses His will, blesses His people for observing His ways and His laws, and we see New Testament indications of God's Church following the same principle, then we ought to obey our God.

People begin to assume that unless the New Testament carefully itemizes and catalogs every centillionth of required Christian behavior, that it is no longer obligatory; that unless you can find some place or reference in the New Testament to something in the Old Testament, then you are not required to keep it.

The point is, there is *no* New Testament evidence that *tithing* was ever *rescinded*. But how would we know just how to apply the tithing law in the traumatic twentieth century?

How Christ Speaks to Christians Today. How does Christ speak to His Church today? Notice Hebrews 1:1-3: "God, who at sundry times and in divers [different] manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 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 [character] 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 [a living Christ]."

But what about questions and problems *unique* to a hyper-technical, supercomplex, technocratic space age? How does Christ speak to a Church that exists in the midst of a modern world with a different set of problems than those peculiar to the first century? Has Christ left twentieth-century Christians utterly without any on-course, on-target direction today?

The four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record in painstaking detail many specific conversations between Jesus and Peter. But none is more important for God's Church today than the one quoted in Matthew 16:18-19. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [Greek *Hades*, meaning the grave] shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The authority of *binding* and *loosing* was perpetually given to the New Testament Church until Christ comes again to visibly take the reins of government both in the Church and in the world at large.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth plainly said in verse 18 that the true Church would *never* die out. It was *not* dependent on Peter's perpetual existence; he died, as Christ prophesied, in painful martyrdom (John 21:18-19).

And Matthew 16:19 clearly points out that those whom Christ appointed to lead the Church would have the right, the power and the authority to make those decisions necessary in giving every age or generation *since* the God-intended warning and witness.

**Tithing has worked
for human beings down
through the centuries from
Abraham to right now —
and will continue
to work for those who have
the courage to step out
on faith and exercise
this great principle.**

And though Jesus Christ has remained at the helm — He is the *Head* of the Church today as much as He has ever been — He has clearly demonstrated that His awesome power and rule could work in and through His chosen human servants. In most cases these human servants were not and are not volunteers but mostly "unwilling draftees," at least at the start of their service. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," said your Savior and mine.

How God's Servants Have Looked at Tithing. As clearly commanded in the New Testament (see Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4; I Cor. 10:11; Rom. 15:4; II Tim. 3:15-16; John 5:39, etc.), Christ's servants today have taken a long, careful look at the Old Testament laws, principles

and examples with regard to tithing. We have already seen a rather brief "word's-eye" summary of that view in the beginning pages of this article.

Further, Christ's servants have noted their Savior's obviously deep-rooted belief in the Old Testament as a whole and the law of God in particular (see again Matt. 5:17-19). It is interesting that Christ clearly confirmed the very Old Testament miracles that modern religionists laugh at as hopeless myths.

And deeply understanding that tithing is a vital part of God's giving principle (remember it is so stated in the Bible that *tithing is giving a tenth*), Christ's ministers have also noted that the principles of giving are completely consistent, criss-crossing both Old and New Testaments with an automatic blessing attached (see box on page 4).

Since Christ was prophesied to "magnify the law, and make it honorable" (Isa. 42:21), God's servants have striven to see how this principle would apply to tithing.

Returning to the "Sermon on the Mount" in the fifth chapter of Matthew, we have seen how Jesus carefully cautioned His disciples that He did *not* come to do away with God's law. Now notice verse 20 in *context*: "For I say unto you [the disciples then and now], That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." Then Jesus went right on to explain by several examples how the spirit of the law far exceeded the letter requirements.

But what was the "righteousness" of the Pharisees? All Bible students know that the Pharisees tithed; but did they really practice this financial principle in the right manner and so fulfill the fullest intent of God's natural law of giving?

The answer is a resounding "No!" Notice Matthew 23:23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Strictly tithing a backyard garden

is not the most important fulfillment of God's financial law. But Christ did *not* condemn them for doing even this. He said "not to leave the other undone."

However, tithing was not and is not a catch-all principle. Blessings are *not* unconditionally promised to some few who may tithe (probably to the penny, making sure that God doesn't get a cent extra) and yet break every other principle and law of God, as well as declining to practice judgment, mercy and faith.

Some people claim they are not blessed for tithing and herein lies an important reason. They are violating *other* laws and principles of God that are *just as important*. The tither must possess the giving attitude and put God first in his heart and mind as well as his pocketbook (see Matt. 6:33).

Tithing — A Living Law. Tithing is a living, natural law deeply rooted in the Bible and in the ecclesiastical and secular makeup of many nations in antiquity. Ancient Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Chinese and Greeks all practiced a form of tithing. Rulers and religious leaders of those nations either required or themselves paid a tenth of their produce or "spoils" to their particular "god."

In more modern times, John D. Rockefeller, it is said, accepted at eight years of age God's challenge to prosper the individual who pays God His tenth. Mr. Colgate, the well-known soap manufacturer, apparently practiced the principle of tithing all the way from boyhood to his position as head of a great multimillion-dollar soap concern.

The Bible is simply filled with statements of how the living *natural law of giving* (remember again tithing is giving a tenth) works automatically for the giver (see scripture box on page 4). It has worked for human beings all down through the centuries from Abraham to right now — *and will continue to work* for those who have the courage to step out on faith and exercise this great principle.

Tithing — An Act of Faith. Make no mistake about it, tithing is a test of faith! The first impulse of our innately carnal, selfish nature instantly balks at the very thought.

Humanly we would rather give by impulse than by principle. But hazard, hit or miss, do-it-when-you-feel-like-it giving misses the mark when it comes to actively supporting the very Work of the living God on this earth today!

Money is often "the acid test" of a person's character. One author said: "If you know how a man deals with money, how he gets it, spends it, shares it, you know one of the most important things about him."

I have often said that tithing is akin to prayer. Prayer to God is an offering of one's deepest heartfelt intent coupled with thanksgiving and gratitude. Tithing and giving of our material substance is exactly in the same category.

The examples of men who have been greatly blessed for obeying just this one principle of God are too many, and too widely known and documented, to overlook! I have known, personally, of people who have been miraculously healed of illness *immediately* after they dropped a letter requesting an anointed cloth into their own private post box. The act of faith — though we had not yet received the letter, the cloth had not yet been sent — was instantly answered by God from heaven!

I have known of others who, upon dropping their tithe and offering into the local post office, were met by a person who had owed them a debt for many, many years; a person they never expected to see again, and who told them, "Something just put it in my mind — I had to look you up and pay my debt."

Experience has proved there is an automatic blessing in being obedient to our God in these great principles if the obedience is coupled with living faith!

Tithing is like prayer — it is an act of *faith* in God! As such, it is the heart and core of what Christianity and conversion are all about.

Tithing is a deeply personal act of worship when done in faith. It is an acknowledgment that God is there — that He really exists — and that He is able (sometimes in spite of all outward appearances) to "supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." □

TEST YOUR BIBLE KNOWLEDGE

With this issue of the GN, the editors are beginning a brand-new column designed to rapidly increase the overall Bible knowledge of our family of readers. Multiple-choice and true-and-false questions are featured. The answers are found on page 27. We hope all of our readers will benefit from this new feature. Let us know how you like it!

Multiple choice (circle the correct letter):

1. What is the Bible? A. The history of an ancient people's quest for a concept of God. B. An inspired revelation of basic knowledge man is not capable of finding out for himself. C. A collection of apocryphal writings originally penned in Greek and Hebrew. D. A collection of sixty-six books (thirty-nine in the New Testament and twenty-seven in the Old).

2. Abraham was promised A. only the whole area of Palestine from Dan to Beersheba. B. the third heaven. C. the whole earth as an eternal inheritance. D. direct rulership over the twelve tribes of Israel.

3. Water baptism is A. an outward sign of one's inward repentance and submission to God. B. a New Testament ritual only for first-century Christians. C. no longer a normal requirement for spiritual salvation. D. by sprinkling or pouring.

True or false (circle T or F):

1. The Bible speaks of a spirit in man, but not an immortal soul that lives on after death. T F

2. The expression "end of the world" refers to the destruction of our planet — the physical orb on which we live. T F

3. Isaiah 24 shows that no human being will survive the next world war. T F

4. Resurrected saints — true Christians — will be priests as well as kings in Christ's coming world government. T F

We invite you, our readers, to send in your questions on biblically oriented prophetic, doctrinal, historical and Christian-living topics. While we cannot promise that all questions will be answered in print, we will try to cover all those that are of general interest as space permits. Send your questions to the appropriate address listed on the inside front cover, care of *The Good News*.

QUESTION: "Leviticus 11:21-22 says: 'These may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth . . . the locust . . . the bald locust . . . the beetle . . . and the grasshopper' Does this mean that we can eat these bugs?"

Betty K.,
Richfort, Vermont

ANSWER: The first chapter of the book of Mark speaks of John the Baptist who "was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). Christ said of this man: "Among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist." So he was a righteous man, and he ate locusts.

However, John apparently lived a very unconventional, austere personal life (Luke 5:33-34) in the desert. In such an arid region there is not a great variety of edibles (see Luke 1:80).

But the fact that the Bible shows it is all right for us to eat these insects doesn't mean we *have* to, any more than we have to eat any meat at all if it offends our sensibilities or our consciences (Rom. 14:2-4).

As for eating "beetles," exactly defining which insect the original Hebrew text referred to is very difficult. Apparently the only insects designated as being fit to eat were

the ones with legs designed for jumping, such as locusts and grasshoppers.

Many of us would find it hard to eat these creatures unless we were extremely hungry. But some who have eaten fried grasshoppers say they are delicious. At any rate, it is perfectly permissible according to Leviticus 11 to eat grasshoppers and locusts if one chooses to do so. (Further information is available in our free reprint article "Is All Animal Flesh Good Food?")

Q: "I am most interested in the doctrine of penance. Some say it is a sacrament. Your views, please."

Vincent I.,
Port Jefferson, New York

A: Doing penance for sins is based on the idea that we need to do something to earn God's forgiveness, or that we can be justified by our own works. This is not a biblical concept. Romans 3:23-28 reads: "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are *justified by his grace as a gift*, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law."

The Bible says there is "*one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), so we do not need the intervention of a human being to obtain forgiveness for our sins.

Christians have been "buried with him [Christ] in baptism And [we], who were dead in trespasses . . . God made alive together with him, *having forgiven us all our trespasses*" (Col. 2:12-13).

Some try to use John 20:23 to prove that persons in ecclesiastical offices have the power to forgive sins. This verse reads: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." However, it does not mean that mere men can actually forgive sins in a spiritual sense. *God alone* can forgive sins

(Mark 2:7-10; Luke 5:21-24). Christ spoke these words to His future apostles *in the context* of the Church authority He was giving them (see John 20:21) — the power to disfellowship those who were dissenters or heretics (see 1 Corinthians 5:2 and 1 Timothy 1:20) and bring them back into the congregation upon repentance (II Cor. 2:6-10).

Also the penances some humans seek to impose (repetition of various prayers and so forth) often come under the category of the "empty phrases" (RSV) or "vain repetitions" (KJV) Christ spoke of in Matthew 6:7.

Q: "Awhile ago you people ran an article intimating that prophecy is conditional in certain instances. Could you please elaborate?"

James K.,
Belleville, Michigan

A: Yes, certain parts of the prophetic writings are conditional, although some prophecies such as those predicting Christ's second coming and the utopian millennial reign are unconditional.

God gives man a choice; if we repent He will have mercy on us. Leviticus 26 illustrates this principle. It enumerates the blessings and curses prophesied to come upon ancient Israel according to whether or not they kept the covenant God made with them.

The same concept is found in Deuteronomy 29 and 30: "When all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you this day, with all your heart and with all your soul; then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes, and have compassion upon you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you . . . and he will make you

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more prosperous and numerous than your fathers . . . And the Lord your God will put all these curses upon your foes and enemies who persecuted you . . . for the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God . . . with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 30:1-10).

The entire book of Jonah is an account of how God sent one of His prophets to the ancient city of Nineveh to warn them of their impending doom if they did not mend their ways. They repented and "proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5). And "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it" (verse 10).

Another example of the outcome of prophecy being delayed by repentance is found in II Chronicles 32. God had miraculously healed Hezekiah of a fatal disease, "But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem" (verse 25). God told him, "Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house . . . shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left . . ." (II Kings 20:17). "But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah" (II Chron. 32:26). Again, when a nation or individual repents, God has mercy on them.

Q: "Will we know our loved ones after death? When Jesus Christ returns, raises up the dead, then gathers His elect to meet Him in the clouds, will all that are left on earth still be human? Or will they be changed too, as the ones caught up to Him?"

**Marie W.,
Jacksonville, Florida**

A: Although those resurrected to eternal life at the second coming of Christ will have glorified immortal spirit bodies (I Cor. 15:53), they will be able to appear in a recognizable form. The disciples were able to recognize Christ after His resurrection (Luke 24:36-43).

The rich man (in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Luke 16:19-31) was able to recognize Lazarus after they had both been resurrected.

Christ's friend Lazarus (Mary and Martha's brother, not the same man as in the Luke 16 parable) was raised from the dead to physical life, and looked no different than before.

Those persons who are not changed at Christ's second coming (I Thess. 4:13-17) will still be human. Isaiah 11:8 shows that they will have children. They and their descendants will have an opportunity to become converted and eventually to be changed into spirit beings also. For more information on this subject, write for our free reprint article "What Will You Be Like in the Resurrection?"

Q: "You say we are to stay in our graves until the first resurrection. Please explain Luke 23:42-43 in this connection."

**Elizabeth L.,
West Orange, New Jersey**

A: Luke 23:42-43, part of the account of the thief on the cross, reads: "And he said, 'Jesus, remember me *when* you come in your kingly power.' And he [Christ] said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'"

Notice, the thief asked Christ to remember him *when He came into His Kingdom* (KJV). Christ will not receive His Kingdom until His second coming (see Revelation 11:15), which has not yet occurred. (Write for our free booklet *Just What Do You Mean — Kingdom of God?*)

Some confusion has resulted due to the placement of the comma next to the word "today" in verse 43. The original Greek manuscript contained no punctuation, so the trans-

lators added punctuation marks wherever they thought appropriate. The verse could more accurately have been punctuated: "Truly I say to you today, you will be with me in [a future] Paradise." This better conveys the true meaning of the verse.

For a more detailed explanation of this subject, request our free booklets *What Is the Reward of the Saved?*, *Where are Enoch and Elijah?* and *After Death — Then What?*

Q: "Revelation 3:11 reads, 'I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.' My question is, what is it we have that we are supposed to hang on to?"

**Anonymous,
Sacramento, California**

A: In the context Christ is addressing one of the local congregations which was located on a mail route in Asia Minor. They had been faithful to the words and teachings of Jesus Christ who said: "... You have *kept my word* and have *not denied my name* . . ." (Rev. 3:8). Though that congregation was lacking in miracle-working power (*dunamis* in the Greek) — verse 8 — they were faithful to Christ's teachings which had been transmitted through the apostles. Unlike some others in the early Church, these Christians had not been ashamed of Christ (compare Mark 8:38). They had not denied their allegiance to Him as their Savior and the Head of the Church. They were admonished to hang on to these values. They were to continue to remain faithful to the word of Christ and to His leadership. As we read in the book of Acts, "There is salvation in no one else, for *there is no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Today's Christian can apply these timeless words to his or her own situation. We too must remain faithful to the written instructions of Christ and be unashamed to openly declare that He, and He alone, is our Savior and High Priest. □

THE SECRET RAPTURE MYTH OR

Thousands of professing Christians have their future hopes set on escaping the trials and tribulations of this present world by means of a secret rapture. This event is supposed to provide the faithful believer with a guaranteed passport to his long-awaited reward somewhere beyond the fabled "pearly gates." But is this what God intended that Christians look forward to or does he have something else in mind?

by George Ritter

There I was, driving down the freeway and all of a sudden the place went crazy . . . cars going in all directions . . . and not one of them had a driver. I mean it was wild!"

What was it? An invasion from planet X? The end of the world? No, according to the above quote, it was the secret rapture. The "blessed hope" that Christians had long awaited.

The author further explains: "Someday, a day that only God knows, Jesus Christ is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air. . . . Those who remain on earth at that time will use every invention of the human mind to explain the sudden disappearance of millions of people" (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, pp. 135-137).

Those "chosen few" who manage to qualify for the rapture will, if you believe the story, be whisked away to a spiritual never-never land, far away from the pains, agonies and trials of planet earth.

Sound plausible? Something to stake your life on? According to the rapturists, it most certainly is. As far as they are concerned, this future scenario for the saints is no spiritual pipe dream. They cite several scriptures to back up their theory. For

instance, I Thessalonians 4:15-17: "For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord."

Another is I Corinthians 15:51-53: "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality."

Deflating the Rapture Balloon. After reading this far, maybe you are somewhat convinced as to the veracity of the rapture theory. But before you get *too* convinced, consider the following.

First of all, there is the question of the "dead in Christ." According to the rapturists, the dead saints are in heaven: "We are told that the moment a believer breathes his last breath and dies his soul goes immediately to be with Christ — *to be face to face with the Lord*" (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 140, emphasis ours).

But according to the apostle Paul *both* the dead in Christ along with the living "shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to *meet the Lord in the air*." Now how do the dead in Christ "meet the Lord in the air" if they have already been with him "face to face" since their death? And why would Paul tell the Thessalonians that the living "shall not *precede* those who have fallen asleep [the dead]"? Why bring this question up if both he

and the Thessalonians knew that the dead in Christ were already with the Lord? The question is more logically raised and answered if you know the dead *aren't* with the Lord. (For more information on this subject, write for our free booklet *What Is the Reward of the Saved?*)

The Third Coming of Christ?

Trying to fit the secret rapture into future end-time prophecies is also somewhat of a dubious proposition. Most proponents of this theory would tell you that the rapture occurs *before* the great tribulation. Christ snatches away His saints and returns with them to heaven. Three-and-a-half or seven years later — take your pick — He comes again, this time to visibly establish His Kingdom on the earth.

Rapturists in effect are speaking not only of a *second* but a *third* coming of Christ. The second is for the church; the third for the rest of the world. Most rapturists would agree that "The Bible is speaking of two separate events" (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 139). But is it?

According to this theory, the rapture is supposed to occur at the *last* trump. Which trump is the last trump? The rapturists say (*The Late Great Planet Earth*, pages 140, 141) it is the *seventh*; and, in truth, the Bible says the same thing.

But notice what takes place at the seventh and *last* trump. "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'" (Rev. 11:15).

Now you could hardly call that a secret coming of Jesus to rapture away the saints. Yet this event occurs at the *last* trump. There are no more trumpets following the seventh one. It is the same *last* trump Paul was referring to when he wrote: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last* trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead

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will be raised imperishable . . ." (1 Cor. 15:52). It is obvious he is referring to the same event that is described in the 11th chapter of the book of Revelation.

And notice what else happens at this seventh and last trump: "The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great . . ." (Rev. 11:18).

But how can this be? The rapturists say the prophets and saints were all raptured away 3½ or 7 years before Christ's visible return to power. Yet here is more evidence that the dead receive their reward at the seventh trump and the visible, public return of Jesus Christ.

Returning in Unlike Manner. If the rapture theory were correct, then Christ never really returns to the earth at the time of the rapture; he only makes a "near miss." Yet notice the contrasting description given in the first chapter of Acts: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men [angels] stood by them in white apparel: which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come in like manner* as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-12, KJV).

Christ ascended visibly from the Mount of Olives. He plans to return the same way. If Christ had intended to rapture the saints, which includes the twelve disciples, why didn't He instruct the angels to tell them differently?

In order for Christ to return "in like manner," he has to return to the *earth* — terra firma — not reverse course in midair and head back for heaven. The prophet Zechariah said of this momentous event: "Behold, a day of the Lord is

coming. . . . For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. *On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives* which lies before Jerusalem on the east . . ." (Zech. 14:1-4).

Rupturing the Rapture's Time-table. Zechariah's description hardly sounds like a secret, hidden event. Nor does the description given by Jesus Christ Himself recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. In each of these passages it is important to remember that Christ is talking primarily to His own disciples, who later formed the nucleus of God's Church.

Notice what He answered in Matthew 24 in response to their question "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (Verse 3.) Had Christ believed in the rapture theory, He might have answered this question by stating that the first sign of His coming would be one similar to what was described in the beginning of this article — general disorder, people missing, etc. Instead, He spoke of false prophets, wars, famines and pestilence (verses 4-7). Then in verse 9 we read: "They will deliver you [Christians] *up to tribulation*, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations *for my name's sake*." Not only does Christ neglect to mention a rapture, but He even says that some Christians will have to go through tribulation.

The apostle John amplifies this in the 13th chapter of the book of Revelation. In speaking of the future "beast" power that would one day hold sway over the earth, John wrote: "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months [the great tribulation]. . . . Also it was *allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them*" (Rev. 13:5, 7).

In the preceding chapter, John's description of the coming persecution of God's Church is even more explicit: "Then the dragon [the devil] was angry with the woman [the Church], and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, *on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus*" (Rev. 12:17). If the Church is to be raptured before the great tribulation, what happened to the faithful mentioned in the above verses? How come they missed the boat?

A Visible Return. The Olivet Prophecy goes on to show what happens *after* this great tribulation: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light . . . then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, *and they will see the Son of man coming* on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29, 30).

But then notice what happens in the following verse: "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will *gather his elect* [God's Church or Christians, see 1 Peter 1:1-2, Colossians 3:12 and Romans 8:33] from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (verse 31).

Mark describes this same event: "And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, *from the ends of the earth* to the ends of heaven" (Mark 13:27).

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth He is not going to come in by some secret back door method. The whole world is going to know about this earth-shattering event (see Rev. 1:7; 6:15-17). Christ is coming both to establish His Kingdom and to resurrect the saints (Rev. 20:4).

This, rather than a secret rapture, is what God wants Christians to look forward to with renewed hope and confidence. □

WHY AREN'T YOU MORE CHRIST-CENTERED?

Are you ashamed of Jesus Christ? Are you afraid to mention His name in conversation? Is Jesus Christ at the heart and core of your Christian life? Or have you relegated the name of Christ to the realm of maudlin, sentimental, mushy "religious" conversation?

by Brian Knowles

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

These powerful and indicting words of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ring down through the centuries with fearsome import! Are you ashamed to mention your Savior, your King, your Lord and Master, in everyday conversation? Are you embarrassed by a discussion concerning Christ, your High Priest, over dinner in a fine restaurant? What part does the Captain of your Salvation play in your daily life and activity?

These are critical questions.

Is it "Protestant" to talk about Jesus Christ as though He were a *living* entity who occupies a central part in your life? Why should professing Christians squirm at the mention of their loving elder brother in the Faith?

The Vital Importance of Jesus Christ. Make no mistake about it — if you expect to be saved you had better acknowledge Christ in your life! There is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ *alone* can rescue you from the inevitable pen-

alty of eternal death which all of us have incurred (John 3:16). He is the *only* hope you and I have of immortality.

If there is no resurrected Christ — no Messiah — then your faith is in vain (see I Cor. 15:12-20). Apart from Christ *all* religion is meaningless. There is no way to overemphasize the importance of the person of Jesus Christ to the Christian! Words alone are not sufficient to magnify the supremacy, the glory and the meaning of Christ to those who would fulfill their ultimate human destiny!

Paul taught that "... God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is *above every name*, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess *that Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9, 10).

Those who do not acknowledge the transcendent supremacy of Jesus Christ in every sphere are not Christians at all!

The apostle Paul was perhaps the most Christ-centered individual who ever walked the face of the earth. He wrote, "For to me *to live is CHRIST*..." (Phil. 1:21). He was totally preoccupied with Christ! Paul was, in a sense, *obsessed* with Jesus Christ! Nothing was more important than to preach Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). Christ, and His life, death and resurrection, occupied the centrality of Paul's preaching and doctrine.

Paul, the other apostles, and the early first-century Christians were conscious of a continuing, living relationship with Jesus Christ

through the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. John wrote: "And by this we know that *he abides in us*, by the Spirit which he has given us" (I John 3:24). Christ actually takes up residence within the Christian life through the Holy Spirit! Paul wrote that "Christ in you" is "the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Apart from the indwelling of Christ there is no hope. There is nothing to look forward to but oblivion. But with Christ there is *everything* to hope for!

What Makes You Righteous? No human being is righteous in God's sight of and by himself. It is the *righteousness of Christ* that makes any of us clean. We are all sinners — without exception. All of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. We are all doomed to pay the penalty for our sins which is eternal death in the lake of fire (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; I John 1:8, 10, etc.). We have all been consigned to eternal death by our own sins against God.

But God has provided a way by which we can be made righteous *in spite* of ourselves! Christ said, "*I am the way*, and the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6). Through Jesus Christ we can all be made righteous. There is no other way!

But exactly *how* does all of this work? Just *how* are we saved by Christ? The answer is: we are justified by faith in Christ's *sacrifice*!

We are told in Romans 3:26 that God justifies "him who has faith in Jesus." It is *through* Christ that we obtain access to God's mercy and grace. That is why He is "the way"! "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Through* him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1-2).

Christ, and Christ alone, is the source of our salvation. It is He who is working out God's great purpose on earth. That is why he is called the "captain of our salvation" (Heb. 2:10, KJV). Those who would be saved must be willing to recognize, acknowledge and admit that Jesus is their "Lord" or "Master" so far as salvation is concerned. There is *no other door* through which one may pass in order to obtain mercy, justification and, ultimately, salvation.

Law-keeping Saves No One. One cannot be saved, for example, by the law. Law-keeping makes no one righteous — "For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law . . ." (Rom. 3:20). The law merely points out what sin is (verse 20, last part). "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). The law simply *convicts* all of us of sin! We are condemned by the law as sinners. None has ever obeyed that law perfectly but Christ. "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32).

The law, then, can do no more than *identify* sin for what it is and condemn us all for committing it! Once we have broken the law, no amount of future law-keeping can undo the damage that has been done. Law-keeping cannot make one righteous. It cannot justify for past sins. It cannot save you from the penalty of past violations.

Christ alone can do that.

Our eternal salvation is entirely in Christ's hands: "If we live, we *live to the Lord*, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are *the Lord's*" (Rom. 14:8).

To the true Christian, Christ is

everything. Paul said: "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made *our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption*" (1 Cor. 1:30). Any righteousness the Christian may possess is not his own but is of Christ. It is Jesus who sets us apart (sanctifies us) and buys us back from certain death (redeems us). We are *purchased* by His blood (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Our future is entirely in His hands.

Only One Mediator. Jesus Christ, not any human being, is the head of the Church which is His own body (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). He leads the Church through the Holy Spirit. There is no human mediator or intercessor between God and man, "For there is one God, and there is *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The Christian's relationship with God and with Christ is a *direct* one. It is not "filtered" through men.

We are accountable to Christ for our actions and our sins in this physical life. It is He who will judge "the secrets of men" at the last day. No man should be allowed to rob us of our crown of righteousness which will be granted at Christ's return (Rev. 3:11). We must maintain a *direct*, personal, one-on-one relationship with our Savior! Certainly Christ has His true ministers (servants), but there is no true "Vicar of Christ" in God's scheme of things according to the Bible.

A word of qualification is necessary at this point. The fact that each of us should have a personal, one-on-one relationship with God does *not* mean that we should isolate ourselves as individuals from the Christian community. It does *not* imply that we should become "independent" Christians. Fellowship

is a very important and necessary part of the Christian life. We should not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25, KJV).

Christians are expected to "come together" in congregational meetings (1 Cor. 11:18, 20, etc.). We are to meet in the fellowship of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Where "two or three" are gathered together in Christ's name He is among them (Matt. 18:20). Whenever possible, those who have been begotten by the Holy Spirit should seek out fellow Christians and assemble with them in worship services. The Worldwide Church of God does hold weekly services around the world. For further information, please see the box entitled "If You'd Like To Know More" on page 29 of this issue.

Saved by Christ. The Christian must *internalize* his belief and his faith in Christ. God first calls the candidate for the Kingdom, brings him to repentance and baptism, then gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once begotten, the Christian walks in "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Now his life, to use Paul's phraseology (Col. 3:3), is "hidden" in Christ. He trusts implicitly in Jesus Christ to save him. He knows and believes that it is only by faith in Christ's shed blood that he can be justified for sins. He looks to no other source for salvation. His confidence is in the Son of God who *lives* to make intercession for the saints (Heb. 7:25). He knows that ". . . We are now *justified by his blood*, much more *shall we be saved by him* from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9).

Those who have God's Spirit know that salvation, in the ultimate sense, is a yet-future event. "For if while we were enemies we were

The Offices and Titles of Jesus Christ

God. "But of the Son he says, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8).

Mediator. "And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).

King of kings. "... For he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).

Apostle. "Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1).

Deliverer. "And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

Master. "Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ" (Matt. 23:10).

Captain of Salvation. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10, KJV).

High Priest. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come ..." (Heb. 9:11).

Counselor. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

Savior. "To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior" (Titus 1:4).

Judge. "And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42).

Lamb of God. "The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Advocate. "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ..." (I John 2:1).

reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, *shall we be saved by his life*" (Rom. 5:10). The blood of Christ "cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7). We are reconciled to God through Christ, but we are not yet saved in the ultimate sense. We look forward to receiving the promise of eternal life at the resurrection (I John 2:25; I Cor. 15:51-54).

God's Plan. All of this is according to God's great purpose. It is all done in accordance with a pre-ordained plan. That purpose is being worked out under the personal direction of Jesus Christ. "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, *according to his purpose* which he set forth *in Christ as a plan* for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9-10).

Jesus Christ is at the heart of this plan. He is the focal point of it. The entire purpose of the human creation of God is to be found in Christ! Therefore, to truly have faith in Christ (and all that that implies!) is to have eternal life! To be ashamed of Christ, to minimize the importance of His great office, to place Him anywhere but in *the very center* of your thinking, is to *reject* Him.

Nothing and no one is more important than Jesus the Savior! He alone holds the key that unlocks the door to eternity for every human being that has ever lived or died.

The gospel message is a message about Christ and His coming government (Isa. 9:6-7). He is at its center. He is described as the Savior of all mankind, and its coming King of kings and Lord of lords. He will rule over all of the earth in the world tomorrow. Ultimately, He will unite all things in Himself and in God the Father. God will be "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28, KJV).

Paul, realizing the sheer magnificence of God's marvelous plan of salvation through Christ, was moved to write: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Will you yet be ashamed of Christ? □

THE BIBLE IN A CHANGING WORLD

Beginning with this issue, "The Bible in a Changing World" will be a regular GN feature. The basic theme throughout will be to demonstrate how the Bible relates to modern life and society.

We will cover a wide variety of topics relating to your personal life and to problems and trends in the world around you. The purpose of this feature is not to present the last word on any given subject, nor to cover it in depth, but rather to provide food for thought from a biblical perspective. We believe the Bible is a timeless document containing lessons and principles relevant to this continually changing and often confusing world.

SPARE THE ROD?

The U.S. Supreme Court recently approved of use of corporal punishment in public schools, but only as a last resort after teachers have exhausted other milder forms of punishment.

Psychologists and other experts disagree as to whether there is ever a need or justification for giving several mild swats in a particularly difficult situation where a child seemingly will not respond to other forms of discipline. But where does the Bible stand on this issue?

The Bible does not condone cruelty, either physical or mental. Ephesians 6:4 states: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The biblical emphasis is on teaching or educating children, not spanking (see Deut. 6:7; Prov. 22:6, etc.). But they are to be brought up with discipline.

The book of Proverbs states that "He who spares the rod [Hebrew, switch or stick] hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (13:24). And: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (22:15). (See also Proverbs 23:13-14; 29:15, 17; 19:18.)

But the Bible shows that the key to spanking (or any kind of punishment) is *instruction* — unless it is preceded and accompanied by loving instruction and guidance, it probably doesn't do much good in the long run.

WOMAN'S PLACE: IN THE PULPIT?

Hot theological debate still continues among many clerics over biblical authority for ordination of women to the ministry. Those opposed to such ordinations quote the apostle Paul's edict in I Timothy 2:12: "I permit no woman to teach or to have [exercise] authority over men; she is to keep silent." Here Paul referred to administrative ecclesiastical authority over men within the local church organization. In other words, women were *not* to become church elders and should not give sermons. (Based on Paul's teachings, the Worldwide Church of God does *not* ordain women speakers.) The New Testament does, however, give a precedent for the ordination of deaconesses (see I Timothy 3:8-11 and Romans 16:1, RSV).

Apparently Priscilla and Aquila, Jews who served under Paul's administration, were deacon and deaconess. In the Church at that time was a very powerful and effective teacher named Apollos. Apollos' knowledge was imperfect, though, and "...when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Here we find a woman and her husband together teaching a man the way of God more perfectly.

So there are biblical examples of women teaching outside a formal church situation, and there is also no injunction against women writing on scriptural topics. After all, parts of the Bible were contributed by women — for example, Hannah's prayer, Miriam's song, the

teachings of Lemuel's mother, and Mary's "magnificat." These were included in the canon to be read by men and women alike.

OLD TESTAMENT RAPE LAWS

In citing a long history of injustice and male bias toward the crime of rape, one feminist went so far as to say that "Hebrews routinely executed married rape victims along with those who attacked them."

This erroneous inference was drawn from Deuteronomy 22. Verse 22 of this chapter reads: "If a man is found lying [a euphemism for sexual intercourse] with the wife of another man [by mutual consent], both of them shall die . . ." But this was plainly referring to adultery.

Verse 23 continues: "If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her . . . you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because *she did not cry for help* though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife . . ." Again, this was describing a case of sexual promiscuity — not rape.

The fundamental rape law follows in the next verse: "But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then *only the man* who lay with her shall die. But to the young woman *you shall do nothing*; in the young woman *there is no offence* punishable by death . . ."

Verse 26 continues: "For this case [of rape] is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor . . . though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her."

Under the civil laws of ancient Israel rape and murder were on the same par — both serious capital crimes warranting the death penalty. □

MR. ARMSTRONG SPEAKS IN JAMAICA

Herbert W. Armstrong in a two-night campaign at the National Arena in Kingston, Jamaica on November 21 and 22 brought the message of the "incredible human potential" and the necessity for God's government to be established on earth.

The first night "He pointed out that the number-one problem facing mankind is survival," according to Clarence Bass, regional director of the Caribbean Work. "Then he went on to explain what man is and why man doesn't know the way to peace." The second night Mr. Armstrong pointed out that the establishment of the Kingdom of God will finally bring mankind peace. He spoke for about an hour each night.

The two-night personal appearance capped a week of activities during which Mr. Armstrong met Governor-General Florizel Glasspole and Minister of Education Howard F. Cooke. Mr. Armstrong also addressed a nationwide radio audience via an interview on a government-owned station.

Mr. Stanley Rader, general counsel for Ambassador College, said the audience response to Mr. Armstrong was "remarkable." He later reported: "Both evenings there was a rather unique relationship established between Mr. Armstrong and his audience, the likes of which I have never experienced in all the many years that I have accompanied Mr. Armstrong in his speaking engagements.

"He was repeatedly interrupted throughout his delivery by applause and by shouts from the audience indicating their total agreement with what he was saying. It was as though they wanted not only to be inspired but to inspire him to carry on."

Mr. Armstrong had arrived in Jamaica Sunday, November 16. The



following day an interview was aired nationwide as part of *The World Around Us*, a human-interest program on the government station. Mr. Armstrong was also featured on a national news broadcast.

On November 19 he was guest speaker at the Kingston Rotary Club, which Mr. Rader said was "a really enthusiastic and responsive audience."

On November 21, hours before the first night of the campaign, Mr. Armstrong was received by Governor-General Glasspole.

Well Timed. The timing of the campaign proved to be propitious for the message Mr. Armstrong was proclaiming. Only shortly before the campaign the governor-general "found himself in the midst of a controversy because of comments he had made about social conditions prevalent in Jamaica," said Mr. Rader.

"To hear the governor-general speak about the conditions in Jamaica would be to think for the moment that one was hearing Mr. Armstrong. For example, the



GN Photo

HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG speaks to audience in Kingston, Jamaica, about the government of God.

governor-general stated, 'Today the whole wide world is plagued with confusion, chaos, increased crime rate, violence of one sort or another . . . radicalism, inflation, fears of one kind or another, and I could go on naming them ad infinitum. Indeed, I am bold enough to say that in the last 30 years never have so many people of the world been

subjected to such trying times.' "

Mr. Rader added: "The governor-general felt that Mr. Armstrong was badly needed in Jamaica and that we would prove to be of inspiration to his people."

Earlier in the week Mr. Armstrong and his party had been received by Mr. Cooke, the minister of education.

Will Be Back. In his comments Mr. Rader told the audience, "We will be coming back." He said tangible contact would be made with the Jamaican people, not only through the Church's ministry there, but also through the Ambassador International Cultural Foundation, which, Mr. Rader said, may set up a cooperative educational program with the Jamaican government.

ON LOCATION WITH G.T.A.

Photos by Scott Crawford

The *Garner Ted Armstrong* telecast has begun its new season over approximately 100 U.S. and 32 Canadian TV stations. What you are seeing now are programs that started with research and videotapings on location several months ago.

Utilizing our remote videotape unit, the Video Pod, Mr. Armstrong recorded program material at the San Onofre Nuclear Power Station near San Clemente and at the Huntington Beach oil fields for two programs on practical responses to the challenge of the energy crisis. A third program was videotaped at three locations in the Bakersfield area, detailing the American farmer's squeeze between rising production costs, government interference in the market place, and consumer demands for cheap food.

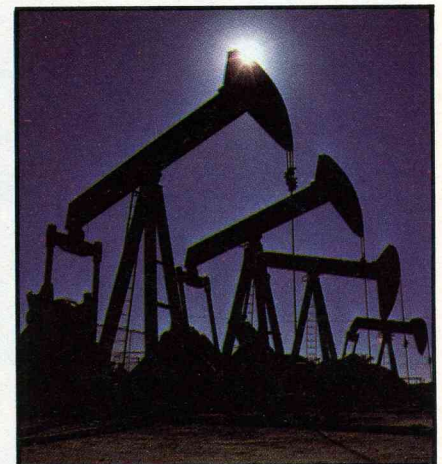
The three taping sessions, with Ambassador Television Production crews, provided the core of hard-hitting programs on these topics. Interviews with government, environmental and power company ex-

perts on alternate power sources completed the programs on energy. Comments from Senators Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Robert Dole of Kansas, a Department of Agriculture economist, state and national wheat growers association officers, and farmers from across the country were featured in the farm program.

Several local ministers and members of the Worldwide Church of God have been instrumental in pre-scouting program shooting locations as far distant as Texas and Montana. We plan to continue utilizing this valuable service to save time and money in determining the best locations to record the *Garner Ted Armstrong* program. Present plans call for additional programs on the arms race, the juvenile justice system, the end of affluence in America's way of life, and the question of life in the universe. These are in the research and writing stage and are set for possible remote videotaping. Plans are being formulated for up to three quarters of this season's shows to be made on location.

In addition to producing the weekly program, the TV crew flew the Video Pod to Kansas City to record Mr. Armstrong's October personal appearance for projected use next summer as a 60-minute special throughout the United States.

(See pictures next page)





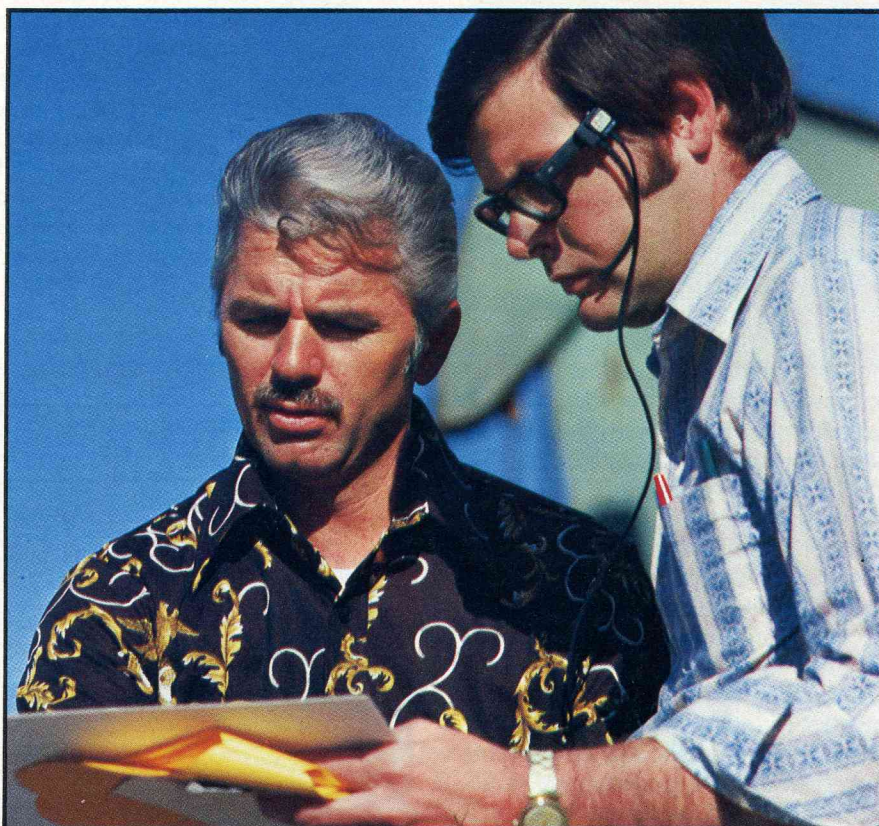
THE CHURCH IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand is a land of lush green pastures, trout-filled lakes and snowcapped mountain alps. Abundant hydroelectricity, geothermal steam power, and over 60 million sheep in a nation of three million people — benefits like these help make the country seem like an isolated, peaceful haven far from the rest of the hectic world. But unfortunately, New Zealand has its share of sickness and disease, crime and pollution, broken families and divorce.

The Worldwide Church of God is firmly established in New Zealand and is dedicated to reversing these downward trends. In this country we are having considerable success in proclaiming the return of Christ and the wonderful world tomorrow. The Church has grown and now extends to seven congregations in the main cities.

The Early Years. Since New Zealand is a small country, we have been able to experiment on a national scale with many different methods of promoting the *Plain Truth*. The first of these was in 1959, when double-page advertisements began appearing in several editions of the mass-circulation *Readers' Digest* magazine. Right from the start, response was encouraging. Before long, a mailing list of 5000 had been built up.

During the early 1960s, in response to readers' requests, ministers of the Worldwide Church of God traveled from Australia to conduct several baptizing tours. Soon there was a need for a local representative to reside in the country and provide increased Church contact. I was sent from Australia in



GARNER TED ARMSTRONG shoots segment for energy crisis program at California oil field (above), after talking over script with producer (below).

August 1967, and within a year our office in Auckland was opened. During 1969, advertising space was purchased monthly in the popular *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* magazine. These ads, along with further advertising in various regional newspapers and *Readers' Digest*, quickly doubled the New Zealand mailing list to 10,000 in 1970.

Then another dynamic door opened up. In 1970, private commercial radio became a reality in New Zealand, and *The World Tomorrow* broadcast began to be aired to the nation. Over the years several different stations have been used. At present, Garner Ted Armstrong is heard nightly over an Auckland station which can be heard throughout much of New Zealand. In a sense, *one* radio station proclaims the witness to the entire nation.

Newsstands and Householder Cards. In 1972, we experimented with putting the *Plain Truth* on newsstands in the major cities for a trial period of six months. This was quite successful, but an even more effective door opened up — an idea which has proved to be the most successful tool for the Work in New Zealand. This is the post-office approved advertising method of using "householder cards."

A small, multicolored card advertising the *Plain Truth* is printed in large quantities. These are delivered by a special post office service to every household or letterbox in a given area. All the householder needs do is write his or her name and address on the card, and return it to us.

In September 1975 we sent out the final consignment of half a million household cards — thus reaching every home in the nation!

Films. During 1975, another important method for promoting the Work was put into action. Since the *Garner Ted Armstrong* television program is unavailable here, we have been showing 16mm films of Herbert W. Armstrong and Garner Ted



GN Photo

Armstrong to interested *Plain Truth* readers.

The films, one titled "Herbert W. Armstrong — Ambassador for World Peace" and the other a Garner Ted Armstrong personal appearance campaign, have been shown in a number of cities. The results have been quite encouraging. An average of five to ten percent of our *Plain Truth* readers (sometimes as high as 20 percent) have turned up to see the films. Many of these people returned for follow-up Bible studies and Church services.

Bustling With Activity. As a result of these many methods of getting the message out, the New Zealand Work has developed a strong and solid foundation.

The income has made a steady annual increase — despite inflation and economic woes it recorded a good 15 percent increase for 1975. Contributions come from the New Zealand public and members of the Church. The money is spent within New Zealand as well as for the *Plain Truth* needs in our nearby Pacific areas of Fiji and Tonga.

The Auckland office is currently manned by a staff of ten, with four ordained ministers serving in other cities throughout the country. The seven weekly churches and six monthly outlying Bible studies now

ENTRANCE to our office in Auckland, New Zealand.

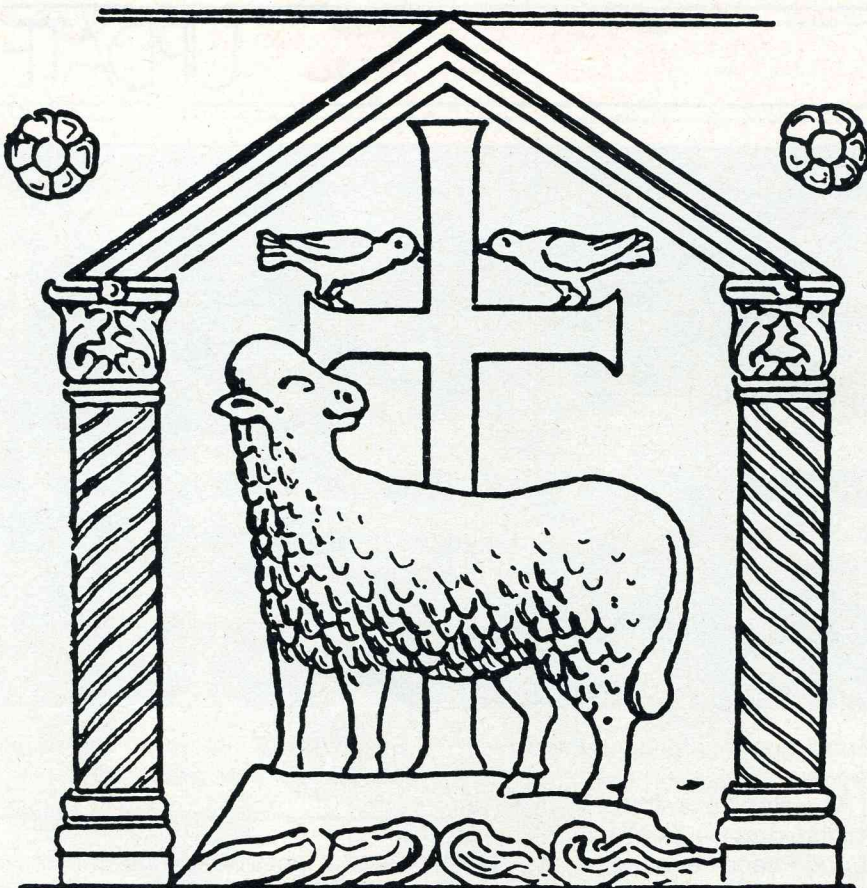
make it possible for anyone, anywhere in New Zealand to have some Church contact at least once a month. Church attendance now averages 600 a week — and we have the additional strength of 3,500 co-workers and donors.

The *Plain Truth* and *Good News* magazines for New Zealand and the Pacific Islands are printed monthly at the press of New Zealand Newspapers Limited, in Auckland. Mail from the South Pacific Islands, including Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa, is all handled by the Auckland office. Each week, over 1,000 letters come into our post office box from our readers.

Most of these letters, of course, are requests for literature. Last year our mailing department sent out well over half a million items of mail. Stacked one on top of another, these pieces would form a postman's nightmare — a pile towering over two-and-a-half miles into the sky!

Yes, here in New Zealand, a tiny, far-flung corner of the world, God's Word is being proclaimed as a witness — in a powerful way!

— Graemme J. Marshall
Director, New Zealand Office



IS THE SECOND COMMANDMENT OBSOLETE?

by D. Paul Graunke

In 1956 Hollywood made a highly successful movie on the life of Moses and the emancipation of ancient Israel called *The Ten Commandments*. If religious epics are ever again in vogue, they ought to make a movie on the history of the post-New Testament era of church history and call it *The Ten Amendments*.

It would depict how Christianity through the centuries has paid much lip and liturgical service to the

EARLY CHRISTIANS were reserved in explicitly depicting Christ, choosing instead such symbols as the lamb.

Ten Commandments, while often amending, revising, or wholesale abandoning them in doctrine and actual practice. Naturally, Hollywood would concentrate on lapses of the commandments concerning murder and adultery.

The Real Second Commandment. But for the purposes of this article we will concentrate on a less sensational commandment — the second. What does the second say? Well, that depends on what you read. For there are two listings of the Ten Commandments in circulation. In many catechisms and religious booklets you will find the second commandment listed as "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

But if you go back to the authentic source — the Bible — this is what you will read: "You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:4-6).

If you can't imagine why some denominations avoid or gloss over the real second commandment, just visit one of their cathedrals or churches, or read some of their literature. You will find plenty with images of Deity.

And again . . . God had more to say on the subject of images after the lawgiving at Sinai. In case anyone in Moses' day missed the point, God told the Israelites nearly 40 years later: "Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or fe-

male, the likeness of any beast that is on earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them, things which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven" (Deut. 4:15-19).

And in Deuteronomy 5, the command against idolatry is repeated again with the rest of the Ten Commandments.

Two "don'ts," then, are contained in the commandment: 1) don't make images to represent Deity; 2) don't use images of anything, whether God, man, or beast for purposes of worship and veneration.

But today — in spite of God's "don'ts" about images — there are many professing Christians who do incorporate images in their worship. Why — how — this has come to pass, would, of course, be one of the subjects of the proposed religious epic.

Act I: Doctrinal Darkness. Our imaginary movie would open sometime between 70 and 120 A.D. Unfortunately, historical material for the scripts would be sparse. Historians use metaphors like "curtain" or "dark cloud" to describe the dearth of information about this period. We know something about the persecutions the Church suffered, so there could be an obligatory scene of the Christians versus the lions while we wait for doctrinal developments. The scene would have to be a long one, as we have to rely on much speculation and inference drawn from few facts in constructing a doctrinal scenario for the first 100 years or so after the Apostolic era.

A number of Protestant scholars maintain that for the first three centuries, at any rate, the Church was as a whole shy of making images and pictures of Christ and was certainly opposed to using them for veneration. They are fond of quoting statements made by a number

of the "church fathers" to prove their point.

But Catholic and Orthodox scholars insist that "the practice of veneration of images has a distinctive and continuous tradition in Christian History" ("Images, Veneration of," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, p. 370). That the first Christians had any sort of prejudice against images is labeled as fiction. They appeal to archaeology for support. "The use of images in early Christian worship cannot now be reasonably questioned in view of the modern discoveries of archaeology" (*ibid.*, p. 371).

Who is right?

From the evidence available it seems the truth lies somewhere in between. The early centuries of church history are difficult to unravel. The young faith was threatened from without by persecution and sometimes divided within. No single ecclesiastical authority prevailed or was universally recognized.

In regard to images, archaeological investigations of the catacombs do indicate that Christians were portraying scenes from the Bible as early as the second century A.D. The subjects depicted were Old Testament patriarchs and events and New Testament saints and martyrs. *But portraits of Christ or of God are conspicuously absent.* Instead "Christians . . . at first represented Christ by symbol alone, the fish being one of the most important. The Greek letters of the word 'fish' are the initial letters of the words 'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior' . . . The lamb as a symbol was [also] used in early Christian art" (Katherine Morrison McClinton, *Christian Church Art through the Ages*, p. 13).

It should also be pointed out that while images of biblical heroes and symbols of Christ were made, any claim that they were actually used in veneration and worship is largely a matter of inference and not hard historical fact. "Very little was written about the veneration of images during the early period of Christianity," admits the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. "... Little is known about the doctrinal basis of veneration as practiced by Christians at that time" (vol. 7, p. 371).

Act II: A Double Standard? By the third century A.D., however, explicit depictions of Christ were being made. And within another century images of Christ, saints and martyrs were commonly used for veneration.

At the same time image veneration was spreading among Christians, church fathers and theologians were vigorously condemning *pagan* idolatry in the strongest terms.

At first glance this would seem to be an incongruous, hypocritical posture. But to them, there was no contradiction, no double standard involved. It was all a matter of terminology. To them the word "idol" had several different meanings.

1) An idol could be an image that was considered to be an *actual* god with miraculous powers.

2) An idol could be an image representing a *false* god.

3) An idol could be an image representing the *true* God that was used for edification and instruction — but not for veneration.

4) An idol could be an image representing the *true* God that was used for veneration.

Usually, early Christian theologians had definitions 1 and 2 in mind when writing about idolatry. They didn't consider images of the *true* God to be idolatry. Yet some philippics were so sweeping and all-inclusive in their condemnation of images that it seems their authors had the 3rd and 4th definitions in mind, too.

Some Defy the Trend. Take, for example, the second-century church father, Melito. In an apology to Marcus Aurelius, he countered an argument for imagery with these words: "There are, however, persons who say: It is for the honour of God that we make the image: and in order, that is, that we may worship the God who is concealed from our view . . . How can the unseen God be sculptured? Nay, it is the likeness of thyself that thou makest and worshippest."

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-220) condemned pagan idols as nothing more than representations of demons and then asserted in his *Protrepticus*: "But we [Christians] have no sensible image of sensible

matter, but an image that is perceived by the mind alone — God, who alone is truly God."

Origen (185-c.254) in *Contra Celsum*, chapter 76, wrote: "'Insane' would be the more appropriate word for those who hasten to temples and worship images or animals as divinities. And they too are not less insane who think that images, fashioned by men of worthless and sometimes most wicked character, confer any honour upon genuine divinities." (Clement and Origen's opposition to art extended beyond the issue of idolatry. They deprecated artisans and artwork as a whole.)

Tertullian (c. 160-230) took to task those who, seeking an exception to the rule, justified images by pointing to the example of Moses making a brass serpent (Numbers 21). He argued that the second commandment was not nullified by this incident. He concluded, "Make not any likeness in opposition to the Law unless to you, too, God have bidden it" (*De Idolatria*, chapter 6). He might have added also that Hezekiah destroyed the brass serpent several centuries later because Judah had taken to worshipping it with incense (II Kings 18:4).

"It is difficult to think that a pagan would have appealed to this incident in the Old Testament," said the English scholar and lecturer Edwin Beven. "Who could it be except a Christian who wanted to find a justification for the making of pictures and images in the Christian Church?" (*Holy Images*, p. 106.)

Church Fathers Not Unanimous.

Two incidents from the fourth century A.D. indicate that while images in the church were then proliferating, there were still those who objected. The famous church historian Eusebius (c. 260-340) rebuked Constantina, sister of Constantine, when she requested from him a picture of Christ. He considered such imagery to violate the second commandment.

And Jerome preserves a letter dated 394 A.D. written by Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis. In it he records that at Anablatha he saw "an image of Christ or of one of the saints; I do not rightly remember whose the image was. Seeing this,

and being loth that an image of a man should be hung up in Christ's church contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, I tore it asunder and advised the custodians of the place to use it as a winding sheet for some poor person."

So there were some who objected to idolatry even when it was baptized in the name of Christianity. The testimony of the early church fathers isn't unanimous in favor of imagery. But the dissenters were outside of the mainstream of thought on this and other issues. Their words carried little weight, and their arguments were rejected when the doctrine of image veneration was crystallized several centuries later.

Act III: Excess Leads to Iconoclasm. By the eighth century, image worship was quite the religious

If you can't imagine why some denominations avoid or gloss over the real second commandment, just visit one of their cathedrals or churches, or read some of their literature.

rage — particularly in the Byzantine Empire. Images of Christ and innumerable saints multiplied. Rituals, liturgies and ceremonies grew up around them. The icons were even being credited with supernatural powers.

This state of affairs represented a supreme doctrinal irony for Christianity. As the apostle Paul took great pains to point out in several of his epistles, Christ preached something better than a religion of rituals. He revealed a way of life in which piety didn't have to be — indeed, *couldn't be* — based upon or measured by ceremonies and physical deeds such as sacrifices and circumcision.

The concept of righteousness through rituals and ceremonies died with Christ. Unfortunately, down through the centuries, it has

been resurrected by men in such forms as the image worship that swept through the Byzantine Empire. Having rejected Old Testament rituals, the image worshipers proceeded to install a ritualistic system of their own making.

Finally, a reaction set in to the excesses to which image worship was carried. In 726 Byzantine Emperor Leo II began to destroy icons. In 754, the Council of Constantinople, under the aegis of Leo's successor, condemned idols in churches, decreeing that "If anyone ventures to represent in human figures, by means of material colours . . . the substance or person of the Word [i.e. Christ] which cannot be depicted, and does not rather confess that even after the Incarnation he [i.e. the Word] cannot be depicted, let him be anathema!"

But the iconoclasts lacked broad-based popular support in the East. And they had even less support in the West, where image veneration was more restrained anyway. The iconoclastic movement was finally suppressed after the death of Emperor Theophilus in 842.

Act IV: Hermeneutic Hair-splitting. Although ill-fated, the iconoclasts did prod the church into formulating a systematic doctrinal justification for the use of images. One of the staunchest defenders of image veneration during the early years of the iconoclastic uprising was John of Damascus. Although he is not considered a theologian of the first order, his arguments typify the line of reasoning used then — and now — to rationalize image veneration in light of the second commandment.

John argued for images by appealing to history and the "traditions of the fathers." He declared that veneration of images was a continuous practice from the earliest times. But, as we have seen, there is little evidence either in artifacts or documents to back this claim.

What about scriptural proof, then? Here John of Damascus bases his case not so much on the Bible — but largely in spite of it! He indulged in some hermeneutic hair-splitting in stating that New Testa-

ment Christians were not bound to observe all ten of the Ten Commandments. Christians should observe, said he, those articles that constitute the moral, or natural, law. Thus, following this line of reasoning, adultery remains a sin, as does murder.

But the second commandment was arbitrarily reckoned to be largely ceremonial — not moral, and hence subject to revision. The command against idolatry has a valid spiritual principle behind it (don't worship false gods — definitions 1 and 2 given earlier). But the technicalities of the command (no images whatsoever — encompassing definitions 3 and 4) are null and void for Christians worshipping the true God.

This conclusion was reached in the "spirit" of New Testament theology. Actually they missed the "spirit" of New Testament theology which — as explained earlier — discounts the need of ritualism to be accepted and saved by God. In building their case, they dispensed with the "objectionable" Old Testament ceremonial law only to institute a new ceremonial law of their own!

Image Veneration Defined. A formal doctrine of image veneration was enunciated by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. In effect admitting that matters had gone to an extreme, the council established the theological justification for images and laid down ground rules for veneration.

They declared that what makes an image an idol depends on what it represents and how it is used. As noted earlier, the church fathers didn't hesitate to condemn pagan idols because they represented false gods at best, or demons, they believed, at worst. But Christians need have no qualms as long as their images represented the true God.

Undeterred by an overwhelming lack of biblical proof for this distinction between pagan idols and Christian images, the council proceeded to define two kinds of religious worship involving images: 1) adoration due only to the Godhead; and 2) respect and worshipful honor accorded to saints and

martyrs. Further, the council made clear that the veneration of images is not directed to the image *per se* — but to the person or deity it represents.

Thomas Aquinas gave the doctrine of image veneration its fullest explanation five centuries later in his *Summa Theologica*. The worship due God was called *latria*, while the homage due to distinguished saints was called *dulia*. It was again stressed that the worship given an image reaches and terminates in the person or God represented.

Subsequent to the Reformation, Protestants dispensed with the ritual and rubric surrounding images, particularly of saints. But most continue to sanction images and pictures of God and Christ for religious instruction and edification.

The problem of portraying God the Father is that no one knows what He looks like! "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). And no eyewitness portraits of Christ exist.

Epilogue: God in the Image of Man. End of the movie — but not the argument! Although largely avoiding the pitfalls of ritualistic religion with regard to idols, Protestants still beg the question: Should God and Christ be portrayed at all?

The problem of portraying God the Father is that no one knows what He looks like! "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18; 5:37). And no eyewitness portraits of Christ exist. The earliest portraits of Christ that we have were made at least a century after His resurrection and ascension. And "Since there are no descriptions in the Bible of what Christ looked like . . . each race and each artist sought to represent its or his ideal. Beginning with the classic beardless youth of Roman art, we then have the Byzantine representation

with beard and parted hair. . . . The artists of the fifteenth century sought to represent Christ as He walked among men. . . . Each artist gives his own interpretation, and thus we have infinite diversity . . .

"The Protestant church . . . rejected the harshness of the crucifix and the Man of Sorrows, but accepted the sentimental, weak, unreal Christs of 19th-century art . . . which do not correctly interpret the person of Christ or the truths of the Bible. These popular painters have robbed Christ of His strength and made Him a sweet, poetic, nineteenth-century aesthete" (McClinton, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 123).

Does artwork — by its very nature highly subjective — really honor and serve Christ? Or are these works only creating a God and Christ after the image and imagination of men?

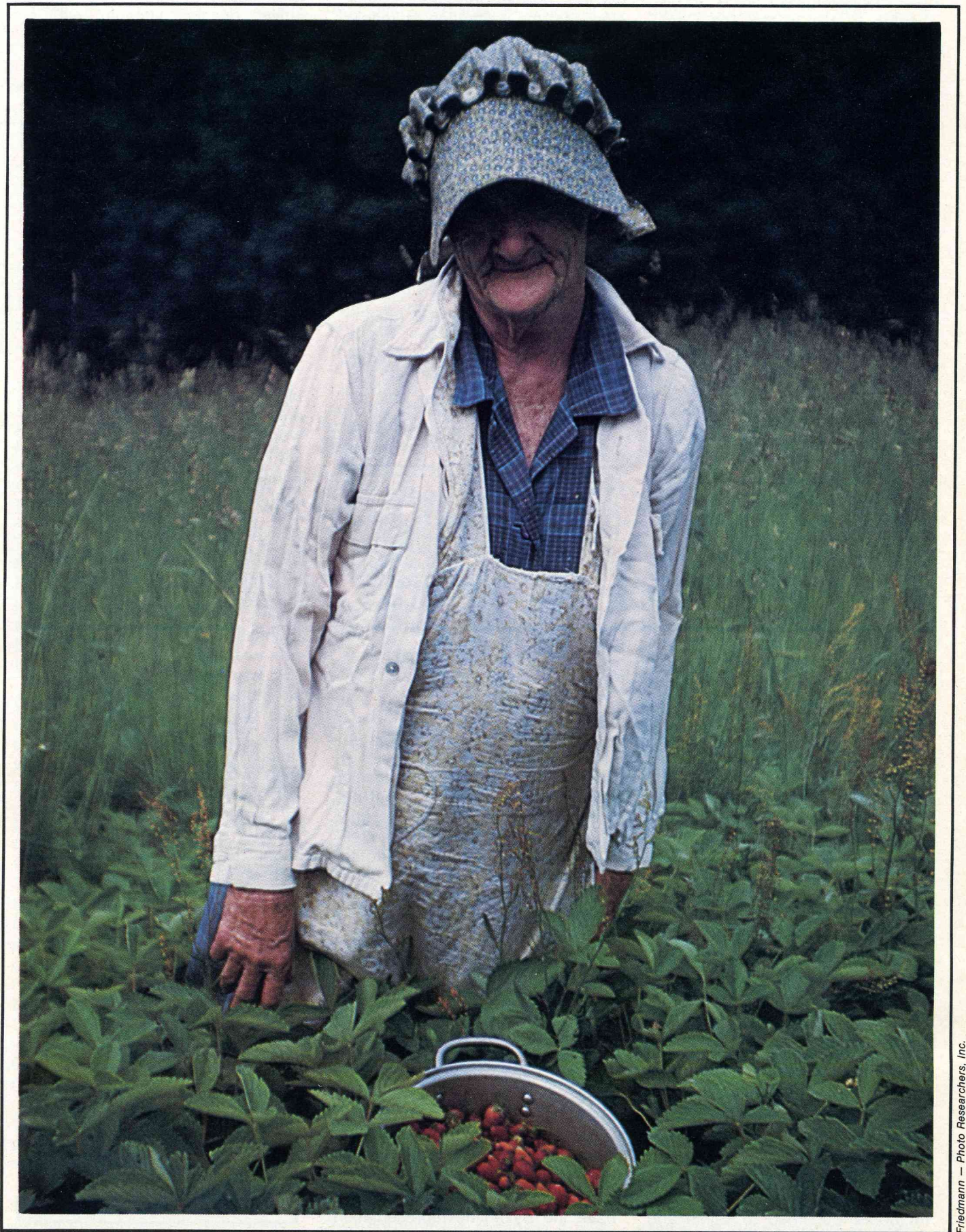
"In Vain Do They Worship Me." The second commandment, as Shakespeare might say, is "more honored in the breach than in the observance." The veneration of images of divinity rests not on the firm rock of the Bible but the sandy foundation of human reasoning and preference.

It has led to distorted and unscriptural concepts of God who "we ought not to think . . . is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man" (Acts 17:29).

Image veneration has also led people to confuse symbol with substance, ritualism with righteousness. What Christ said nineteen centuries ago about another religious rubric he might say today about images.

"For the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men'" (Matt. 15:6-9). □

Correction: On page 3 of the December GN we said: "Herod the Great was a vice-king in Jerusalem (tetrarch of Galilee, Luke 3:1) at the time of Jesus' birth." Herod the Great did reign at the time of Jesus' birth (Matt. 2:1). However, his son Herod Antipas ruled as tetrarch of Galilee during Christ's ministry (Luke 3:1).



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REMEMBER THE WIDOW!

by Carole Ritter

Widowhood is one of the most shattering experiences that can ever happen to a woman. It leaves her alone, sometimes poor and friendless, in a world geared to married couples. It can take as long as two years for a new widow to fully adjust to her new status. Some (such as the happy old woman on the facing page) carve out a new and productive life alone. But other widows have special problems that can only be alleviated by the care and concern of those around them. The Bible places heavy emphasis on the Christian responsibility to provide support — emotional and otherwise — for those women who have lost their mates.

Poor Henry. Gone so suddenly. He was a really fine guy . . . the whole neighborhood will miss him. And his wife — she's really shook up. Three fine kids with no father. Not much life insurance, mortgage payments sky-high — she'll have to sell the house, probably get a job. But she always was a homebody. Poor thing — we'll have to have her over for dinner some night.

But no, that would foul things up. Can't invite another fellow so soon; it would be awkward. Maybe she'd enjoy bridge with us girls some evening. But honestly, I'd really feel sort of funny having her around when Fred was home. I'm not the jealous type at all, but I know how things are with widows and you can't be too careful. Maybe she'd fit in at that big party we're going to have.

And so it goes. Another Henry dies, another woman loses her man, her credit cards, her friends and her identity.

In the United States, one out of ten households is headed by a widow. Eleven million women exist in the twilight zone between marriage and their own death. And while 70% of men over age 65 are married, only 30% of the women are.

In spite of the fact that most married women outlive their husbands, few bother to face this reality ahead of time. It's like old age — when we're twenty we believe it'll never happen to us.

The Widow's Plight. Our society tends to approach widowhood with its collective head in the sand. In fact, death has replaced sex as our national taboo. Widows remind us of our own mortality, so we have systematically shut them out of our lives and consciousness. Ours is a subtle but no less cruel form of the Hindu *suttee* — only modern custom relegates the widow to a psychological funeral pyre. As far as the mainstream of society is concerned, a widow is as "dead" as her husband.

And the very structure of things militates against a woman preparing for her statistically probable fate. "Don't worry about geometry — you'll never use it. Take home ec

instead. Get married as soon as you can — why bother to learn how to type? He'll take care of you."

Then, when the inevitable has happened, a woman may have nothing to fall back on. She may have no financial resources to prevent her from sinking below the poverty level. Although she may have served well as a wife and mother, this line of work is usually not too well-paying outside the home.

Perhaps too tired to work as a clerk or waitress and too unskilled for office work, she may find herself in the middle of that awkward age between welfare and Social Security. And perhaps her husband "protected" her from the financial details that might have halfway prepared her for this turn of events.

Does God Want Widows to Suffer? What goes through God's mind when He looks down and sees society's callous disregard for the widow's plight? Did He really mean for things to be this way?

Today's society is far from God-ordained — God cannot be blamed for the "raw deal" so many widows receive. God says He is a "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (Ps. 68:5). What if He were now taking a direct hand in human government? How would He care for women who have lost their husbands?

God has left us a record of how He handled the "widow problem" in His theocracy of ancient Israel. That record, the Bible, shows how He set up some really progressive laws that protected widows both legally and financially. One of those laws reads: "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless" (Ex. 22:22-24).

Ancient Social Security. Back then God executed "justice for the fatherless and the widow . . ." (Deut. 10:18; see also 24:17 and 27:19). He instituted a fair and just system of social security for those who needed it. Here is what He commanded the Israelites to do: "At the end of every three years

you shall bring forth all the tithe [tenth] of your produce in the same year, and lay it up within your towns; and the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do" (Deut. 14:28-29; see also Deut. 26:12-13).

God also told them: "When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut. 24:19-22).

When Israel rebelled from obeying these laws, God roundly condemned them — especially for forsaking the widow. He warned in Isaiah 1:23: "Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Every one loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them." He threatened vengeance on those who oppressed the widow and the orphan (Jer. 7:6). Israel did not repent of these sins, and eventually was taken into captivity as punishment.

Support Your Local Widow. God's instructions are no less clear for Christians today. He still has the same concern for widows He exhibited in Old Testament times. He inspired the apostle Paul to instruct the New Testament church: "If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. . . . If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:4, 8).

Paul continued: "If any believing [man or] woman has relatives who

are widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows" (verse 16). So Christians today have an obligation to help support close relatives who are widows if they are at all financially capable of doing so.

In some countries such as the United States, programs like Social Security provide at least a minimal income for widows after they reach a certain age, and in some instances provide child support. But not every widow will qualify for this assistance. In such cases it may be necessary for her to rely on the church or some other charity for support. And even though a Christian already contributes toward Social Security, he should also be willing to contribute to these other programs as he is able.

Emotional Support. But widows need more than mere financial aid. During the first weeks and months of widowhood, emotional support is also desperately needed. But people willing to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15) are rare indeed. "Sociologist Robert Fulton raised this problem in a conference on widowhood. 'Whom can you turn to when you are touched by death?' he asked. His discomfiting answer was, 'There aren't very many people who are prepared to come to your assistance either socially or emotionally. In fact, it is sometimes hard to find anyone who will even talk to you about your loss'" (Lynn Caine, *Widow*, New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1974, p. 139).

But such listening can be a greater gift than any amount of money one could give: "Verbal repetition eventually dulls the horrendous shock enough so that it can be faced, can be accepted. Talking helps us absorb less tragic situations, but even then listeners tend to resist. People scoff at the woman who says, 'Let me tell you about my operation.' Why? Because it makes them feel uncomfortable. Vulnerable. Such intimations of mortality are frightening to most of us. Our fear outweighs our desire to help" (*ibid.*, p. 139). But a genuine practicing

Christian ought to be willing to lend a compassionate ear.

Helping Widows Reenter Society.

Once a widow has adjusted to life alone, she still must face a world that is geared to *couples*. The woman alone today is considered a fifth wheel, a threat. "The prevailing assumption is that there is 'something wrong' with any woman alone" (Patricia O'Brien, *The Woman Alone*, New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1973, p. 70).

When a man dies, his wife is usually gradually but systematically excluded from her former social relationships. Unless she has formed a circle of friends entirely her own, after a time she may be left out in the cold.

This is another area where Christians have an opportunity to help. It may be uncomfortable at first to break out of the "couple" rut, but, as Margaret Mead said: "I think that family living . . . will become increasingly narrow, cramped and frustrating unless married couples open the doors of their homes and bring some singles into their lives. Opening the door of friendship to the widowed, the divorced and the never-married would bring a family blessed relief from the daily repetition of the same themes and the same controversies through the welcome diversity of other views and other interests.' This will not occur until married women gain courage and have enough faith in their own worth to welcome other women as friends. (And until their husbands can see widows as more than sex objects or bores.)" (Caine, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.)

A younger widow may also really appreciate the opportunity for her children to be able to have some masculine companionship. A Christian family should be stable enough to share itself with those in need of emotional support — without the specter of jealousy or petty social considerations intervening.

The apostle James wrote that "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27). This sort of thing — remembering the widow — is what real Christianity is all about. □

ANSWERS

Multiple choice

1-B. The Bible is a revelation of basic knowledge inspired of God through human instruments (see II Tim. 3:15-16; John 10:35; Matt. 4:4; II Pet. 1:21). The English word "Bible" is a derivative (or anglicized form) of the Greek expression *biblia*, meaning "books." The Christian Bible is composed of sixty-six books (*twenty-seven* in the New Testament and *thirty-nine* in the Old; compare closely with "D"). Certain apocryphal, noncanonical books are *not* included in most translations. Write for our free article "Do We Have the Complete Bible?" to find out why.

2-C. God promised the whole world to Abraham and his descendants as an eternal inheritance (Rom. 4:13). The booklet *What Is the Reward of the Saved?* makes plain this basic biblical truth.

3-A. Water Baptism is an outward symbol of one's inward repentance toward God. See our free booklet *All About Water Baptism*.

True or false

1-T. See Job 32:8; Zech. 12:1; I Cor. 2:11-14; Ezek. 18:4, 20; also request the free booklet *Do You Have an Immortal Soul?*

2-F. The disciples did ask Jesus privately: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3.) But the English word "world" was translated from the Greek word *aion* which means "age" and has been so rendered by a number of competent translators. Planet earth (the physical globe) has a permanent and vital place in the universe (see Rev. 21 and 22).

3-F. Isaiah 24 shows that there will be relatively "few men left" (verse 6) after this great period of chaos. It's all explained in our free reprint entitled: "The Coming Utopia — Wonderful World of Tomorrow."

4-T. Read Revelation 5:10: "And has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

A scripture which has puzzled theologians for centuries is I Corinthians 15:29: "Why then do those who baptize for the dead do what they do, if there is definitely no baptism for them?" (Author's translation throughout.)

One scholar who cataloged all of the various explanations of this verse over the centuries counted over two hundred! Since he wrote, several more have been advanced. Many attempts to explain the verse have been ingenious. Many have had a great deal of merit. Yet there is no consensus among scholars on the meaning of the passage.

Does this verse alter the understanding of baptism in the New Testament? Does it teach "vicarious baptism"? Do scholars have to agree on the meaning of I Corinthians 15:29 before we can properly understand Christian baptism?

Requirements for Baptism. Baptism is a ceremony with symbolic significance. As Romans 6 shows, baptism is a symbolic death and burial. At baptism the new convert figuratively buries his old self — with its sinful past and its history of living contrary to God — and rises a new individual in Christ.

Yet even though baptism is a ceremony, what it represents — and thus the ceremony itself — has certain prerequisites. Baptism is more than just an initiation ceremony. It is *not* the Christian counterpart of swallowing goldfish to enter certain collegiate fraternities. A person seeking baptism should be ready to *change* his *whole* life. He has to be ready to surrender himself to God and His direction.

When the apostle Peter was asked what to do in order to become a Christian, notice what he said: "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Notice carefully these steps which must precede a true and valid baptism. An individual must first repent of his former way of living apart from God. He must believe the gospel and the new way of life it presents (see Mark 16:16). He must be willing to make any changes necessary to live as Christ would have

"BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD"

by Lester L. Grabbe

him. Only then is the person ready for the ceremony of baptism which symbolizes this change of life through faith in Christ.

Any baptism which is not preceded by the proper prerequisites is invalid. The person may be doused in the water, but he will not receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 19:1-7). Such a baptism is completely worthless.

Should Christians Practice "Vicarious Baptism"? When one understands the purpose of, and requirements for, baptism, it becomes clear that there can be no such thing as vicarious baptism. One person cannot be baptized on behalf of another. Each individual must be baptized for himself, after *his own* repentance before God.

Therefore, it is clear that I Corinthians 15:29 does *not* teach vicarious baptism. Whatever that verse means, it is not a command to be baptized for those friends or relatives who died unbaptized. Such a concept is contrary to the clear teachings and intent of Scripture.

This does not mean, of course, that those who were not Christians at death are lost forever. For evidence that all will have a proper opportunity for eternal life, write for our free booklet *After Death — Then What?* and the reprint article "Is This the Only Day of Salvation?"

Explanations of "Baptism for the Dead." As mentioned at the beginning of this article, there have been multiple explanations of the phrase, "baptism for [*huper* in Greek] the dead." The reasons include the fact that the phrase in Greek is capable of more than one interpretation and that the historical situation is not clear from the New Testament or secular history.

The term "baptism for the dead" is used only in I Corinthians 15:29. Paul does not tell us what he has in mind. The Corinthian church obviously knew what he was referring to, but history has not recorded their knowledge for us. Several possibilities would fit the context of I Corinthians 15.

Some have suggested that the passage has reference to the resurrection, which is the hope of the dead. One could bring that idea out by the following paraphrase: "Why then do those who baptize with the hope of the dead in mind — which is the resurrection — do it, if the dead are by no means raised?"

Another explanation which has wide appeal is that Paul refers to a peculiar rite carried out by a group in Corinth. This group might not have had anything to do with the Church since Paul says "*those* who baptize for the dead," not "*you* who baptize for the dead." According to this explanation, Paul is not appealing to any practice of the Church but to a pagan rite — as an example — with which the Corinthian Christians were familiar.

Other explanations are also possible. In any case, there is *no command* to "baptize for the dead." In all the discussion of how to baptize and the significance of water baptism, there is *no* mention of baptizing "for the dead." It is also clear that any so-called vicarious baptism is contrary to biblical teaching.

Conclusion. The exact meaning of "baptism for the dead" is no longer discernible with absolute certainty. Several explanations are possible.

However, it is clear that true baptism must be preceded by repentance and belief. No one can repent for another, whether the other person is dead or alive. So-called vicarious baptism is, therefore, contrary to biblical teaching. Any attempt to extract such a doctrine from I Corinthians 15:29 is completely absurd.

There is *no* command to baptize for the dead in all the New Testament discussion of baptism. The instructions on baptism and its significance are clear. I Corinthians 15:29 has to be understood in the light of plain biblical teachings, not the other way around. □

IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE

Many hundreds have written asking if we have representatives in their areas to counsel with them personally and to answer their questions.

The answer is yes, we do.

The Worldwide Church of God stations personal representatives (most are ordained ministers) in the United States and British Commonwealth and many other areas of the world. These men will visit you, if invited, directly in your own home.

So if you have spiritual matters to discuss or questions to ask about biblical topics such as repentance, baptism, etc., please feel free to write us and request a private appointment. Worldwide mailing addresses are as follows:

- United States: P.O. Box 111, Pasadena, California 91123 (Or simply dial this toll-free number in the *continental* U.S.: 1-800-423-4444. Readers in California, Alaska and Hawaii may call 213-577-5225 collect.)
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- South Africa: P.O. Box 1060, Johannesburg 2000 (Or dial this number: 011-216406.)

Other areas of the world should check the inside front cover (staff box) for the address of our office nearest you.

LETTERS

Mr. Armstrong's Travels

We are thankful that at his age [Mr. Herbert Armstrong] is able to do the traveling like he does. It is good he is getting the plain truth to so many foreign countries.

Ora and David L.,
Forsyth, Missouri

No Hereafter?

After reading your article entitled "Are You Brave Enough to Face Truth?" I wouldn't know what to believe. What kind of religion is it where there is no belief in the hereafter? Do you mean to say that the crooks and evildoers are just as good as the people who try to live a decent life? Please!

M.Z.,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

• The Bible does teach that there will be a "hereafter," but it is not the traditional heaven/hell. God promises to eventually reward everyone according to their works (see Rev. 22:12). For more information on this subject, write for the free booklets What Is the Reward of the Saved?, Why Were you Born?, and Is There a Real Hellfire?

A Message From Amos

I thought that was a great article written by Brian Knowles on "A Message from Amos." It sure applies to us today. Everything Amos warned about is going on right here in this country.

Lincoln C.,
Bainville, Montana

Who Was Jesus?

I have just finished reading John R. Schroeder's article entitled "Who Was Jesus?" and just want to let you know what a tremendous blessing and message is contained in those four pages! Surely God is inspiring such in-depth articles to open our eyes and minds to our incredible destiny just when we need them! Keep up the good work!

Mrs. Roger D.,
Granite Falls, North Carolina

The Sheep Instinct

Thank you for exhorting us to use our "noggins." I don't think God gave us a brain just to fill the space between our ears. In other words, we needed that!

Fred M.,
Long Beach, California

Church of God

The September issue of *The Good News* contained several letters from people who had visited different congregations of the Worldwide Church of God, telling how they were so impressed with the friendliness of the people and the spirit that prevailed in their meetings. If visiting with your congregation is encouraged, we would like to know where there is one within driving distance of our home where we might attend.

Mr. and Mrs. Lewis F.,
Columbus, Ohio

• If you too are interested in talking to a minister of the Worldwide Church of God or in attending services, see the box on this page for further information. Also request: This Is the Worldwide Church of God.

From the Philippines

The Good News magazines you sent me were indeed very enlightening. I really don't know how to express my gratitude, but thanks anyway for your kind and deep concern. I am sure that this Work is most valuable and absolutely priceless.

Rupert L.,
Baguio City, The Philippines

Bible Quiz?

We would like to see a Bible quiz in each issue of the *Plain Truth*, but with scriptures we can look up to find the answers.

William S.,
Newtown, Connecticut
• We are sending you a sample copy of this month's Good News. Notice the quiz you asked for on page 7.

What Is The Unpardonable Sin?

Many a struggling Christian, pondering his eternal fate, has been frightened by the term "unpardonable sin." The very words — unpardonable sin — seem ominous, black and terrifying. Many have asked, "Is there some sin so horrible that it cannot possibly be forgiven? What is it? Have I committed it? Am I in danger of committing it? How can I be sure?" The Bible does speak of a sin which cannot be repented of, hence cannot be forgiven. But this, like many other Biblical teachings, is often misunderstood.

In a recent (November 1) *Plain Truth* article, Herbert Armstrong wrote, "Anyone who fears he may have committed the 'unpardonable sin' — is perhaps worried about it, and hopes he has not committed it, and still wants to have God's salvation — no such has committed it!"

If you are one who has worried about the unpardonable sin, or would like to know more about what the Bible says on this subject, write for the free booklet, *What do you mean - 'The Unpardonable Sin?'*

What do you mean—
"The
Unpardonable
Sin"?

The Good News Pasadena, CA 91123

Please send me a copy of the free booklet,
What do you mean, The Unpardonable Sin?

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