

The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word." (II Timothy 4:2)

•

"Feed the Flock." (I Peter 5:2)

The Reality of...

GOD

THE EVIDENCE of awesome, Almighty Power is all about us. In the darkness of the night look out into the star-studded heavens. We are told that our immediate universe exists on the outward fringe of that great expanse called the Milky Way. Here time is measured in terms of light years. Massive planets go reeling through space around the sun in clock-like precision. And in our more immediate world the seasons come and the seasons go with faithful regularity. Observe the world of nature with its balance of plant-life and animal-life. Then take notice of the structure of a single cell, or the breaking down of an atom. This Almighty Power all about us is not blind, erratic force—it is governed by systematic intelligence, which can be described in no other terms than Supreme Intelligence. A careful study of this harnessed Almighty Power governed by Supreme Intelligence is called science. There are natural laws that can be defined and depended upon. Science, with all of its amazing discoveries, is simply rec-

ognizing and rethinking the thoughts of Higher Intelligence. There is no way of getting around it. Almighty Power coupled with systematic, Supreme Intelligence can mean only one thing—GOD, and GOD who exists as real, definite, and consistent personality: ALMIGHTY, INFINITE IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD. God is real, a very simple truth yet the most profound and amazing thought that can enter your mind.

Just because we cannot see God with the natural eye does not mean that He does not exist. Even in our physical world some of the greatest realities are things we do not and cannot see. Can you see the air you breath? Can you see the wind? Can you see heat, the cold? Can you see gravity, electricity? Can we see life? We can see evidence of life (or lack of it), but in reality we cannot see the life that animates our human bodies. Nor can we see God with these human eyes. But God *is*! (And "in him

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THE SWORD AND STAFF

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Proverbially SPEAKING...

IT IS EASY for the person who has been forgiven to forgive others.

"Until a Christian has prayed, the the most important thing he can do is to pray."

Humility wears well on anybody (and especially the young).

"Half of the problems in living the Christian life come in half living it."

Still water runs deep, and rivers are most noisy where they run shallow.

"It may justly be suspected, that they have not the grace of God themselves, who grudge others a share in that grace."

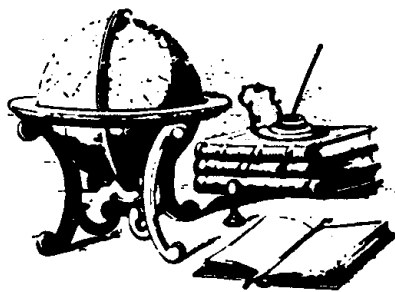
Before you give your "two cents worth" it might be good to consider if it is worth "two cents."

"The stature of a man is measured by his friendliness and courtesy for someone who can do absolutely nothing for him."

Efforts to be righteous without humility only results in self-righteousness.

"The reason a lot of people do not recognize an opportunity when they meet it, is that it usually goes around wearing overalls and looking like hard work."

A Christian is not primarily a person who DOES, but is a person who DOES because he IS.



EDITORIAL

COMMENTS...

THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE

WE WISH to call your attention to the NEW KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible. Many of you, like the editor of this paper, started out years ago with the regular King James translation and are pretty well versed in its terminology ("thees," "thous," et al). We have been very much at home with this monumental work of the English language (although it has age upon it). In fact, the beauty of its style and expression cannot be surpassed (in our opinion). But we are living in a time when the average person does not spend much time with the Bible, and therefore archaic expressions of the old English are about like a foreign language to him.

We briefly call your attention to old King James expressions like "meet" (Genesis 2:18), "conversation" (Hebrews 13:5; I Peter 1:15), "convenient" (Romans 1:28; Ephesians 5:4), "communicate" (Galatians 6:6; I Timothy 6:18), "quick" (II Timothy 4:1), "divers" (Hebrews 1:1), and "temptations" (James 1:2). The usage of these words today is considerably different from what they were in 1611. In the old King James vocabulary "meet" means suitable, "conversation" means behavior or conduct, "convenient" means proper or seemly, "communicate" means to share, "quick" means to be living (alive), "divers" means various (diversified), and "temptations" sometimes means trials. The New King James translation is helpful in changing such obsolete expressions as these.

We have read just some of the New King James Version, and, for the most part, have been pleased with what we read. It stays pretty close to the original King James sentence structure so that one may follow in the older translation or vice versa without any difficulty (that is a problem with some of the new translations based on the critical text)—thus, the beauty of the original style is largely retained.

Following are some itemized features about it listed by the publisher:

COMPLETE TEXT Unlike many popular versions which actually *delete* words, phrases, and entire verses in their "translations," the New King James retains every verse of the original translation.

UPDATED PUNCTUATION & GRAMMAR The New King James Version has been updated only in those specific instances where clarity could be enhanced through modern punctuation and grammar.

PRONOUNS CAPITALIZED In accord with today's reverent usage, all pronouns referring to God are capitalized.

ARCHAIC VERBS & PRONOUNS UPDATED "Sheweth" now reads "shows," and "thee" reads "you" for ordinary people and "You" for God.

TRUE MEANINGS PRESERVED Because words have changed their meaning since the

original translation, the meaning has been preserved rather than the actual word—for example, "naughtiness" is better understood as "wickedness" today.

THEOLOGICAL TERMS RETAINED Words which have special theological meaning for the Christian have been kept intact, words such as "atonement" which have no secular counterpart.

COMPLETE FOOTNOTES The footnotes on variant readings in the New King James Version are the most complete found in any Bible today.

MODERN FORMAT Modern typesetting and layout enhance clarity through paragraph units, subject heads, poetic structure for lyrical passages, and italics for editor-supplied words.

Also, we call your attention to the fact that all of the scholars who were involved with the New King James Version signed a statement as to their belief in the Divine inspiration of the Word of God (the Bible). □

THE REALITY OF GOD

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we live and move, and have our being" Acts 17:28). Jesus said that "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and He also said "a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). God is called "INVISIBLE" in I Timothy 1:17. He exists in another dimension from our immediate human experience.

I. THE REALITY OF GOD AS TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE.

The Bible is full of references to the reality of God and His awesome attributes (in fact, the Bible is the revelation of God of Himself to sinful mankind in the unfolding of His plan of redemption)—and when we study God, we find that we are dealing with absolutes in the fullest sense of that word and using the most expressive superlatives when trying to describe Him. It is mind-boggling.

Here is a listing of some of the great and profound truths concerning the reality of God as taught in the Bible.

1. God is—Hebrews 11:6; Genesis 1:1.
2. God is Spirit—John 4:24; Genesis 1:2.
3. God is Almighty (Omnipotent)—Revelation 4:8; 19:6 (Genesis 1:1; 17:1).
4. God is from everlasting to everlasting—Psalms 90:1-4.
5. God is Omniscient—A Being of infinite intelligence and knowledge, all-knowing.
 - (1) This is evident from creation.
 - (2) This can be seen by prophecy.
 - (3) The Scriptures directly declare it—Isaiah 40:28; Romans 16:27; Acts 15:18; Romans 8:29; Matthew 10:30.
 - (4) The Day of Judgment will reveal it—Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; I Corinthians 4:5; Romans 2:16; Matthew 12:36.
 - (5) God knows everything that is, everything that has been, everything that will be, and He even knows what might have been (Matthew 11:21, 23).
6. God is Omnipresent—I Kings 8:27; Psalms 139:7-12; Acts 17:27, 28.
7. God is Infinite in Moral Goodness and Perfection (the essence of perfection).
 - (1) James 1:17.
 - (2) Mark 10:17, 18—The rich young ruler had thoughtlessly used words appropriate only for Deity, "GOOD MASTER" (Romans 3:10, 23; 7:18), for only God is good in the absolute sense (man's goodness is relative).

J. W. McGARVEY in his *FOUR-FOLD GOSPEL* says: "As the ruler had not used this language sincerely Jesus challenged his words. The challenge showed the ruler that he had unwittingly confessed the divinity of Jesus, and thus started him into a consideration of the marvelous fact which his own mouth had stated. This is done because the young man would need to believe in the divin-

ity of Jesus to endure the test to which he was about to be subjected."

- (3) God is the Essence of Truth and Righteousness—Deuteronomy 32:3, 4; Psalms 31:5; John 8:26; Titus 1:2.
- (4) God is Faithful—I Corinthians 1:9.
- (5) Therefore, the character of God constitutes the law of the universe.
8. God is Holy—Isaiah 57:15; 6:3; I Peter 1:16.
9. God is a Consuming Fire—Hebrews 12:29 (He has been in the past, and the day of wrath and judgment is coming).
10. God is Love—I John 4:8, 16 (Deuteronomy 5:9, 10).

II. RESPONDING TO THE REALITY OF GOD.

God is real, and the examination of His awesome attributes more vividly bring this home to us. But we fit into the picture. How do we respond, or more exactly, how should we respond to the reality of God? We said that God is Almighty (Omnipotent), Omniscient, Omnipresent, etc. The prefix "OMNI" means all, everything. Therefore, the only logical way, as well as the only acceptable way, a finite being (such as we) can respond to this infinite Being of Eternity is with his all.

Let us look into this as we consider the profound truths brought out under point "I."

God is

Genesis 1:1 reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is a simple statement of the greatest truth—"In the beginning God" (God is). God is the first premise upon which every other premise rests. We respond with faith: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). God was in the beginning, the first cause before all things. He must be in the beginning in our lives. He must have first place, and we must build our lives around and upon this singular truth.

Before God gave the monumental Ten Commandments to Israel, they were prefixed by this profound declaration, "I am the LORD your God..." (Exodus 20:2ff; Deuteronomy 5:6ff). Then listen to Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." God is the first premise before everything (even the very foundation upon which His commands rest). He is one; He is all. We respond to Him with our all. His very laws spring from His reality and His character.

We respond to His reality with faith followed by works. James in essence says they are one—they cannot be separated (James 2:18-26).

God is Spirit

Jesus said, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). We are created after God's Own Image (which is spirit). As far as the eternal is concerned, the essence of reality is spirit. The physical simply accommodates us for this brief, tem-

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poral existence. But the spirit was made for eternity for God is Spirit.

Therefore, as we said, spiritual things are the real, eternal things—don't trust the physical and get all wrapped up in them. Even having to do with such a simple thing as food, Jesus said to the devil: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'." (Matthew 4:4). If we leave God out we have left out that which makes everything else make sense. Paul admonished, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1,2). Consider Matthew 6:24.

This is how we respond to God the Spirit. We are more than beasts of the field, and our motivation is higher than the flesh (sinning in the flesh). Paul correctly summed it up by saying, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

God is Almighty

We have before stated this awesome truth. God spoke of Himself as the "Almighty God" in communicating with Abraham (Genesis 17:1). The last book of the Bible has heaven resounding with thunderous praise and declaration: "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (Revelation 19:6). The preceding and intervening pages declare this, and the world of nature all about us every day and every moment of the day loudly attests to this fact.

But how are we (frail creatures that we are) to respond to such an Almighty Being?

In humility—there is no other way we can approach Him! Micah 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O man, what is good: And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" Of six things that the LORD hates (even seven that are an abomination to Him), the writer of Proverbs tops the list with a "proud look" (Proverbs 6:16-19). All are instructed by the apostle Peter to be "clothed with humility." Then he tells why: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (I Peter 5:5,6).

Then God's strength is made perfect in weakness: it is made evident! Think of the POWER that is at our disposal when serving God! (The power that made heaven and earth; the power that raised Jesus from the dead). "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). Christians are "strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" as He indwells by faith (Ephesians 3:16,17). In fact, we are "kept by the power of God through faith" (I Peter 1:5) when we serve the Almighty God. Paul confidently stated, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Therefore, we are not surprised to read: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in

us" (Ephesians 3:20). Just think of this! And we have listed only a few of the Scriptures! Praise His Name!

God is from Everlasting to Everlasting

Being human, this is something hard for our finite minds to grasp, but it is nonetheless true. Psalms 90:2 forthrightly states: "Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Read this 90th Psalm on down through verse 12. Time is nothing with God for He is in the realm of eternity. The Psalmist reflects upon the frailty of man in contrast with God. We are like grass that grows up in the morning, is cut down in the afternoon, and withers. He goes on to say, "The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow: For it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

What is the proper response of man to this immortal God (I Timothy 1:17) Who always was and always will be? And especially in view of the brevity of our lives in the flesh? The Psalmist very fittingly concludes, and thereby tells us, by saying: "So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom" (verse 12). And from the New Testament perspective, today is the day of salvation. What time is allotted us is an act of grace that we might be brought to repentance (II Peter 3:8-11), and then that we might pass the time of our sojourning here in fear (I Peter 1:17), living soberly and conscientiously. We are creatures of time, and it will only be a matter of time till this will personally be brought home to us as we close our eyelids in death. We need to work while we can.

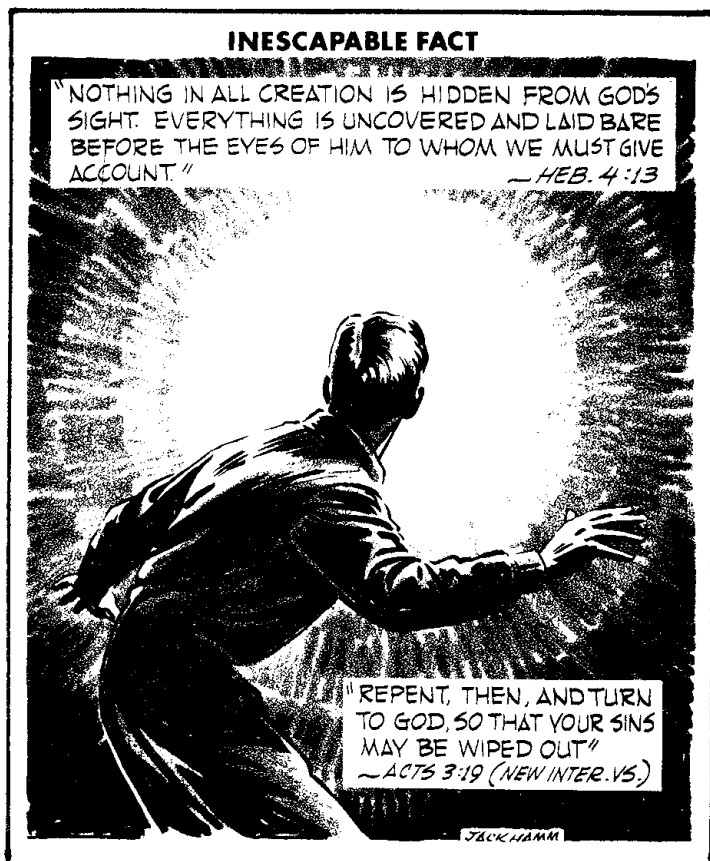
But, inasmuch as God is from everlasting to everlasting, and our trust is in Him, we have anchored our souls to that which is eternal (not that which is passing away). Therefore, we should experience stability in our lives. God will be around when everything else is gone. What security!

God is Omniscient

As we have before pointed out, God knows everything that is, everything that was, everything that will be, and He even knows that which might have been. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. In fact, He knows the thought and intent of your heart. God is Supreme Intelligence. Needless to say, this is beyond our comprehension in any sense of the word. Amazing!

Realizing that God knows all, there is no room for hypocritical living. Be careful how you live. There is coming a "day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel," Paul said. God knows the hearts of all men. Let us be sure that we are right with Him. He knows if we are not. The only person we fool is self.

Since God is all-knowing and wise, and we are created with mental faculties above that of animals, we should seek to excel in knowledge and wisdom (especially about spiritual things). As a basic fact, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4). Then we are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). What an exciting Book we have to study as we learn the mind and wisdom of God!



Then rest assured as you suffer your hardships and trials down here below they are not unbeknown to God. If you will commit your all to Him, He will work things out for your good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

God is Omnipresent

Although king Solomon built God a temple, he realized a temple could not contain Him. He said, "...Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (I Kings 8:27). The 139th Psalm is a great one, showing that God is everywhere and ever present. Listen: "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell (sheol), behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You." Therefore, throughout the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament alike) everything is pictured as being done in the sight of God (Judges 2:11; I Kings 11:6; etc.; I John 3:22; etc.). "...There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

How are we responding to these truths? Whose sight are we mindful of? Too many people merely do that which is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). Then some people have in mind the eyes of other people. They are men-pleasers and hypocrites (Read Matthew 6). However, those who are wise are mindful of the sight of God. With the Psalm-

ist, they will pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23,24, written after considering that God is everywhere and sees all). And, like Paul says, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23). The eyes of the LORD God behold everything. Live soberly and righteously in this present world (And, as it has been said, character is what you are when no one is looking, when you are in the dark).

Coupled with the fact that God knows all, these truths are startling!

God is Infinite in Moral Goodness and Perfection

This is made emphatically evident in the Scriptures we brought out in the first division of this article. There is no sin, no evil, nor wrong to be found in Him. In fact, as we said, His character is the law of the universe—and especially in the perfect consistency of it. He can be depended upon for what He says, for what He is, and for what He says He is.

The purity, the totality, of His perfection and righteousness is overwhelming. All men who have experienced close encounters with God have freely admitted their guilt (example: Isaiah 6:5). Men have said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). They have cried out, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Men are convicted of guilt and of the need of righteousness not found within themselves. They are made to want to turn to God for forgiveness and the righteousness which He bestows therewith.

This should make us want to be humble, realizing our sinful limitations, and live good and godly lives. We will appreciate the grace of God and be anything but self-righteous. We will conscientiously make every effort to be like our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:48).

God is Holy

Perhaps this should have been considered in connection with God's moral goodness and perfection. God is infinitely Holy, far removed from all sin and pollution. His holiness is complete, is perfect, is awesome. The Holy Spirit of God convicts of sin (John 16:8; Acts 2:37,38).

Peter appropriately admonishes: "As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'." (I Peter 1:15,16). This was originally written in the Old Testament Scriptures (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7) and the truth of it is repeated here for our benefit. Peter continues, having reference to our responding to God's holiness in being holy, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1:17).

Yes, "The fear of the LORD is clean" (Psalms 19:9), but not only that, it produces boldness in our lives (Matthew 10:28). The man who fears God has nothing else to fear. "The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25). "The wicked flee when no one pursues, But the righteous are bold as a lion"

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(Proverbs 28:1). You only have to look at the apostles in the early church to see the combination of the fear of God and boldness. May we respond accordingly.

God is a Consuming Fire

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28,29)

Here we have the present situation and anticipation of Christians, with a glimpse into the past, forecasting the future. Down here on this earth and in the Old Testament period fire had literally come out from the presence of the LORD and devoured rebellious sinners in the flesh. The Old Testament was temporal and pertained to the flesh, whereas the emphasis in the New Testament is spiritual and eternal. Remembering this (Hebrews 12:29), and looking to the future, this is a powerful motive for right living in the present. In that great day of final judgment God will say to the ones on his left: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41,46). Then it will be "everlasting fire," and it doesn't say that it will "consume" (it did and does down here on this earth). Lost humanity will be in the "lake of fire" with the devil and his angels. What will the state be there? Listen: "And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). Then verses 11-15 of this chapter of Revelation tell us that "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (This corresponds to Matthew 25:41,46). Never forget it. Sin is an awful thing. In His relation to sin God is a God of wrath, and there is a final day of wrath and judgment coming.

So, along with the holiness of God (which we cannot stand before in sinful flesh), this should produce fear. It should motivate us to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. We are accountable to Him.

God is Love

Now we come to that which decidedly shows that God is more than impersonal Infinite Force, that which lets us know this old universe has a heart of compassion, and that which holds everything else together in meaningful relationship. Listen: "Behold, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for GOD IS LOVE. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (I John 4:7-9). This great truth that "God is love" is repeated in verse 16.

When we talk about God's love, this includes His mercy, His grace, and His longsuffering with His fallen creatures. This includes all that He is doing now as well as what He has in store for those who love and serve Him (the glorious hope that we have). Without the love of God there would be no gospel, no salvation, no loving care for us. Think of this all-engulfing love which is in the framework of order and re-

sponsibility, that which desires the best for us. We are saved from the wrath of God through the love of God. All of us know John 3:16.

We respond to this overwhelming love with love; this is the fire heaven has lit and not we ourselves. "We love Him because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). Paul tells us that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5; note Acts 2:38). Peter admonishes: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere

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love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (I Peter 1:22,23; note I John 3:14). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23). (Notice that love tops the list).

We love God, and we love one another (I John 4:19-21). But this love is more than a wishy-wasy sentiment. It is concrete; it is real. It takes definite visible form. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (I John 5:3; John 14:15). "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I John 3:16-18).

Love is the dividing line between the children of God and the world.

Summary Conclusions and Thoughts on Responding to the Reality of God

As we have found in this article, the prefix "ALL" must be repeatedly used in describing the reality and attributes of God, and it must be used in describing our response to Him (if He is real to us). As we approach God, the attitude

of that first Gentile convert must be ours: "...we are all present before God, to hear all things commanded you by God" (Acts 10:33). As the Lord Himself said: "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Paul continues the thoughts: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). As a Christian "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). God is first and must be put first (Genesis 1:1; Matthew 6:33). Christ must be LORD OF ALL in our lives or He is not LORD AT ALL; He must have FIRST PLACE or no place. God is all: "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:6). To respond to God in any less way is to deny His deity.

We become like the God we worship. Power, stability, purity, love and goodness will be in the lives of those who worship the Almighty God of Eternity (II Timothy 1:7; Galatians 5:22,23). People who worship the God of materialism (the so-called almighty dollar which is not so almighty anymore) have different responses. They become highminded, selfish, and greedy (I Timothy 6:17). Since their god is not almighty (they trust uncertain riches), their lives will be filled with uncertainty, worry, and anxiety (Matthew 6:24-34). Then some people profess to believe in the true God, but deny Him by their works (Titus 1:16). Inferior concepts of God can only produce inferior results in your life.

The early church is a great illustration of responding to the reality of God. The book of Acts tells many wonderful things about them and their God. Their prayers tell us a lot about their concept of God. Following the resurrection of Christ (and the great day of Pentecost) when Peter and John were threatened and told to not teach anymore in the name of Jesus, they replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"

TEN WAYS TO BE NICE TO YOUR WIFE

HERE ARE TEN WAYS to be nice to your wife (she will love you for it):

- 1. Smile at her when she enters the room.
- 2. When around other people, let them know you appreciate her.
- 3. Say something nice about her when you introduce her to someone.
- 4. At dinner, hold her chair for her when she sits down; give her a pat on the shoulder.
- 5. When visiting with others, ask her a question when conversation lags.
- 6. When out visiting, look up to her after dinner; ask her if she is enjoying the occasion.
- 7. Hold her coat when getting ready to leave.
- 8. Praise her when on the way home from somewhere (meeting, visiting, etc.).
- 9. Tell your mother-in-law how much you appreciate her daughter, and how you appreciate her too.
- 10. Frequently tell your wife that you love her—and demonstrate it! —Selected

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(Acts 4:19,20). Notice the prayer that follows made by the church after their release (Acts 4:24-31). In it we hear them addressing the great God of eternity, the creator of heaven and earth, and the omniscient One who knows everything before it happens. They address God as "Lord" (verse 24). This is not the regular Greek word for Lord (*Kurios*), but it is *Despota*. We get our English word "despot" from this. The original does not have a bad connotation, but in it we see God in all His power and authority. They believed this. They feared God (and they had nothing else to fear). They prayed for boldness (not deliverance), and boldness they received (4:29-31). They were of one heart and one soul (4:31) (and Christians will be today when God is real in their midst). Those were great days for the church. They had a great God (He is still around). The apostles had great power and great grace was upon them all (4:33). We read of great fear (5:5,11), and that they were greatly multiplied (6:7). Their great love prompted great lamentation when Stephen was stoned (8:2). Great joy was common among them (8:8). God was real to them.

God is. Everything points to this reality. There are so many things that we do not know, cannot know, and that are beyond our human understanding about God. However, we can walk by faith and build our lives around this great reality (properly responding to the truths that we do know). Hebrews 11 is a great chapter which tells about people who actually did this (read it). They "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (11:27). Let us be believing until death. We will be the better for it now and for eternity. The godly life cannot be surpassed.

(NOTE: quotations from the Bible in this article were from the NEW KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible.)

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NOT AFRAID TO DIE, HOWEVER...

JUST BEFORE the famous Campbell-Owen debate, Mr. Owen visited Mr. Campbell at Bethany to arrange for the discussion, and one evening when the two were strolling together over the farm they came to the family burying ground, and Mr. Owen paused and said, "There is one advantage I have over the Christian—I am not afraid to die; and if some few items of my business were settled, I would be perfectly willing to die at any moment." Mr. Campbell replied, "You say you have no fear in death; have you any hope in death?" After a solemn pause, Mr. Owen answered, "No." "Then," continued Mr. Campbell, pointing to an ox standing in the shade, whisking off flies, "you are on the level with that brute. He has fed until he is satisfied, and there he stands in the shade, and has neither fear nor hope in death." Mr. Owen made no attempt to answer.—Selected

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SHOEMAKER, SIDELINE BUSINESS

WHAT ATTENTION we as God's servants need to give matters that pertain to our lives on the earth can best be understood by the old Boston shoemaker's statement. His business or occupation, said he, "is only my sideline to pay the expenses of my business of serving the Lord."

—Selected

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WHY FIRETRUCKS ARE RED

DO YOU KNOW why fire trucks are red? Well, fire trucks are red because they have four wheels and eight men. Four and eight are twelve. Twelve inches is a foot and a foot is a ruler. Queen Elizabeth is a ruler and the ship the Queen Elizabeth is the largest of the seven seas. The seas have fish and the fish have fins. The Fins fought the Russians and the Russians are red. Fire trucks are always "rushin," therefore, fire trucks are red.

Does this make any sense to you? It makes as much sense as any excuse you have to offer for a failure to do God's will. The third chapter of Genesis tells us that God did not accept the excuses offered by Adam and Eve for their failures to obey Him. God won't listen to any reason that you will offer for a failure to become a Christian.

—SELECTED

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THE ANT AND THE STRAW

A BIOLOGIST tells how he watched an ant carrying a piece of straw which seemed a big burden for it. The ant came to a crack in the earth which was too wide for it to cross.

The ant stood for a time, as if pondering the situation. Then it put the straw across the crack and walked over on it.

This example, real or unreal, can be a lesson for us every day. Our burden properly borne and utilized can become a bridge for us.

Paul wrote to the Philippians in the first chapter, verse 12: "Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest."

He went on to say that as a result of his imprisonment most of the brethren were made more confident through his bonds and were "abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear."

This was in perfect accord with his declaration in Romans 8:28: "Unto those that love the Lord, all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose."

When we come to problems and worries that concern us, we should remember the counsel of Jesus: "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" John 14:1.

Christians must believe in the providence of God, that he "is a very present help in trouble" Psalms 16:1. But that is exactly the role of the Lord: a "help." God expects us to do our part in handling problems and difficulties.

Many duties we often would impose on the Lord's shoulders we can and must bear ourselves. Listen to these words:

"Study to show thyself approved unto God" II Timothy 2:15. Basically, the responsibility is upon "thyself" now.

"Save yourselves from this untoward generation" Acts 2:40. The Lord has completed his work in your salvation until you act. God will not accept your responsibility as his duty or work.

When Israel was defeated by the little insignificant

town of Ai, Joshua, the leader of God's people, complained to God for his lack of attendance in their defeat and shame. God replied: "Joshua, get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face. Israel hath sinned, and they also have transgressed my covenant" Joshua 7:7-11.

And before God would be their savior, their help in time of need, their defender, they had to put away evil. The Christian has no advantage over the world so far as the providence and protection of God are concerned unless he is careful to hear and do the will of God.

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" I Peter 3:12.

But when we earnestly strive to do his will, God's good providence helps us turn adversity into good, defeat into victory, and with Paul we can say:

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" II Corinthians 12:10.

This is the advantage in being a Christian, a faithful Christian (Revelation 2:10).—The Christian Connection□

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"REPENTANT THANKS"

*Lord, how can I be thankful
in inflated times like these,
when grocery bills are rising,
Lord, tell me how, please?*

*What can I be thankful for
amid such need and distress?
Seems expenses tally more and more,
and my income counts for less.*

*Everytime I think I'm getting
maybe just a little ahead
Something new crops up before me,
then back I drop into the red.*

*...Forgive me, Lord, for mistaking
what really matters most—
It's not in all these pointless worries,
but in Thy blessings we should boast.*

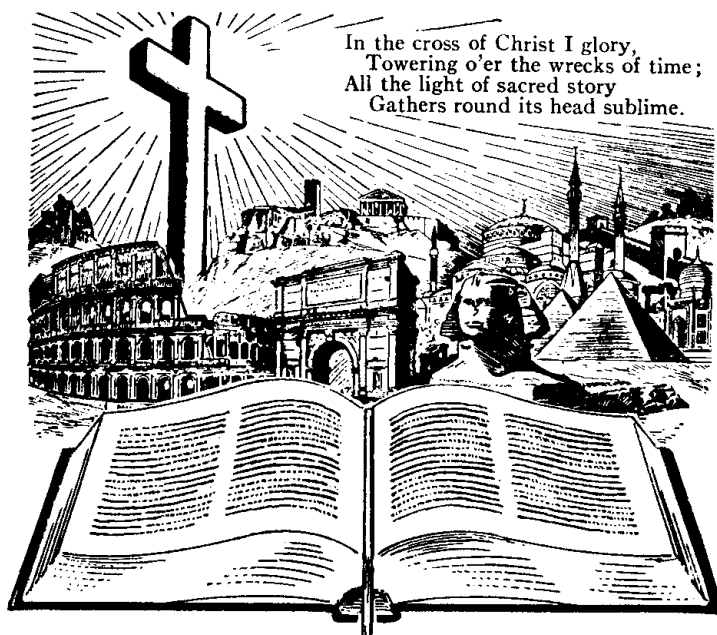
*How can I o'erlook Thy goodness,
when it flows so full and free?
How can I not see my blessings
daily as they come from Thee?*

*O, we are such a spoiled people,
accustomed to having more than we need.
We should count our blessings more often
and upon Thy heavenly manna feed.*

*Pray, may I give true thanks to Thee,
bowing happily, humbly upon my knees,
that I may know Thy grace for me.
Dear Lord, help me be so, please.*

By BOB WICKLINE
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The Wise Design of God's Church



● By James E. Gibbons

IN THIS ARTICLE we wish to consider the wise design of God's church, and we wish to approach this subject in the following manner:

- (1) The wisdom of its design in reference to its message.
- (2) The wisdom of its design in reference to its accomplishment in connection with itself.
- (3) The wisdom of its design in reference to its organization.

But perhaps we could understand all of this better if we asked some other questions first. What is God trying to accomplish in reference to His creation? Or, what is His eternal purpose or will, especially as it relates to man? And, does the church fit in with this?

Our study of God's Word has led us to conclude that God is seeking to accomplish at least three things. (1) He is trying to accomplish HIS GLORY—glory to God is from cover to cover of the Bible, and the final book of Revelation especially makes this emphatic. I Corinthians 1:31 reads, "that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the LORD'." (2) God is seeking to maintain the ongoing of RIGHT AND ORDER in the universe—He is not the author of confusion. And, (3) God wishes to bring about the SALVATION of "whosoever will" of the fallen human race. Mankind has made a mess out of it and has proved himself incapable of saving himself.

In view of this, it must be said that the church fits into the very center of this over-all plan or scheme of things. God is to be glorified through the church—"to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21). The manifold wisdom of God in reference to man's salvation is being seen unfolded and accomplished through the church (Ephesians 3:10; 5:23). And, the church is the pillar and ground of the

truth (I Timothy 3:15).

But, what do we mean by "wise design" as we speak of the wise design of God's church? To understand this we ask another question: What is the difference in the meaning of *wisdom* and *knowledge*? Knowledge is knowing a lot; wisdom is having the good sense to apply what we know in a practical way to a given situation. God is at the same time ALL-KNOWING and ALL-WISE. What impresses us about the wisdom of God is (1) the unlimited extent, magnitude and diversity of it, and (2) how practical it is in accomplishing His purpose. So, when we are talking about the "wise design" of the church, we are talking about the practical design of the church in accomplishing God's eternal purpose (as well as the greatness and diversity of it). And we said that His purpose involved HIS GLORY, the prevailing of RIGHT, and the SALVATION of mankind (HIS GLORY comes largely as a by-product of the establishment of HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS and the SALVATION of lost humanity).

When we realize the magnitude of the problem of sinful humanity, wisdom as never before known is needed in somehow bringing about the salvation of man (and especially when we remember that God has said that nothing sinful or unclean would enter heaven, Revelation 21:27). The problem is one of universal proportions—mankind in general has made a first class mess of it. That is the gist of Paul's conclusive remarks in Romans 3:10 and 23—"There is none righteous, no, not one" and "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The reality of the problem of the sinful depravity of Gentile and Jew alike is first presented before these conclusions are stated (chapters 1:21-2:24). "Professing to be wise, they became fools," is said of the Gentiles. He then tells us how they were given over to senseless idolatry, homosexuality, and all kinds of sinful depravity, perversion, and wrongs. Jews reading Paul's vivid description of the Gentile world would resound with an "Amen!" But chapter 2 levels the charge against them that they were equally guilty. Their hypocrisy had even made the name of God become a curse word among the Gentiles. He correctly concludes that "ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The human race is sinful, predisposed to sin, and depraved. Yet, God wishes to save fallen man from the doom he has brought upon himself—what a challenge! Nothing less than divine wisdom could get the job done.

The greatness of this problem is greatly compounded when we see what a motely and diversified bunch needs to be saved. There they are: lowly, primitive people of the jungle, the "sophisticated" of the big city (another jungle); the "educated," the illiterate; the "wise," the simple; the rich, the poor; the "moral," the immoral, the depraved—you name it! What a colorful, colorless, checkered, motely bunch!

Yes, a wise design beyond anything human would be needed to get the job done. The problem is universal, but the people with the problem are so different. It would have to be something very practical and down to earth—something very simple, and yet at the same time very powerful. All of this would have to be accompanied with a lot of

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grace.

Paul declares that we see this very wisdom of God being manifested and worked out in the church (Ephesians 3:10). He speaks of the "manifold wisdom of God" being "made known by the church." This word "manifold" simply means many-fold. There are many folds, there is much diversity, in this wisdom which can be seen in the church. Not only can man see it, experience it, and reap eternal benefits from it, angelic beings in the spirit world looking on take notice of this "manifold wisdom of God."

I. THE WISE DESIGN OF GOD'S CHURCH IN REFERENCE TO ITS MESSAGE.

The church is entrusted with God's message for a world lost in sin. It is not as the Roman Catholics would have us believe, that the church wrote the Bible—therefore, the authority is in the church, not the Bible (thus putting themselves in a position to justify whatever tradition they may come up with if it happens to supplant the Bible). Certain men (i. e. apostles and prophets, and not the church generally) were directly guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:1-5). When once they wrote what they were inspired to say, the inspiration was in their writings (the inspired Scriptures). These writings constitute the inspired message of God for time and eternity. The church is the vehicle through which God's heavenly message is carried and made known to the world. As we have already seen, the manifold wisdom of God is made known by the church (Ephesians 3:10), which also is called the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). The Spirit and the bride say "come" (Revelation 22:17). Paul says that we have this treasure (the gospel) in earthen vessels (II Corinthians 4:7). He also said that God has ordained through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe (I Corinthians 1:18ff). The church does all of this marvelous work as it carries out the Great Commission.

The Wisdom of the Message

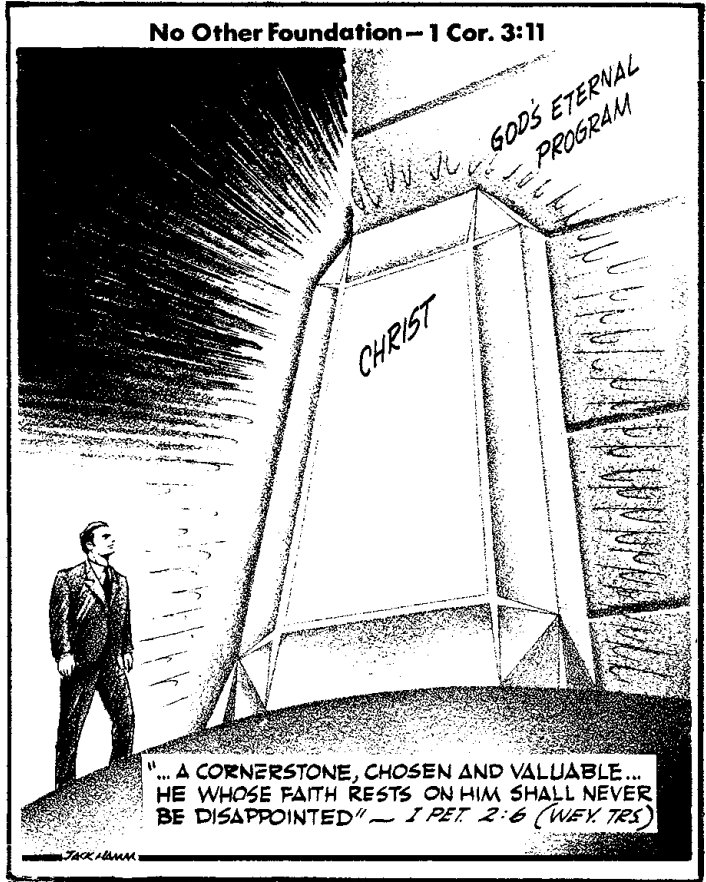
God's great wisdom from the practical viewpoint can be seen in the message the church preaches.

The message that is preached in the gospel is basically a message of grace (unmerited favor)—what wisdom! All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, and sin is so bad that one sin made the human race a dying race. Man needed total forgiveness and a new start. By himself he could not undo the past, so God stepped in. Man could not lift himself by his own bootstraps. Therefore Paul declares, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Then Titus 3:4, 5 says, "But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." And that great verse in II Corinthians 5:21 reads, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." When a sinner accepts Jesus, his past is blotted out to be held against him no more. What good news!

This message the sinner has responded to is very simple and universal in its appeal (thus showing the evidence of divine wisdom). The prophetic Scripture of Isaiah 35:8, pointing forward to Christianity, had said, "A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray." How nice—what wisdom! The simplicity of the message of the old rugged cross is brought out in I Corinthians 1:18-2:5. John 3:16, coupled with this simplicity, shows the scope of God's love. The need and the appeal are universal. All of this is implied in the Great Commission (Matthew 28; Mark 16). What wisdom in having such a message!

Such a simple message getting right to the heart of things is powerful in transforming the lives of sinners. Paul calls it the "power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). There is a new birth (John 3; II Corinthians 5:17). In I Peter 1:22, 23, that apostle wrote, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." Then Paul says, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). What wisdom in having such a power that will unlease us from the fetters of sin!

Then, from the viewpoint of its magnitude and diversity the wise design of God is very much in evidence in this message of the church. Paul has already called it "manifold wisdom" (Ephesians 3:10), and Peter speaks of "the



manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:10). Like a beautiful diamond sparkling, its many facets reflect the wisdom of God in its variegated greatness from any angle you choose to look at it. The truths are varied and beautiful. New dimensions and depths of the grace of God are continually being discovered. The futility of human wisdom is mentioned in Romans 1:22. Then Paul shows God's great wisdom in bringing salvation to all men in the unfolding of His manifold plan. Such contemplation made him break out in excited and poetic jubilation. "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). Romans 16:25-27 further reflects this feeling, making him conclude by saying, "To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen."

And all of this fits into God's over-all purpose. His glory is accomplished, salvation of human beings is brought about, and righteousness prevails. God's glory comes through Christ in the church (Ephesians 3:21; Revelation 5:11-13). Man is made to be humble because of the nature of this message of Christ, i. e. the cross (I Corinthians 1:18-31). Man is brought to salvation (I Timothy 2:4-6), and righteousness and order are restored in God's universe.

God's purpose is accomplished—what wisdom!

II. THE WISE DESIGN OF GOD'S CHURCH IN REFERENCE TO ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT.

What is the purpose of God for the church in reference to itself? What has Christ done, and what is he doing? He loved the church and "gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27). The first part of the Great Commission is to be carried out, but the second part likewise must be accomplished (Matthew 28:20). There is little point or value in the church being multiplied if it is not edified. There must be continued victory over sin. There must be spiritual development and maturity.

The Wise Design of God Here

How God has taken steps to accomplish this through the church certainly shows His great wisdom.

We have before called your attention to God's grace (unmerited favor). Grace is but one of the two sides of the same coin. Time and again Paul says something like this: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Timothy 1:2; etc.). On one side of the coin we have mercy and on the other grace. Mercy is punishment that has been withheld when it is deserved. Grace is favor that has been bestowed when it is not deserved. That is the story of our salvation; that is what happens when we accept Christ and enter the church. Then as a by-product of mercy and grace being in our lives we have peace—heart peace (as Paul says). How wonderful!

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). When we repented and were baptized, we got IN CHRIST (Galatians 3:27; I Corinthians 12:13). I Corinthians 1:30 reads, "But in Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from

God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." To be in Christ is like a plant being in a hot house or green house. We are given special attention and shelter to get us going as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord becoming stronger. We are in the circle of God's love, and are experiencing imputed righteousness as we become righteous even as He is righteous. If we "mess up" we have the throne of grace to which to flee (Hebrews 4:15,16; I John 1:7-9). God does not give up on us if we do not give up and are sincerely trying. (What great love! What great wisdom! Before sin and a state of condemnation made it impossible for man to get anywhere with God).

When we become a Christian, not only is our past life of sin taken care of, God gives us assurance and power for the future. We are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32), and this means power beyond ourselves. Paul desired "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16) (and, as the next verse says, He dwells in our hearts by faith—3:17). "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). It is no wonder Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Along with all of this the Word of God has its central place. The Ephesian elders were given this timely and timeless admonition: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Then the church is a melting pot of all kinds of people. We become one in Christ, brothers and sisters—just one big family (Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 3:9-11). The wise design of God's church calls for ONENESS (Ephesians 4:4-6). There is no wisdom in denominationalism—it is not of God (Matthew 12:25; John 17:20,21; I Corinthians 1:10-13; 14:33).

All of this (just noticed) has to do with practical aspects of God's wisdom in what the church is accomplishing in reference to itself, but even in this we can see how diverse it is. The diversity and magnificance of it literally overwhelms us when we listen to Paul telling the Ephesians "to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18,19). Isn't that some command?—to know that which is beyond knowing! But such is the wisdom of God.

And to put on Christ (Galatians 3:27) is to put on a coat of many colors. Paul said, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." (Galatians 5:22,23). The life of a true Christian is a most beautiful thing to behold—there is absolutely nothing like it. To see the wisdom of it just look at the foolish mess the people of the world have made and are making of their lives.

How diverse and beautiful is divine wisdom!

Certainly God is accomplishing His eternal purpose in what the church is doing in reference to itself. He is GLORIFIED: "BLESSED be the God and Father of our Lord

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THE WISE DESIGN OF GOD'S CHURCH

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Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). (This word "blessed" here having to do with God does not mean happy or fortunate as in the beatitudes, but being a different word in the Greek, means to *eulogize* God—thus to praise and glorify Him). SALVATION of man is brought about as never before possible (Hebrews 7:25, and the cause of righteousness prevails.

Praise be to HIS GREAT AND GLORIOUS NAME!

III. THE WISE DESIGN OF GOD'S CHURCH IN REFERENCE TO ITS ORGANIZATION.

God does have a design for the organization of His church, and in it we see His great wisdom. We read about this simple organization in the Bible, which will make us "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16,17). Here we find the local autonomous church with its God-given offices of work, namely that of elders (also called pastors, bishops, and overseers), evangelists (preachers of the gospel), and deacons (servants or assistants). Elders and deacons were permanent fixtures in the local church (Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3) whereas evangelists were sent out from the local church as its embassies in the world. The whole church functioned as a priesthood of believers (I Peter 2:5,9; Ephesians 4:11-16). (The early church had apostles and prophets, offices which served their unique purposes, and are no longer held by living occupants today).

This writer has been told that this simple organization was fine for the early church but is not practical in our complex society today. It might even work in some small rural churches in our time, but not generally. But we do not believe such assertions. God knew what He was doing, and there is divine wisdom behind such an organization with its simplicity.

From the practical viewpoint we can see the great wisdom involved here. The organization is simple and spiritual, fitting the very nature of the church, which is spiritual: the "kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 20:35; I Corinthians 1:27-31). (There is no room for worldly ambition). Wisdom can be seen in the "priesthood of believers," having every member involved. Wisdom can be seen in having only qualified men to take the leadership, thus setting the right example for the others (I Timothy 3). Certainly this organization must have been very practical considering the success the early church had in spreading the gospel (Colossians 1:23).

Then from the viewpoint of diversity we can see God's great wisdom here. The organization as designed by God accomplishes its primary twofold commission effectively, that of evangelization and edification (Matthew 28; Acts 9:31; etc.). And the simplicity of the organization will fit into any society (ancient or modern)—especially would such an organization be suited for survival in a hostile society. Going "underground" would be much easier, and each local church unit being complete within itself could beget other such bodies without as much difficulty.

Obviously through all of this God is accomplishing His eternal purpose: HIS GLORY (such a simple organization

defuses the pride of man and points to the ALMIGHTY GOD); the ONGOING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and the SALVATION of lost humanity. □

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AIM THE CHILD STRAIGHT

HARRY RIMMER told of an unpleasant experience he had with a rowdy boy. After repeated efforts to get him to behave had failed, he approached the boy's father, explaining that his son was destroying property and making a terrible nuisance of himself.

The father listened... then shrugged his shoulders and said: "Well, I can't do anything with the little devil! One of these days he'll land in real trouble, and the law will handle him. He belongs in a reform school, anyhow!"

Astonished, Rimmer said he wanted to say: "Generically speaking, a *little* devil would be the offspring of a big one!"

Training children is demanding and difficult. It is also about the most important business in the world. It can't be passed off with a shrug. Solomon said, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). To neglect the cultivation is to invite grief at the time of harvest. David said that children are as arrows in the hand of a mighty man (Psalms 127:4). An arrow doesn't FLY straight unless it is AIMED straight. Neither does a child. —Selected □

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THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE BIBLE

ONE OF the remarkable features of the Bible is its universality. Most books are limited in their range, as animals and plants are by conditions of climate.

Few Oriental books retain their interest in the Occident, and not many books can stand the change of climate involved in translation. But the Bible is equally at home in all lands, and languages, and emerges from the process of translation with all its fresh colors unimpaired and when carried around the equator and from the tropics to the poles, it loses no element of interest.

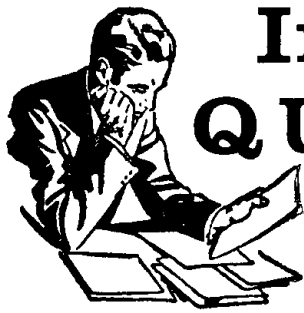
And so whether a reader sits under a palm in the tropics or in a hut of snow in the arctic, whether he eats dates and oranges or wheat and apples, the book finds him because it runs through all the ranges and sweeps of the charts of human life.

It knows human nature through and through because human nature has written itself into it in all its complicated experiences and moods. It holds its mirror up equally to rich and poor, to high and low, to prince and peasant, scientist, scholar and poet. The day of joy is depicted in its pages, and so is the day of sorrow.

The profoundest philosopher may lose himself in its depths, the little child may delight in its picturesque stories, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

It is a book for all times and countries, for all classes and conditions of men, and for all minds and hearts. It is the one book of the world that contains most of man and most of God. To know it is an education, and to live it is life more abundant and everlasting. —Selected □

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Inquirer's QUESTIONS Answered

• By James E. Gibbons

VIRGINIA: "I would like to know more about women wearing pants..."

I SUPPOSE that you have reference to Deuteronomy 22:5, which reads: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God" (KJV). I suppose that you want to know more about what this actually means and if it applies to us today.

Some have used this verse in an arbitrary way to say that women can not wear slacks, pant suits, or jeans. But really can this verse be used in that way? There is much to be said in favor of keeping clear the distinction between the sexes in this matter of dress, but this verse is not the one to use to draw the battle line. In fact, our thoughts are mostly matters of Christian judgment, not Scriptural N.T. command.

In the first place, the commands to the Jews in the Law of Moses are not the place for us to go to find Christianity (although the Old Testament may serve useful illustrative purposes to teachings spelled out in the New Testament). The law was a school master to bring us to Christ, and now we are no longer under that law (Galatians 3:24,25; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:16,17). We go to the New Testament to find Christian doctrine this side of the cross of Christ. The Old Law was full of types and shadows. It had laws of various kinds to get a point across, namely that God's people were different (foreshadowing the great spiritual difference which was to come in the New Testament age). In the very same chapter (Deuteronomy 22) where it speaks of a woman not wearing that which pertains to a man (and a man not wearing a woman's garment), we find some parallel verses. Notice verses 9-11: "Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers (different) seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of the vineyard be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a

garment of divers sort, as woollen and linen together."

When we think about the type of clothing worn by men and women in much of the times of the Bible, it is hard to see the difference we have today. Traditionally speaking today (in our part of the world), we think of men wearing garments as pants or trousers with legs in them. Whereas on the other hand, we think of women wearing dresses (physically different in appearance). In Bible times this was not always the case. In fact, if you go all the way back to the garden of Eden, it seems that God clothed Adam and Eve in clothing that was very much alike. Read it yourself: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). Both were clothed in coats or tunics, which is more in the direction of clothing thought of in modern times having to do with women (no pant legs are implied as being in these garments). And this type of clothing seems to have been in use throughout much of Bible history. Therefore, for a man to wear a woman's clothing would not mean so much in the style, cut, or the way it looked as to the fact that it (that particular garment) belonged personally to a certain woman. To take the garment personally belonging to a woman and wearing it would be wearing a woman's garment.

However, as we said, there is much to be said in favor of practicing a difference in the way men and women dress (and how they look otherwise, as the Bible says that it is a shame for a man to have long hair—I Corinthians 11:14). It is an unhealthy thing when the difference between the sexes is broken down, not just in appearance, but in personal sexual identity. The rise of homosexuality is truly an abomination in the sight of God. Then (May be I'm old fashioned) it is nice to see the fairer sex just a little more refined and "feminine" in appearance (not so coarse looking). I'm for it. But to blanketly condemn the wearing of pant suits, etc., has no Scriptural founda-

tion. (Even if you were applying the Old Testament Scripture in the sense some do, a pant suit would not be a man's garment—it was made for a woman). This is just a matter of personal preference and Christian judgment.

VIRGINIA: "Please comment on Ephesians 5:26."

First, let us notice what Ephesians 5:26 says: "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (KJV). I don't know what is in mind in wanting a further explanation of this verse, but I do know there is intentional misunderstanding in the religious world surrounding this verse. Some who do not wish to accept what the Bible literally says about baptism, say that when it mentions the water (as in John 3:5, etc.) it means the word. They come back to Ephesians 5:26 to try to back this up.

One of the best ways to understand Scripture is in the light of other verses of Scripture on the same subject. Running parallel references on Ephesians 5:26 is very interesting and helpful. For a starter, notice Mark 16:15,16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38; I Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; and I Peter 1:22,23 in connection with Ephesians 5:26. These verses equal, compliment, and supplant one another. Like Peter said, "Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren...being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Peter 1:22,23). And Paul to the Corinthians said, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:11). All of these verses are parallel truth with Acts 2:38, which makes it very plain: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)..." Ephesians 5:26 simply means that when men responded to the preaching of the gospel and were baptized, they were sanctified and cleansed.

Another way to get a deeper insight into a verse of Scripture is to study the key words in the original language in which the New Testament was written. In Ephesians 5:26 a key word that is getting our attention is the word "word" itself in the "washing of the water by the WORD." The Greek word behind our English word for "word" is *rhema*.

(Continued on Next Page)

“FINALITY OF THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”—Who wrote this article?

(Read it and be pleasantly surprised)

THE QUESTION is often raised whether or not the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred once for all or is repeated in subsequent baptisms. The evidence seems to point to the former view to the extent at least of being limited to outpourings which took place in connection with events recorded in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. The following considerations favor this view:

(1) In the first chapter of Acts Jesus predicts, according to Luke’s account, that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would take place, “not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). This would seem to point to a definite and specific event rather than to a continuous process.

(2) Again, Peter’s citation in Acts 2:17-21 of Joel’s prophecy shows that in Peter’s mind the event which his hearers were then witnessing was the definite fulfilment of the words of Joel.

(3) Notice in the third place that only one other event in the New Testament is described as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and for special reasons this may be regarded as the completion of the Pentecostal baptism. The passage is that contained in Acts 10:1-11:18 in which the record is given of the following events: (a) miraculous vision given to Peter on the housetop (10:11-16) indicating that the things about to occur are of unique importance; (b) the speaking with tongues (10:45, 46); (c) Peter declares to the brethren at Jerusalem that the Holy Ghost fell on the Gentiles in this instance of Cornelius and his household “as on us at the beginning” (11:15); (d) Peter also declares that this was a fulfilment of the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (11:16, 17); (e) the Jewish Christians who heard Peter’s account of the matter acknowledged this as proof that God had also extended the privileges of the gospel to the Gentiles (11:18). The baptism of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Cornelius and his household is thus directly linked the first outpouring at Pentecost, and as the event which signalized the opening of the door of the gospel formally to Gentiles, it is in complete harmony with the missionary significance of the first great Pentecostal outpouring. It was a turning point or crisis in the Messianic kingdom and seems designed to complete the Pentecostal gift by showing that Gentiles as well as Jews are to be embraced in all the privileges of the new dispensation.

(4) We observe again that nowhere in the epistles do we find a repetition of the baptism of the Spirit. This would be remarkable if it had been understood by the writers of the epistles that the baptism of the Spirit was frequently to be repeated. There is no evidence outside the Book of Acts that the baptism of the Spirit ever occurred in the later New Testament times. In I Corinthians 12:13 Paul says, “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body. . . and were all made to drink of one Spirit.” But here the reference is not to the baptism of the Spirit, but rather to a baptism into the church which is the body of Christ. We conclude, therefore, that the Pentecostal baptism taken in conjunction with the baptism of the Spirit in the case of Cornelius completes the baptism of the Holy Spirit according to the New Testament teaching. The baptism of the Spirit as thus bestowed

was, however, the definite gift of the Spirit in His fulness for every form of spiritual blessing necessary in the progress of the kingdom and as the permanent and abiding gift of God to His People. In all subsequent New Testament writings there is the assumption of this presence of the Spirit and of His availability for all believers. The various commands and exhortations of the epistles are based on the assumption that the baptism of the Spirit has already taken place, and that, according to the prediction of Jesus to the disciples, the Spirit was to abide with them forever (John 14:16). We should not therefore confound other forms of expression found in the New Testament with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When Christians are enjoined to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) and “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), or when the Spirit is described as an anointing (*chrisma*) as in I John 2:20-27, and as the “earnest of our inheritance” (*arrabon*) as in Ephesians 1:14, and when various other similar expressions are employed in the epistles of the New Testament, we are not to understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These expressions indicate aspects of the Spirit’s work in believers or of the believer’s appropriation of the gifts and blessings of the Spirit rather than the historical baptism of the Spirit. —(from *THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPAEDIA* under “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” by E. Y. Mullins, former president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, and now deceased) □

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INQUIRER’S QUESTIONS ANSWERED

(Continued from Last Page)

This word *rhema* puts the emphasis upon the word “word” from the viewpoint of the utterance (like we say verbal) more than the content. (*Logos* puts the emphasis upon the content of the word). Thus, Robert Young (author of the famous *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*) in his not as well known *Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible* renders Ephesians 5:26 “that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it with the bathing of the water in the saying.”

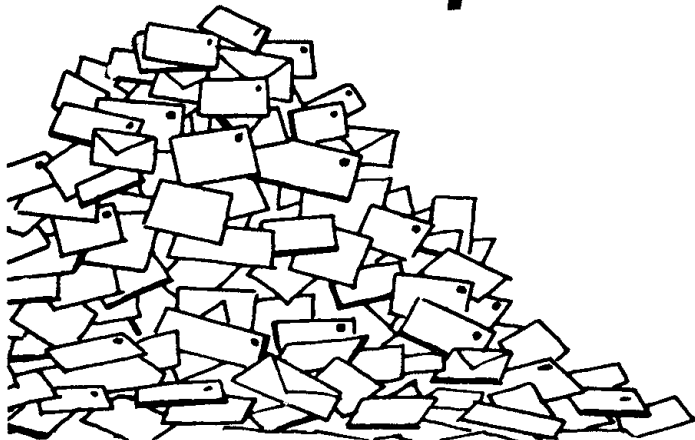
Therefore, Ephesians 5:26 is literally saying that Christ sanctified and cleansed the church in a bath by (through, in connection with, in) the utterance. The real heart of this discussion is: what is the utterance (that which is or has been spoken)? Different viewpoints are possible, and all of them should be seriously considered if they harmonize with the rest of the New Testament (as we have pointed out parallel verses on this subject). Some have said the utterance was that which was spoken when men were baptized (as we are baptized into the name, etc.). Others suggest it means the preaching of the gospel with its promises (verbalized) which culminates in baptism. J. H. Thayer in his well known translated work *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* ties this verse in with Mark 16:16. Notice: “*kathrisas... en rhemati*, acc. to promise (prop. on the ground of his word of promise, viz. the promise of the pardon of sins; cf. Mk. 16:16), Eph. 5:26.”

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“LOVE ONE ANOTHER”

READERS'

... Response



WE PRESENT some of the letters received along, not to "pat ourselves on the back," but to show we have people in sympathy with what is written. We have our constant set of critics, and it is refreshing to know there are those who love and appreciate the Word of God in its fullness.

BRAZIL (SOUTH AMERICA):

■ "For years I have wanted to write you, to express my appreciation for *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. It has many good, practical articles, some of which find their way into the the magazine I edit in Portuguese here in Brazil. (See page 8 of recent issue, which is enclosed.) Thus, your efforts are multiplied by another 50,000 or so readers. Keep up your clear voice of doctrine and concern."

GHANA (AFRICA):

■ "Greetings in the wonderful and blessed name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I wish to know much about Christian religion and how to serve the Lord faithfully.

"I am in an Islamic region where Christian literature and the Holy Bible are difficult to get. As a result of this, I don't have the necessary tools which will help me to grow richly in the Lord.

"I was a Moslem but now I have made up my mind to serve Jesus because he is the way, the truth and life.

"I beckon to you to help me with a Holy Bible and other literature for upliftment.

"It was your book entitled 'What Must I Do to Be Saved?' which converted me into Christian Religion. I came across it on the way to mosque to pray. And the only things I need are the back mentioned requirements.

"May God always use your books as sword to save people who are in darkness."

MARYLAND:

■ "Please take my name off your mailing list."

TENNESSEE:

■ "I praise God for your ministry. Keep up the good work.

I enjoyed the articles 'A Distorted Vocabulary' and 'Diakonos.' The whole paper was good, even better than usual. I liked the poem by Raphael Moreno also..."

KENTUCKY:

■ "I appreciate so much *THE SWORD AND STAFF* and your efforts and ability that you have. I appreciate your stand for Christ and the Lord's Church. May we continue to serve him all the days of our lives."

■ "We just received the latest copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* today. God bless you all for your efforts for Christ and His Church, for a job well done and one that we must all do well..."

"Thank you once again for the magazine. Each of us has something to do for the cause of Christ and it appears as though you all are doing your part well."

OHIO:

■ "We received your paper for the first time and words can not say the feeling of hope that someone else believes Christ has the perfect plan for all of us—if only we would be open and yielding to *HIS WORD*! Many of the churches of Christ have fallen into the pattern of allowing anything as long as all people feel comfortable and no ones feelings should ever be hurt.

"Praise God for your paper! We need to be strengthened!"

INDIANA:

■ "I really appreciate and thank God for men like you. You really have a good work through God in *THE SWORD AND STAFF* magazine. It's meaty and very helpful to me a new Christian..."

ARIZONA:

■ "Have always appreciated every thing printed in *THE SWORD AND STAFF*...and we want to share in a fine work of admonishing the saints. Through the years we have been challenged, encouraged and uplifted by *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. You have 'reproved, rebuked and exhorted, with all longsuffering and teaching.' Any one with an open heart and mind who would be honest with the Word of God could not help but grow in grace and knowledge of His Word."

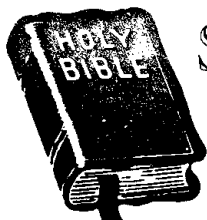
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PRAYED,

the most important thing
he can do

is PRAY.



FROM A NEWSLETTER

We had hoped to have another issue of **THE SWORD AND STAFF** in the mail before 1982 ended, but it has not worked out that way. (The last issue that we have gotten out in 1982 was the one with the article on the front concerning "God's Organization for the Church")...We want you to know that your support is what has kept us in the mail. Although we have not been able to get the publication in the mail as often and as regular as we would like, we have no thought of stopping our writing and printing. We are spreading the unadulterated Word of God, some good seed in a world where there is so much bad. If we did not have this means of expressing ourselves (this means of unloading our "burden" for the truth), we would feel a greater sense of frustration than we do. We are trying to make ourselves "free from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26,27).—JAMES E. GIBBONS

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