

The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:2) • "Feed the Flock" (I Peter 5:2)



EXCUSE-MAKERS AND EXCUSE MAKING IN THE BIBLE—Luke 14:15-24

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EXCUSES—where is the person who has not made them at one time or another? After all, aren't all of us intelligent human beings, and everything that we say and do (or not say and do) must make sense, must have the mark of intelligence upon it (even if it is not always rational). There must be the defense (and sometimes pretense), the apology, the explanation. If not to others, we must at least justify ourselves to ourselves in our own eyes. In some way, we must be exonerated.

And making excuses in a religious context is even

more serious. There is so much more involved and at stake. Someone has said that an excuse is the skin off of the truth stuffed with a lie (and there may be a lot of truth to that). But the perceptive person can see right through such flimsy veneer. And, really, when we try to excuse ourselves, in essence we end up accusing ourselves.

In this article we wish to examine excuse-makers and excuse making as recorded in the Bible. It has been around from the first man and woman. Many lessons are to be learned from such an examination (and how we need to learn them). But perhaps first it

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THE SWORD AND STAFF

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Proverbially SPEAKING...

THE PROOF of Christianity is the resurrection, and if Christians are not living the resurrected life we might as well forget about convincing the world.

"Live as if Christ died yesterday, arose this morning, and is coming back tomorrow."

The much preoccupation with counseling today has come into being with the decline of good solid Bible preaching (which helps make such counseling unnecessary).

"To be angry at nothing but sin is the way not to sin in anger."

If you "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Luke 10:27), you will have no problem in attending all the services of the church all of the time if at all possible.

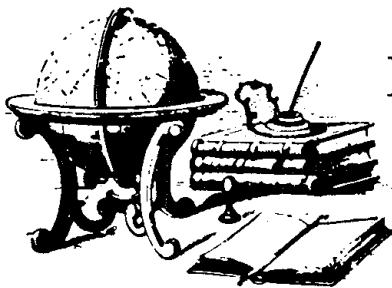
"He who ceases to learn cannot adequately teach."

We cannot be too personal in talking with God, but we can be too intimate (too much of modern religion tends to put God on the same level with man, but let us come before Him in awe; He is the King of the universe).

"Best rule I know for talkin' is the same as the one for carpenterin'... measure twice and saw once."

We live in a time when people claim to be Christians without being a Christian and want to be a Christian without being Christian.

"Even a prizewinning horse draws horseflies."



EDITORIAL COMMENTS...

CAUSE FOR CONCERN: OUR MATERIALISTIC, HEDONISTIC SOCIETY

BY WORLD STANDARDS we live in an affluent society. Our society is materialistic, and the concept of luxury and luxurious living seem to be idolized. People are grasping for more and more of the material. More and more of the self-indulgent creature comforts are sought. The apex of it all seems to lead to hedonistic fulfillment. Hedonistic comes from the Greek word for pleasure. Pleasures may be innocent or otherwise. Since our society is geared to the material, the spiritual meaning less and less, material considerations govern the hedonistic fulfillment. In a spiritual vacuum, crowded out by the material, the pleasure seeking moves on into more radical areas. Hedonistic in its more formalized meaning has to do with a lifestyle; the self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure, any kind, as a way of life. It is fleshly and animalistic and has no hang-ups in reference to morals. Anything goes. If it brings sensual gratification, do it.

The church is no monastery from the world (although we are the called out ones and should be separate). Material prosperity and a position of plenty represent a dangerous situation for Christians (along with the pursuit of pleasure that goes with it). The influence of the hedonistic philosophy is all about us. It takes real Christians to handle the situation. The church of the Laodiceans were at the point of losing Christ (Revelation 3:14-20). In the parable of the sower, explaining the seed that fell among thorns, the Lord said, "And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit unto perfection (completion)" (Luke 8:14). Contrasting the well-to-do widow with the one who was desolate, Paul went on to say, "But she that liveth in pleasure (luxuriously, voluptuously) is dead while she liveth" (I Timothy 5:6). Paul tells of some professed religious people who were "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

The luxurious living and pleasure seeking people of Israel in the day of the prophet Amos greatly disturbed him (and especially in view of the danger confronting the nation). "WOE to them that are at ease in Zion... That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (the impending captivity and judgment)" (Amos 6:1,4-6).

It is mind boggling, but the world today is approaching six billion people—and for the most part, lost in sin! At the same time humanistic and ungodly forces are on the ascendancy. But who cares about that? What are Christians doing? Too many are totally absorbed in the materialistic rat race. They want more and more of this world. At the same time they are pleasure seekers, "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." They are at ease in Zion. They have everything nice and no sacrifice. Their material increase goes for their own self-indulgence and selfish aspirations. They reign like kings (while the church many times is materially and spiritually bankrupt).

But, what did Jesus say? "And he said to them all, If any man will
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EXCUSE-MAKERS AND EXCUSE MAKING IN THE BIBLE *(From Page 1)*



THE GREAT SUPPER

would be good to look into the words translated “excuse” to see what the original writers had in mind when talking about making excuses. Three words get our attention.

(1) In the parable Jesus gave about the marriage supper, those that were invited “all with one consent began to **make excuse**” (Luke 14:18ff). They said, “I pray thee have me **excused**.” This word translated “excuse” means to beg off, to excuse one’s self. We really see a twofold meaning in it, if not more. For simplicity, let us say that the Greek word means to refuse and to excuse. The same word that is translated “excuse” in Luke 14 is rendered “refuse” in Hebrews 12:25. Notice: “See that ye **refuse** not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who **refused** him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.” We are not to refuse, excuse, or beg off in reference to the claims of the Son of God upon our lives. Under Moses they did not escape who tried to do this, and neither shall we under Christ (the Son of God).

(2) Romans 1:20 reads, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead (divinity); so that they are without **excuse**” (they were without excuse in reference to their idolatry). Romans 2:1 speaks of some (Jews) being “**inexcusable**” in being judgmental of others (Gentiles) when they were guilty of the same sins. Then 2:15 speaks of the Gentiles “accusing or else **excusing** one another.” The idea in the Greek word is to make a defense. *Apologia*, a more specialized form from this root word, means to make a defense in a formal sense. The word has come over into English in our word “apology” (to apologize). So in this word for excuse we see the idea of defense and apology.

(3) The excuse concept is found in John 15:22 when the Lord said, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no **cloke** (footnote: excuse) for their sin.” This word “cloke” (excuse, *prophasis*) means “that which ap-

pears in front, that which is put forward to hide the true state of things; a fair show or pretext.” Notice how this word is translated in Acts 27:30 (New KJV), “And the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, **under pretense** of putting out anchors from the prow.” The sailors were trying to escape the impending shipwreck, forsaking the others, by pretending they were putting down the anchors, but they really were letting the boat down into the water in order to escape. They did this “under pretense” (old KJV, “under colour”). As we said, this is the same word that is rendered “cloke” (i.e., excuse) in John 15:22. Excuses are pretexts. They are coverups.

Keeping in mind all of these different ideas involved in excuses as a backdrop to our thinking, let us get right into a consideration of actual concrete, real life examples of excuse-makers and excuse making of long ago found in the Bible. Human nature has not changed.

I. SOME WHO MADE EXCUSES

A. Some Who Made Excuses for Doing Wrong

Adam and Eve

The book of Genesis is the book of beginnings. Creation, man, sin, the nations, Israel, God’s scheme of redemption—all have their beginning in this great book. Likewise, here we find the original excuse-makers and the excuses they used in an effort to exonerate themselves (but to no avail). In them we see the prototype of all excuse-makers and excuse making.

The benevolent Creator placed Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden, paradise upon earth. Everything was for their enjoyment and well-being. Their restrictions were few. In fact, we read of only one law. They had been made in the very image and likeness of God, and so in order for them to exercise themselves in this capacity as responsible free moral agents, this one law was given. It was very simple. There was no room for misunderstanding. “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not

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come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Lk. 9:23). Then, following Matthew’s wording (Matthew 16:25,26), he continued, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” There is not much worldly pleasure and comfort in an old rugged cross. There is self-crucifixion, self-denial, and deprivation. We are to take up our “cross daily” and follow Jesus.

The bumper sticker read: “IF I CAN’T GO TO HEAVEN, LET ME GO TO MYRTLE BEACH.” Sorry, but that is not the choice. If it is not heaven, it is hell!

Let us not be a victim of the society in which we live!

EXCUSE-MAKERS AND EXCUSE MAKING IN THE BIBLE

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eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16b,17).

It seems that Eve had not directly heard God’s command (Genesis 2:15-17), learning about it secondhand from Adam, and thus perhaps the force of it was not felt as strongly. No doubt, realizing this and all other factors that he esteemed favorable for his evil intentions, the devil approached Eve. As she listened to the devil, unbelief filled her heart. Her whole concept of God evidently was altered, shattered. If God was so good how could he even think about withholding the fruit of this special tree from his supposedly favored creatures? He was afraid that they would become like him as the Almighty, Omniscient God (above the likeness in which they had been created). Warm feelings turned into hostility, envy, and rebellion. “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis chapter 3). Their anticipated feelings of superiority become one of irreversible shame. “And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” The trees among which they had hidden could not conceal them from God (nor hide their shame).

Now in response to the probing questions their perturbed Creator asked, the first excuse making is recorded in the Bible. “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.”

How typical were these excuses made by our original parents! The responsibility and blame for their action is not personally accepted. It is passed on to someone else: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree,” and, “The serpent beguiled me.” Not only was Eve implicated, but God and the devil both were brought into the circle of guilt. Adam is saying that not only is the woman to blame, but God himself. God gave her to him. And Eve said, “The serpent beguiled me” (“the devil made me do it”).

The human race has been doing this ever since—trying to put the blame on someone else. And somehow God is to blame: “I didn’t ask to be born.” Yes, and the devil is the bad guy. Let’s put all of the blame upon him since that’s his department—“the devil made me do it.” But there is another side to all of this. God is not to blame, nor can we take all of the responsibility off of our shoulders by putting it on the devil. James said, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:12-16). As free moral agents made in the image of God we have a personal responsibility and accountability as to how we respond to that temptation.

Aaron and the Golden Calf

In their exodus from Egypt the children of Israel were encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. From this mountain in its rugged majesty God had spoken to

them in an awesome way. Moses and Joshua had ascended its summits and had been there for forty days and forty nights. Now with the ten commandments engraved on tables of stone they were making their way back to the camp of Israel. But in the meantime, the encamped multitudes with their crude concepts had become impatient. “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot (know) not what is become of him” (Exodus chapter 32). From all of their golden jewelry that the children of Israel brought, Aaron made them a golden calf. How unthinkable, but they looked to it as their god (a carry-over of Egyptian idolatry). They began to eat, to drink, and to dance around it. As Moses and Joshua approached, the clamorous commotion that they heard prompted Joshua to exclaim, “There is noise of war in the camp!”



He soon found otherwise. “And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.”

After demolishing the golden calf, Aaron was angrily called upon to give account of himself. How could such a thing like this happen? Aaron, give account of yourself. “And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us. . . And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.”

Although he was the leader, Aaron puts the blame on the people. The people made me do it. Sound familiar, putting the blame on someone else? And the particulars about the golden calf? It just happened. They brought their gold “then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.” However, the record as to what actually happened sounds quite a bit different in Exodus 32:2-6. Even when we are in the wrong

we try to put ourselves in a good light.

B. Some Who Made Excuses for Not Doing Right
Saul and the Amalekites

The Old Testament was the law of sin and death, and we see this in evidence at every turn. In the conquest of Canaan, not only was God giving the children of Israel the promised land, they were being used as God's instrument of judgment upon the wicked and depraved inhabitants of the land (Genesis 15:4-16; Leviticus 18:24-28; 20:22-24; Deuteronomy 9:4-6; 18:12). We don't question God's judgments. He is all knowing. In the time of king Saul he (Saul) was to be used to execute delayed judgment upon the Amalekites. We read about this in the 15th chapter of I Samuel. This divine edict was to be carried out by Saul in the most complete sense. The king, the people, and their possessions were to be utterly destroyed. However, king Saul seemed to have something else in mind. He for some reason (perhaps selfish) altered the command of God to his own liking and took things into his own hands. We read, "But Saul and the people spared Agag (the king), and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed." In what follows we find excuse making for not doing right.

Saul and his men, having returned from supposedly accomplishing their solemn mission, were met by the man of God Samuel. Let us read, "And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. . . And Samuel said, And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

What a profound section of Scripture! What great truths are brought before us! As far as excuses are concerned, it is the same old story. Put the blame on some-

one else. The choice livestock had been kept alive because of "the people" (but why was king Agag kept alive?). And to put everything in the most favorable light possible, the animals would be used in sacrifice to God. What a lofty consideration. And in the midst of all of this, Saul keeps claiming that he has obeyed God. The spiritual insight of Samuel's majestic words ring down through the years: "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." We may feign religion, but nothing can take the place of obedience.

The Parable of the Excuses

In the parable of the marriage supper (involving excuses) by our Lord, we are made to look upon the making of excuses for not doing right in somewhat of a different way. Let us notice this parable (Luke 14:15-24). "Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."

What an honor and privilege to take part in such a great supper, but each of those invited began to turn it down, beg off, with their excuses. As in all of the excuse making we have examined, the blame somehow must be placed on someone or something else. In this parable on excuses it is not quite as pronounced, but the blame is shifted away from the one invited (as to why he cannot attend) to a "piece of ground," "five yoke of oxen," and "a wife." The first "man excused himself by feigned necessity (*I must needs go*); the second by a mere desire for other things, verse 19, *I go*; the third, verse 20, on the ground of absolute impossibility, *I cannot come*." That is how the world looks upon such matters. And all of them thought themselves too busy to come.

The rest of the parable shows that the master of the house was very angry. Now all men were invited regardless of position or station in life. Then the man said, "I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." Obviously, excuse making is very foolish.

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**The Way, the Truth,
and the Life**

JESUS SAID, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Without Jesus the way there is no going; without Jesus the truth there is no knowing; without Jesus the life there is no growing (no living). He is all! □

EXCUSE-MAKERS AND EXCUSE MAKING IN THE BIBLE

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The Call of Moses

The call of Moses to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage and the excuses he initially made for not doing this make an interesting study (Exodus chapters 3 and 4). We will not develop that line of thinking now, but suggest it for your personal consideration.

II. SOME WHO MADE NO EXCUSES

A. They were Unable to Make Excuses

Nadab and Abihu

From Mt. Sinai God gave various laws to Israel. Among them were the Levitical laws involving the priesthood and the offering of sacrifices to God. On the day of the inauguration of these priestly functions awesome things took place (Leviticus 9). One was so terrifying that Israel would never forget.

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense therein, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace” (Leviticus 10:1-3).

Here is an example of two who made no excuses. They were not given the chance to explain their irregular behavior. Instantaneous judgment came upon them. Perhaps the sins of Nadab and Abihu were multiple in nature. Were they performing unauthorized functions which belonged only to the high priest? Were they doing this at an unauthorized time? Was the fire strange for reasons other than the way it was carried out (not the fire which the LORD had lit)? (Or, was drunkenness involved? 10:9-11) Regardless, it seems they had taken their priestly duties into their own hands to do as they pleased. God was disregarded. Their action was such a presumptuous infringement upon holy ground that judgment was not delayed. A fire (as lightning) came out from the presence of the LORD and “devoured them” (not in the sense of burning them up, 10:5, but slaying them).

Later in the case of the rebellion of Korah and his company against Moses and Aaron, we see this sin on a wider and more extended basis (Numbers chapter 16). Their shocking example leaves us with the same message.

Yes, Nadab and Abihu made no excuses. They didn't live to make excuses. The lesson stands for time and eternity.

Ananias and Sapphira

In the New Testament Scriptures we see in the case of Ananias and Sapphira a situation that in some ways is parallel to that of Nadab and Abihu. This man and his wife made no excuse for the wrong that they did. They didn't live to get a chance to do this.

This story of Ananias and Sapphira took place in the early days of the church. Many of the more well-to-do Christians, motivated by the grace of God, sold their houses and land to share their wealth with the less fortunate. A certain man and his wife got the idea to do the same thing, but—yes, “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at



DEATH OF ANANIAS.

the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost (Spirit), and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. . . And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. . .” (Acts chapter 5). She responds with the same preconceived lie as told by her husband. In Peter's probing question he is actually pressing God's piercing indictment upon her. Her condemnation and judgment are at the same time forthcoming from God. “Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

This man and his wife made no excuses. They were not given the chance to make excuses. Judgment was instantaneous in coming. Obviously they wanted the glory of giving all, but the love of money prompted them to keep back part of the price of the land (for their own selfish purposes and to lie about it). God did not want his infant church spotted (even as it was the case of Nadab and Abihu, not wanting his newly inaugurated priesthood and priestly function to be desecrated). So for time and eternity in Ananias and Sapphira we can see what God thinks about hypocrisy. It stands as a warning for others.

They made no excuse.

The Man with No Wedding Garment

The Lord in Matthew 22:1-14 gives a parable that has many facets and applications. To those familiar with the Scriptures the overall significance is readily seen. It involves those invited to the marriage feast of the king's son. The part we want to notice is at the end when the guests have arrived and are there at the feast. "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on the wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many shall be called, but few chosen."

This man was utterly speechless. He had (and made) no recourse. He knew he was in the wrong. We understand that wedding garments were supplied for all who came to such festivities (and especially since they had been invited right off the street to come, 22:9,10). How presumptuous and inexcusable to try to attend the marriage feast of the king's son in such vulgar, inappropriate attire. He made no excuse as he was bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

To be in the kingdom of heaven and to enter heaven itself we must have on the wedding garment. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:10). No one can go to heaven with his sins. We must be clothed with the righteousness of Christ (II Corinthians 5:21; Titus 3:5; Philippians 3:9). This righteousness of Christ is accepted by faith when we are baptized into him (Galatians 3:26,27). Here we get the benefits of the blood of Christ (Romans 6:1-4; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Revelation 1:5). As Paul said in Galatians 3:27, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It is so simple.

However, in the last day many are going to be dumfounded, speechless. They have deluded themselves into thinking that they will be taking part in the wedding feast of the King's Son, but they have never put on the wedding garment that Christ supplies (his righteousness).

They will make no excuse for they will be speechless.

B. They Made No Excuses

On the Day of Pentecost

We are familiar with the day of Pentecost as the day of the establishment of the church of Christ as recorded in Acts 2. The resurrected Christ had ascended back to heaven after instructing the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In this special way on that special day the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles to guide them into all truth. In excitement prompted by the occasion great multitudes came together to hear the apostles preach in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance (even in the native languages of those visiting from afar). Outstanding among these preachers was the apostle Peter. The phenomenon of the coming of the *Pneuma* was explained. He now fearlessly proclaim-

ed the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and concluded his Spirit-inspired message by saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Then we read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, 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). For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:36-42).

How refreshing to read such an account. These people on the day of Pentecost made no excuses. There was no gainsaying. They were soundly convicted to the truth that was preached. They were "pricked in their heart." "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In Acts 2:38 they were told in unmistakable language what to do. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Praise the Lord! "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine"—how thrilling and encouraging to read this! Amen!

They made no excuses!

Saul of Tarsus

Saul of Tarsus believed that Jesus (called the Christ) was an imposter. Beginning with the death of Stephen, he backed his belief by leading a belligerent persecution against the church. In the 9th chapter of Acts, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," he obtained the proper authority to pursue them unto distant cities. He was on the way to Damascus for that very purpose. Just outside that city a light of most unusual brilliance shined around about him. "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what will thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

In a split second Saul was brought face to face with the awful reality of what he had been doing. Christ was no mere man! He had been fighting against God! "Who art thou, Lord?" "Lord, what will thou have me to do?" No excuse making here. "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."

After three days without sight (and praying in darkness), this is what happened. A man by the name of

(Continued on Next Page)

EXCUSE-MAKERS AND EXCUSE MAKING IN THE BIBLE

(Continued from Last Page)

Ananias came to him. His sight was restored. He was told how the Lord had called him to be a special apostle to the Gentiles. Then Ananias said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away they sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Saul (Paul) would later say, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). He straight-way began to preach Christ.

This man made no excuses.

Simon the Sorcerer

In Samaria lived a man known to us by the name of "Simon the Sorcerer." He had deceived these superstitious people for a long time into believing that he was some great power of God. However, Philip, who had experienced real miraculous power of the Spirit imparted by the apostles' hands, came into Samaria preaching Christ. "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). We are told that "Simon himself believed also" and "was baptized" (Acts 8:13; Mark 16:16). There is no reason to believe that he was not converted (was sincere), although Calvinists who must defend their human dogma deny this. Simon "also" believed and was baptized (just like the others). Miracles and signs were done by Philip during his tenure here. This got the attention of Simon (the converted sorcerer). He could see they were real. When the apostles Peter and John came into town to impart the special gift of the special gift of the Spirit by the laying on of their hands (on the new converts), Simon offered them money for this power. Evidently momentarily he reverted back to his old way of thinking. "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. . . Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me" (Acts 8:5-24).

Simon made no excuses. He did not try to justify his blunder. He was in the wrong, and Peter made him very aware of it. Peter told him, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Simon didn't even feel worthy to do this, so he requests that

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BIBLE QUESTIONS *(over women in the N.T. Scriptures)*

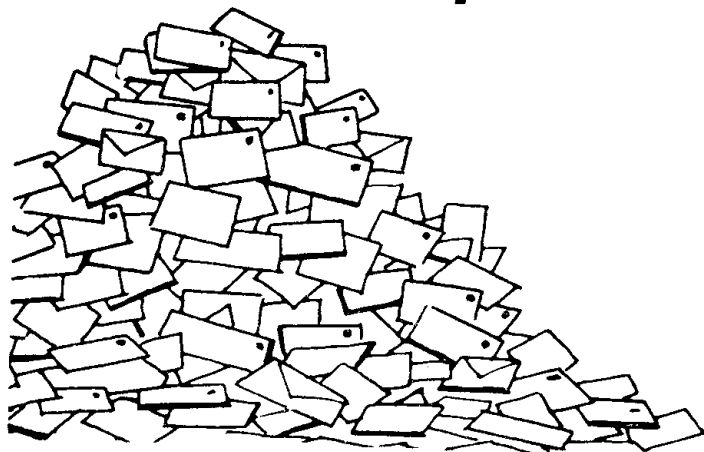
1. Of whom is it said in the N.T. Scriptures, "Blessed art thou among women"?
2. What was the name of the mother of John the Baptist?
3. With what woman did Jesus talk about "living waters"?
4. Of what sickness did Jesus heal Simon Peter's mother in law?

5. How long had the woman had the issue of blood who touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed?
6. What woman had a grudge against John the Baptist and was responsible for his death?
7. Out of which woman had Jesus cast seven devils (demons)?
8. What women are said to have ministered unto Jesus and ministered to him of their substance?
9. Which three of the parables of Jesus in some way involved women?
10. What was the Syrophenician woman (of Canaan) wanting of Jesus as she fell at his feet while he and his disciples were in the region of Tyre and Sidon?
11. What sisters who lived in Bethany were beloved friends of Jesus?
12. What did a woman do involving Jesus that prompted him to say that it would be told as a memorial to her wherever the gospel was preached in the world?
13. Who do we know by name of the women who beheld Jesus upon the cross?
14. From the cross to whom did Jesus commend his mother for her well-being?
15. What names do we know of the women who brought spices and ointments to the tomb of Jesus upon the first day of the week?
16. What woman was privileged to be the first person to see Jesus after his resurrection?
17. What was one of the first problems in the Jerusalem church that involved women?
18. What woman at Joppa, who was noted for her good works and almsdeeds, was raised from the dead by the apostle Peter?
19. In what woman's house in Jerusalem had Christians met to pray when Peter was in prison?
20. What young woman responded to Peter's knocking at the door of the gate to this house, but in her excitement left him standing there?
21. What business woman and her household were the first converts to Christianity in Europe (at Philippi in Macedonia of Greece)?
22. Of the few who believed Paul's preaching on Mar's Hill in Athens, what woman is named?
23. What N.T. evangelist had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy?
24. What outstanding woman and her husband, who were involved with the apostle Paul in the work of the Lord, are mentioned several times in the N.T.?
25. What women in the church at Philippi were admonished by the apostle Paul to be of the same mind in the Lord?
26. What woman who was a servant of the church at Cenchrea did the apostle Paul commend unto the Christians at Rome?
27. What were the names of Timothy's mother and grandmother?
28. What was the origin of the name Mary, and how many women in the N.T. Scriptures had this name (and who were they)?
29. What two reasons does the apostle Paul give as to why women are not to teach or usurp authority over men in connection with the church?
30. According to the apostle Paul in the epistle of Titus, what are the older women supposed to teach the younger women?

(NOTE: Answers found elsewhere in this issue of the paper).

READERS'

... Response



APOLOGY: Please accept our humble apology for slowness in getting correspondence answered. "We" have no staff of secretaries, etc. to handle such, and this is done by the "editor" as time allows. Be it known that you are appreciated.

ALABAMA:

■ "First of all let me say how much I really enjoy *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. When I get it I spend the next few hours enjoying the articles that are written. I also enjoy the little tidbits, poems and humorous things that are written on occasion. Please by all means keep up the good work and may God continue to bless this work and your efforts.

"I would also like to receive the bound volumes for the year 1987-1988. . .

"Again keep up the good work and I am looking forward to the issues mentioned above. It is indeed a joy to have good Christians laboring for the Lord so that one as myself. . . can learn more."

TENNESSEE:

■ "I appreciate your fine publication."

KENTUCKY:

■ "...Be assured your magazine is 'God Sent,' as every issue has answered a question I was seeking Scripturally."

VIRGINIA:

■ "Please discontinue. . ."

■ "...I have all the bound volumes. The material has always been a source of growing for me. Some of the best material I have read has been in *THE SWORD AND STAFF*."

■ "Just to let you know how I enjoyed reading *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. It has plenty of punch, which is sometimes missing from other magazines I read.

"Keep up the good work. . ."

■ "Would you please send 100 copies of 'Are Visions, Dreams and Religious Experiences Proof of Salvation' and 'The Origin of Religious Misunderstanding and False Teaching'?

"These are very helpful in teaching others. . ."

WEST VIRGINIA:

■ "We enjoyed your article on 'fear' in *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. A friend copied it and gave it to us. She said she gets your magazine. We would like to get it too. . ."

PENNSYLVANIA:

■ "I really enjoyed the first *SWORD AND STAFF*. It's a ter-

rific book."

NEW YORK:

■ "Please remove the enclosed label from your mailing list."

MASSACHUSETTS:

■ "Please remove my name from your mailing list. I do not want to receive your publication. I am a Roman Catholic Christian, a member of the one true church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Please delete my name.

"Thank you very much."

OHIO:

■ "Keep up your good work of publishing the truth which is really needed in this age. I cannot understand why some people do not want the truth coming into their homes. . ."

■ "I have had access to your paper for several years. . . It has been a valuable help to me in building my understanding of God's Word and helping me keep the faith. I am not able to send any money but do send my sincere thanks for your dedication to giving us something with meat to read.

"It concerns me greatly to see my sisters in Christ following the worldly customs of our modern day dress. I saw the error of my way some 25 years or so ago and have tried since to present as godly look as possible. Tight jeans certainly have no place in a Christian woman's wardrobe. Yet we put our little girls into them just like the world's children and then wonder why they are coming to church so dressed. I have written a little parable, which if you think worthy you may use for your paper. . .

Thank you for the 'good news' via *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. God grant you health and strength to continue many years—with a younger person being trained to pick up if needed."

A PARABLE: ROSE OR ZINNIA?

"Hello, I'm the daily news reporter. May I ask who you are?"

"Oh, hello. . . I am a rose."

"You, are a rose?"

"Of course I am a rose!"

"But you don't look like a rose. You look like a zinnia to me!"

"Well, I know I look like a zinnia. What difference does that make? I know I am a rose. Besides the zinnias feel more comfortable around me since I look like a zinnia too."

"That. . . maybe, but I still can't tell for sure if you are really a rose. Roses look like roses and zinnias like zinnias since the first garden. So how will you get the zinnias to see you are really a rose?"

"Oh, no problem. They will soon see that tho' I look like a zinnia, I really act like a rose."

"I see. Are you sure about that? If they never see a rose how can they tell the difference? Seems like a rose ought to look like a rose to act like one. Say, you don't suppose when the zinnias see you looking like a zinnia, yet claiming to be a rose, they will wonder who is trying to fool who, do you?"

INDIANA:

■ "I would like to be removed from the mailing list."

■ "Thanks for a very good paper this time. Your article on 'fear' was excellent. Today there is no fear for any authority in the U.S. No fear of the government, parents aren't supposed to discipline their children so no fear there, and for sure no fear of God. The devil sure has his deluding influence turned on full blast. People in the church who are supposed to be Christians just walk around in a daze like, 'Who me, live a holy life? You have to be kidding. This is the 1990's. If you want to have that opinion I guess you can, but keep it to yourself.'"

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS' RESPONSE. . .

(Continued from Last Page)

"Everything today is opinion. Lord, help us to hang in there until you return. Reading your article on fear was spiritually like eating a good wholesome meal is physically."

"Keep up the good work. Pray for us that we can remain faithful to Him who has called us. May God continue to bless your much needed ministry."

MISSOURI:

■ *"Just a line now to let you know we appreciate THE SWORD AND STAFF paper very much. Someone subscribed for us some 33 years ago. We have 5 bound volumes now, starting with number 11-12. We want to order bound volumes 85-86 and 87-88. . .Thank you very much."*

(Editor's Note: Thanks! this is very interesting. *THE SWORD AND STAFF* had its beginning in January 1957 when the editor was in his mid-20's. It was published for four years, then was defunct for six years. In 1967 the paper was revived and has continued to this day, being printed by the editor in the basement of his house—and the last printing being over 22,000 copies. It would be interesting to hear from other folks who have received it from the beginning—or at least started getting it during the early years of publication. Let us hear from you.)

NEBRASKA:

■ *"Please remove us from your mailing list. Thank you."*

ARIZONA:

■ *"Greetings in the Precious Name of our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus."*

"Recently a fellow inmate shared a copy of your publication with me, and wow! did I enjoy it. What a blessing it was to read Scriptural truth. . .instead of junk."

"I enjoyed the articles very much, and I would like to receive them on a regular basis. But, unfortunately at the present time my funds are limited due to my being incarcerated."

"My question is: Do you have any past or current issues that you could send me? Also, would it be possible for you to put me on your future mailing list? I would be most grateful."

"Thank you for your help and consideration with this request. May God's light continue to shine upon and through you, and may His peace be with you always."

CALIFORNIA:

■ *"For the truth, thank God for people like you."*

■ *"Bro. Gibbons, you are doing a wonderful work for the Lord. Keep it up. I've learned so much, and I never want to be without THE SWORD AND STAFF."*

OREGON:

■ *"Please remove from your mailing list."*

PHILIPPINES:

■ *"Our family has been reading THE SWORD AND STAFF for years. It has made our life more blessed."*

"We wish to continue receiving THE SWORD AND STAFF, but we're so sorry we will not be able to send a contribution. With this, we're assuring you our support in prayer and may God bless us all. . .Hebrews 6:10."

GHANA:

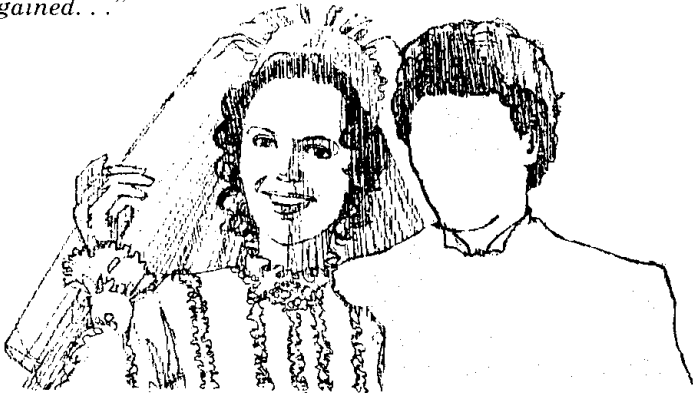
■ *"I have read volume 20 number 3 of your publication being my first time."*

"In fact, I can tell you I enjoy the paper very much. I do appreciate your effort put in printing this publication. If this is a good educative in God's Holy Word, then I may need copies to be studied and be strengthened more in the faith."

"May God bless you, keep you, in the Holy Name. I wish you all the good luck, happy, and prosperous new year."

NIGERIA:

■ *"I feel like having some of your magazines which I saw with a friend of mine. I love reading them, learning about Christ, giving them out to people to gain in it what I have gained. . ."*



THE SCRIPTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXPRESSION "IN THE LORD" ("IN CHRIST")

CORRESPONDENCE has been received (two letters) since the last issue of *The Sword and Staff* went into the mail taking issue with what we wrote concerning I Corinthians 7:39. Here the apostle Paul said, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." Our assertion was that to be married "only in the Lord" meant to be married only to another Christian (and that is how a Christian should enter into marriage). This the two lengthy letters have denied (and somewhat strongly).

We are not interested in polemics, arguing, or argumentation. That is the favorite indoor (and outdoor) sport of some (we are not saying that is the case with our correspondents). Our concern is very simple, the spiritual well-being of the Lord's church. The word "church" means the "called out" ones—people who have been called out of a world of sin to serve the Lord in holiness. The LORD God said, "Be ye holy (separate); for I am holy (separate)." In our day that which is supposed to be the church of Christ in many places has lost its distinctiveness. Truly we are living in perilous times.

In the interest (and concern) of having a positive understanding of the expression "in the Lord" (i.e., "in Christ"), let us now make a brief, but basic, study into this. It would be well for us to keep in mind that "in" primarily denotes situation or position with respect to a surrounding, encompassment, or enclosure. Acquired secondary meanings, if there are any, have their meaning on the foundation of this concept. And when we see the word "Christ," the person Christ come to mind.

The Basic Concept of Entering into Christ

To put it all on the line simply as to what it basically means to be "in Christ" ("in the Lord"), consider the following Scriptures.

■ Galatians 3:26-29, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one **in Christ Jesus**. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

■ Romans 6:1-6, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue **in sin**, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, **live any longer therein**? Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized into Christ** were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by

baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk **in newness of life**. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

■ Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are **in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

■ II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be **in Christ**, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

■ Romans 16:7, "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were **in Christ** before me."

Truths that have a basic bearing upon our understanding of how to get into Christ are seen in these verses (as well as what it means to be in Christ). We see "in sin" and "in Christ" in sharp contrast (meaning just the opposite). When a person through faith puts the "old man" of sin to death and is buried in the waters of baptism, he is baptized into Christ. He puts on Christ. He is a new creature in Christ. In this relationship he is no longer under condemnation. At the same time he is one with everyone else who has likewise entered into Christ. Paul speaks of people who were "in Christ" (were Christians) before he was.

Verses that Throw Light upon This

The contrast found in I Corinthians 15:17,18 (and 58) is very helpful in understanding the meaning of "in Christ." Verses 17 and 18 read, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet **in your sins**. Then they also which are fallen asleep **in Christ** are perished." "In your sins" and "in Christ" represent two contrasting situations in which people find themselves. Then because of the great hope that we have in the resurrection, 15:58 very fittingly reads, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain **in the Lord**."

Ponder these verses in Ephesians. Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened (made alive) who were dead **in trespasses and sins** (verse 1). . . Even when we were dead **in sins**, hath quickened (made alive) us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved;) And hath made us sit together **in heavenly places in Christ Jesus** (verses 5 and 6). . . That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God **in the world**: But now **in Christ Jesus** ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ (verses 12 and 13). . . And that he might reconcile both unto God **in one body** by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (verse 16). . ." For further thought read verse 20-22. Being in Christ, in the body of Christ, is just the opposite of being dead in trespasses and sins (in sins, in the world). The book of Ephesians enlarges upon the concept of this sphere of relationship in which we find ourselves as Christians to speak of our being "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (in the heavenlies).

The book of Colossians is interesting along this line. It is addressed "to the saints and faithful brethren **in Christ** which are at Colosse. . ." (1:2). Then in verse 12ff Paul gives thanks to God that they had been made fit "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us **from the power of darkness**, and hath translated us **into the kingdom of his dear Son**: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." To be in Christ is the same thing as being in the kingdom of God's dear Son. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

The Sphere of Our Life and Activity

Having truly repented and been baptized into Christ, we have entered Christ. We are in Christ (the church of Christ, the body of Christ). This is not a mechanical, superficial thing that we have done (nor is it a mechanical, superficial concept). A spiritual transaction has taken place (I Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:15; John 3:5; Colossians 1:13). We are now in constant union and communion with Christ, a living and vital relationship (II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1). "In Christ" identifies the sphere of our living and activity now, just as "in the world" (in sin) aptly depicted it before we came to Christ. Yes, to be "in the Lord" ("in Christ") has reference to the relationship, the realm, the sphere in which we live, and move, and have our being now as Christians. That seems to be the basic meaning of the expression "in the Lord" ("in Christ"). Every time we come across this expression in the New Testament (and we do many times), this basic consideration should guide our thinking. If it doesn't fit, only then should secondary meanings of the expression be sought (if there are any). Even then a secondary meaning would only have meaning as seen in the light of the original meaning.

The 16th chapter of Romans is loaded with "in the Lord" expressions (Romans 16:2,7,8,11,12,22; cf. Colossians 4:17). In this sphere of life and activity these Christians lived, and moved, and had their being and fittingly this expression is used in connection with them. Notice II Corinthians 12:2; Romans 9:1; etc. Of interest are Galatians 1:22, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2, etc. Many other like references can be found in the New Testament Scriptures.

Yes, we live "in Christ," and we die "in Christ" (and what a beautiful thought this is). John recorded these wonderful words in Revelation 14:13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die **in the Lord** from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Explaining the marvelous things that will take place with the second coming of Christ, Paul writes, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead **in Christ** shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:16-18). How wonderful to be in Christ and finally die in Christ! Great things are in store!

Back to I Corinthians 7:39

Now let us get back to I Corinthians 7:39, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; *only in the Lord*." In the light of what we have learned from looking into the basic meaning of the expression "in the Lord" ("in Christ"), there is no problem in understanding this. The second marriage of the widow (if she chooses to marry again) is to be to another Christian who likewise is in the same sphere wherein she finds herself, i.e., "in the Lord." What the apostle Paul said earlier in this chapter makes this even more relevant (7:15). For more reasons than one how desirable to have a Christian home. "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it. . ." (Psalms 127:1a).

However, as asserted in the said correspondence (paragraph one of this article), some would take the position that all that Paul is saying in I Corinthians 7:39 "is that she must marry only in accordance with the marriage law of God, that is, she must marry someone who is free to marry." And three Scriptures are brought forth (Ephesians 6:1; Phi-

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS' RESPONSE...

(Continued from Last Page)

lippians 2:29; I Corinthians 11:11) wherein it is thought that the expression "in the Lord" is used having a meaning other than its basic meaning. This is used as a leverage in trying to make I Corinthians 7:39 mean something other than what we naturally would understand it to mean. Let us briefly notice the three Scriptures.

Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*: for this is right." As in other places, there is no problem in understanding this as "the sphere in which the action is to take place." In the epistle to the Colossians, written at the same time as the one of the Ephesians, Paul admonished, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit *in the Lord*" (Colossians 3:18). This is spoken of those in connection with the church in contrast with the world. The people in the world may do another thing, but this is what is expected (and is the norm) of those in the realm of the kingdom, "in the Lord"—the sphere in which we as Christians live, and move, and have our being. This is how we do things "in Christ."

Philippians 2:29, "Receive him therefore *in the Lord* with all gladness; and hold such in reputation." The expression again refers to the sphere of activity in which the brother was to be received, and of necessity it involved the receiving, the people doing the receiving, and the brother.

I Corinthians 11:11, "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, *in the Lord*." "The *en kurio* (in Lord) thus assigns to the relation here expressed the distinctive sphere, in which it subsists. Out of Christ, in a profane marriage of this world, the case would be different" (Meyer). And we can't help but think of Ephesians 5:22-33.

We fail to see what bearing these verses would have upon I Corinthians 7:39.

In contrast with those today who would take exception with the obvious meaning of the Scripture, brothers of another generation had no problem in understanding it. B.W. Johnson wrote, "In case of her husband's death, she is free from the marriage bond, and can marry whom she will, with one limitation—she must marry in the Lord; that is, a Christian. An Alien marriage is prohibited. Indeed, so far was an ancient Christian from marrying an unbeliever that the question actually arose, when the sinner was converted, whether he could still live with an unconverted partner." On this Scripture, J.W. McGarvey commented, "only in the Lord (i.e., to a Christian)."

The rendering of I Corinthians by two modern English translations (which happen to be at hand) is interesting. The New International Version: "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to Christ." The New English Bible: "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband die, she is free to marry whom she will, provided the marriage is within the Lord's fellowship."

Admonitions

Kind reader, if your mate is not a Christian (and you are), we urge you to make the most (best) of your situation for the Lord, being a *real* Christian (I Peter 3:1-6; I Corinthians 7:12-16). The purpose of this article is not to condemn, or to sound harsh, but to be helpful. If you are an unmarried Christian, remember that you are instructed to marry "only in the Lord." In such an unstable, immoral, and amoral world as we live today there is too much at stake to do otherwise. Your immediate happiness, your spiritual well-being, and your eternal destiny are involved.

Let us really appreciate what it means to be "in the Lord."

This is no superficial matter.



"LIFE'S HARD-LEARNT LESSONS"

If my life was always sunshine
With never a cloudy day,
I wonder how I'd treat my Lord
And just how much I'd pray?
If all was peace and happiness
With never a stormy sea,
I wonder—Would I walk as close
And could He talk with me?
If my heart was never broken
And never a tear I'd shed,
Would I search His Word for comfort
That my hungry soul be fed?
If I'd never fought and faltered
Before temptations cur-sed face,
Would I know how much I need Him
For His mercy, love and grace?
If through life I knew no sorrow
And my body felt no pain,
Would I long for Heaven's glory
As my soul's far greater gain?
But my Father knows the answers,
He all my sins and sorrow sees;
And perhaps He sends the storm clouds
Just to bring me to my knees. . .
So that I might learn to trust Him,
Free from fear of all that harms,
That I might feel round about me
The embrace of His everlasting arms.

—BOB WICKLINE
2553 Moore Rd., Bethel, OH 45106

EXCUSE-MAKERS AND EXCUSE MAKING IN THE BIBLE

(Continued from Page 8)

Peter pray for him.

Simon in a moment of weakness faltered. When confronted, he made no excuse. He seemed to have a humble attitude in facing up to it.

King David

As sort of an appendage to this point, we would remind you of king David of ancient Israel when approached and confronted by the prophet Nathan about his sin of adultery. In his response to the prophet's parable David utterly condemned himself. Nathan's pointed accusation still rings out, "Thou art the man!" (II Samuel chapter 12). The magnitude of his guilt and sin overwhelmed him. He made no excuses. His prayer of repentance is found in the 51st Psalm.

CONCLUSION:

This examination of excuse-makers and excuse making in the Bible should prove many things to us.

Human nature has not changed from the beginning, and there is no hiding behind excuses before the Almighty God. The One who made us, and “with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12,13), knows everything. (And people know more than we think). When we try to excuse ourselves we end up accusing ourselves. Some people in the Bible didn’t even get a chance to try to excuse themselves. Regardless of what our excuses are before God (and most people make excuses), how foolish to make them. When God invites us or commands us, it is out of great love and grace for our good. He has our well-being in mind. “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). The great supper is provided. “See that ye *refuse* not (beg off) him that speaketh. For it they escaped not who *refused* (begged off) him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Hebrews 12:25).

Election in Due Perspective

■ “Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. . . Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30).

THE PERSONS involved in these operations are called “God’s elect” in verse 33, as in Mark 13:22,27. They have been “appointed” to “obtain salvation,” as it is written in another place (I Thessalonians 5:9-10). Thus, they may have good hope thereof (v. 8), since the appointments of God do not miscarry, neither are thwarted in their complete execution.

Such is the undeniable representation of Scripture. Although the doctrine of election has been greatly corrupted by injection of the elements of arbitrariness and unconditionality into it, still it must be acknowledged by all who receive the Scriptures as authoritative. God has an elect people. They consist of all those who will receive Christ, persevere in the faith, and ultimately be crowned in heaven as victors over the world. Hence, we read of “the faith of God’s elect,” meaning the faith that will so ensue (Titus 1:1). In recognition of that situation, we are in full accord with the determinists, though, as to the circumstances involved therein, we are in direct contrariety to them.

The Implicit Requirement

Admittedly, the scriptural doctrine of God’s election and predestination of people unto salvation is “hard to be understood,” as Peter, probably in reference thereto, put it (II Peter 3:14-16). Thus, those who are spiritually “unlearned and unstable” wrest it, potentially “to their own destruction,” as the Apostle remarks (v. 16). There is, however, a necessary safeguard against that perversion. And it is to it that we here call attention, so that those who are sincere in their desire and diligent in their efforts to know the truth may be assisted in its apprehension at this point.

It is the fact that Scripture must be harmonized with Scripture. Since the Inspirer thereof “is not the Author of confusion,” but of perfect congruence (I Corinthians 14:33), Scripture cannot be rightly interpreted so as to oppose itself. Were that so, we would have a Self-contradictory God and a divided kingdom, which is opposed to the whole of Divine

revelation.

Jesus declared, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Obviously, neither can it be self-contradictory, which would amount to its disruption in the most vital sense. The escape mechanism men have devised, of “parallel but contradictory truths,” is just that. It was spawned sheerly from the compulsion of a false theology that required it.

The Modifying Representations

The application of that principle and situation to the subject of Divine election is simple. As regards anyone’s salvation through Christ, Scripture everywhere proclaims the decisive responsibility for individual belief of and response to the gospel. “He that believeth not shall be damned,” is the declaration of the Savior Himself (Mark 16:16; cf. John 3:18; 16:9). To say that God irresistibly causes one to believe, essentially makes Him, not man, the believer.

The fact that He would so interpose His divine power in certain cases and withhold it in others, makes God a respecter of persons, which He is specifically declared not to be (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11). Such respect is partiality, as James declares, and is designated by him as “sin” (James 2:1-4,9). And certainly the thrice holy God cannot sin, even as He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Hence, arbitrary, unconditional election unto salvation stands refuted by these representations of the Word.

Another stressed doctrine of Scripture is that God desires the salvation of all humanity (I Timothy 2:1-6; cf. Romans 11:32; Titus 2:11, ASV). That circumstance just cannot be made to jibe with the idea of His unconditional appointment of only some persons to salvation.

Closely related to the universal scope of the Divine will on the subject of salvation is that regarding the damnation of people. It is as forcefully proclaimed by Scripture that God “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9; cf. Ezekiel 18:32). To teach that He has arbitrarily and without due cause consigned anyone to eternal damnation clashes head-on with that proclamation.

Yet another consideration that nullifies the deterministic insistence is that of man’s possession of the Divine image. An essential element of that offspringness from God is the factor of freedom of will. Nowhere does Scripture represent God as forcefully violating that freedom. It is true that He brings strong influence to bear upon the will of men, principally through proclamation of the truth and the exercise of His providential working. But these are not irresistible by men.

Could God command salvation of the individual, as determinism represents Him as doing, it is certain that the Universalists are right, and all humanity will eventually be saved. That is simply because God has said that is what He desires. But the Divine likeness in man appears to preclude that occurrence.

The Essential Conclusion

If the consistency of Scripture is to be kept intact, the conclusion on the subject of people’s salvation is inescapable. God purposed it. Thus, “all things,” having to do with provision of the universally-applicable salvation that is in Christ Jesus, “are of God” (II Corinthians 5:18). He “was in Christ, reconciling the world (not just a part of it) unto Himself” (v. 19). In that sense, Jonah was certainly right in his apparently provincially-related ejaculation, “Salvation is of the Lord!” (Jonah 2:9). He, thus, is God the Savior, as Scripture repeatedly declares Him to be (Isaiah 45:15; cf. vv. 21,22; ch. 43:11), and that, at least potentially, of “all the ends of the earth” (ch. 45:22).

Such, of course, is the categorical declaration of Scripture.
(Continued on Next Page)

Election in Due Perspective

(Continued from Last Page)

ture, repeatedly made. "I came not to judge the world," declared Jesus, "but to save the world," not just some of it (John 12:47). For that purpose was He sent by God. So says John: "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (I John 4:14). Hence, "The grace of God hath appeared (in the Person and work of the Son), bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11, ASV). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (II Corinthians 5:19; cf. Colossians 1:20).

From all that Scripture has to say on the subject, the state of the case is clear. Salvation has been provided for all, and God earnestly desires and implores all to receive it (II Corinthians 5:20). In order for the salvation to become effective for the individual, however, it must be received by the means appointed by God. So, but only so, may we "rejoice in God" when we have received the reconciliation to Him wrought for us by His beloved Son (Romans 5:11, ASV).

The word of the universal reconciliation to God—that of their salvation (Ephesians 1:13)—is to be proclaimed to "every creature," and all are to be urged to "be reconciled to God" by receiving it (Mark 16:15,16; II Corinthians 5:18-21). God, through Christ, did the salvational work; we, in our reception of the benefit, are to do the work of believing (John 6:28,29). God will not do our work for us, and we cannot do His work of providing salvation. As regards our personal participation in the provided salvation we, accordingly, are "workers together with Him" (II Corinthians 6:1).

That is the overall situation that must be kept in mind in the endeavor to comprehend the scriptural doctrine of God's electing and predestinating people unto salvation. When it is disregarded, the situation cannot but be corrupted, and that dangerously so, when it is done in such a way as to tend to relieve the individual of decisive responsibility in the reception of the salvation provided for and offered to Him through Christ.

The Key to the Matter

With that state of the case clearly before one, such texts as those of Romans 8:28-33, II Timothy 1:9,10, I Peter 1:2, and Jude 1 can be seen as fully harmonious with the rest of Scripture. The key to such understanding is in the recognition of God's omniscience, which is the fundamental element involved in the situation. He "is not a man," it must be remembered, with human limitations (Numbers 23:19). Known unto Him "are all His works from the beginning of the world," and also prior thereto (Acts 15:18).

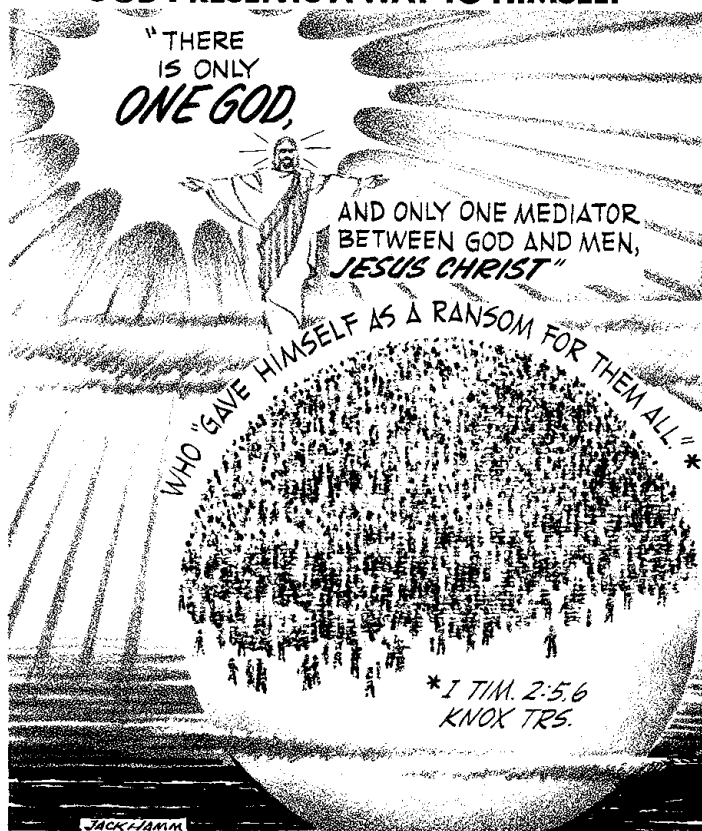
It was in that prescience, or prior knowledge, that God's electing and predestinating of people unto eternal salvation was done. That is equally so, whether the foreknowledge is taken as preawareness, personal approval, or spiritual union. It is not at all necessary to inject the factors or arbitrariness and unconditionality into the matter, which but aligns God against Himself, as He is otherwise represented by Scripture. Neither are we required to say that it was merely a "plan of salvation" that God foreordained, though He did predetermine men's way of coming to Him through Christ. By the clear proclamation of Scripture, individuals were involved in Divine election and predestination.

Here, obviously and necessarily, is how it was done. God, having elected and predestinated Him who was to become Christ, His Lamb, to be the world's Savior (I Peter 1:18-21), also appointed the conditions for people's acceptance of that Savior. In His divine knowledge of all the future, He simply was aware of those who, of their own volition, under the constraint of the Holy Spirit operating through the gospel, would receive the provided salvation, continuing in the faith until death.

It was those persons who were elected and predestined to inhabit heaven as God's redeemed family. The election in no way decisively, much less irresistibly, affected the free will response to the gospel of individuals. It was but the result of God's recognition of the proper and continuing response, as foreseen in times eternal. The referenced determination, it must be remembered was made "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Peter 1:2).

The exactly same principle is involved in the doctrine of the universal atonement made by Christ, yet its individual applicability on condition of personal reception thereof. Sal-

GOD PRESENTS A WAY TO HIMSELF



vation is for all, but will be had only by those who accept it. God, thus, is "the Savior of all men," but effectively, or "especially of those that believe," and thereby receive the salvation (I Timothy 4:10). From eternity, God knew who these persons were, and decreed that they should be saved, but did not unconditionally appoint them to "the obedience of faith" that is required for individual salvation (Romans 16:26).

The predestination, calling, justification, and glorification of the Romans text must be taken in this light. God wills the salvation of all, all are called thereto by the gospel, all who respond to the call are justified, and those justified will be glorified, if they continue in the faith (Colossians 1:23).

Characteristically, Paul did not stop to spell all that out in the passage of Romans 8:28-33. To do so, would have distracted the readers from his principle objective there. That was to assure those who are in Christ, and are suffering with and for Him (vv. 12-25), of the absolute certainty of their eternal salvation, as they continue in the Divine grace and fellowship. That work of continuance, obviously, should be our concern. We should not be deceived by the false doctrine of an unconditional salvation.

Any other view of scriptural election and foreordination unto salvation relieves men of the scripturally-imposed and stressed element of decisive responsibility for their salvation. It casts the whole situation into the lap of God, making

Him ultimately responsible for both the saved and the lost. That state of things just will not accord with, but flatly contradicts, God's portrayal both of Himself and man.

—*The Banner of Truth*

WHO ARE THESE?

Who are these motley ones clothed in such gorgeous robes of spotless white?
Who are these who surge forth upon the streets of gold in wild delight?
At first it seems they're out of place, unfit, as if they don't belong;
As angels step aside somewhat aghast, they merge with heaven's happy throng!
Just who are these that dare to stand before the Mighty God of all?
To praise His Holy Name (Amen! Amen!), and then before Him prostrate fall?
They're earthly creatures, born again, children of Adam's fallen race;
Saved for ever by Jesus Christ, his precious blood, through God's amazing grace!

—By JAMES E. GIBBONS

The Following is Reported:

"IN CHINA, after the communes were set up, the order was given to count the Christians in each commune. If there was more than one believer in a commune, the other Christians were distributed to communes which had no Christians—under the assumption that if believers were separated from each other, they would eventually lose heart and give up their faith. But the opposite occurred.

"Christians were scattered throughout China at government expense, and were sent even in sections of China which had never had a Christian witness. In effect, the government placed one Christianity missionary in every commune! As a result, all of China was evangelized and there are now more Christians than ever before. Entire communes have become Christian."

(Perhaps the word Christian is used more generically here than in the Scriptures, but this is very interesting—Editor). □

Why the Eighth Day?

IT IS a colossal understatement to say that the Bible is unique. It is not just unique, it is of divine origin. This is made obvious by the many instances of scientific foreknowledge found upon its pages.

One example of this concerns the medical practice of circumcision—the act which symbolized the covenant between God and Abraham (Genesis 17:10-14). Circumcision was subsequently incorporated into the Mosaic system and prevailed as a religious requirement until the beginning of the Christian Age (Leviticus 12:3; I Corinthians 7:18,19).

Whereas in the Bible circumcision has a religious

importance, studies have shown that this practice has definite health benefits as well. Certain cancer risks are almost completely removed by following this Biblical rite. This in itself is impressive; but of even greater significance is the day that the Bible designates for circumcision. Moses wrote: "He that is eight days old shall be circumcised. . ." (Genesis 17:12). Why the *eighth* day?

Circumcision, like any surgery, involves risks; bleeding is a real concern. A newborn is susceptible to hemorrhaging because he lacks the proper levels of the clotting agent prothrombin. His body does not produce vitamin K (necessary in the production of prothrombin) until between the fifth and seventh days after birth. However, on the eighth day, a child's prothrombin level is higher than at any other time in his life (actually 10% above normal). In other words, the safest possible day to perform circumcision is the eighth (see S.I. McMillen, 1984, *None of These Diseases*, p. 92).

How did Moses know that the eighth day was right for circumcision—hundreds of years before science discovered it? Was it mere coincidence? Hardly! □

—Brad T. Bromling

**Answers to:
BIBLE QUESTIONS**

1. Luke 1:28,42; 2. Luke 1:13; 3. John 4:4-14; 4. Matthew 8:14,15; Luke 10:38-42; 5. Matthew 9:20-22; 6. Mark 6:17-29; 7. Luke 8:2; 8. Matthew 27:55, 56; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:38-42; 9. Luke 13:20,21; Luke 15:8-10; Matthew 25:1-13; 10. Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; 11. John 11; 12. Matthew 26:6-13; 13. Matthew 27:55,56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25; 14. John 19:26, 27; 15. Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:10; 16. Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18; 17. Acts 6; 18. Acts 9:36-41; 19. Acts 12:12; 20. Acts 12:13-16; 21. Acts 16:12-15; 22. Acts 17:34; 23. Acts 21:8,9; 24. Romans 16:3; Acts 18: 1-3,26; I Corinthians 16:19; II Timothy 4:19; 25. Philip-
pians 4:2; 26. Romans 16:1,2; 27. II Timothy 1:5; 28. It is a shortened form of the name Miriam, the sister of Moses. It would seem that seven women had this name in the N.T. Scriptures: (1) Mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:20,21); (2) Mary Magdalene (Mark 15:40); (3) Mother of James and Joses (Mark 15:40); (4) Wife of Cleophas (John 19:25); (5) Sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1-3); (6) Mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); (7) A Christian at Rome who helped Paul (Romans 16:6); 29. I Timothy 2:12-14; 30. Titus 2:3-5.

A Process of Decay

THE MAKING of intoxicating drink is a decay process in the fermentation and breaking down of the different components (grain, grapes, etc.) involved, and the effect of drinking the by-product of this decay is likewise a breaking down (morally and physically), producing decay in society. □

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James E. Gibbons—Editor

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Did It Happen by Chance?

THE NOTED INFIDEL Robert Ingersoll had decided to visit a new model of the solar system at the New York Planetarium. A scale of the sun with all the planets moving in orbit around it was suspended from the ceiling.

When Ingersoll entered the room and saw the display, he exclaimed, "This is beautiful! Who made it?"

The head of the planetarium, a theist, who was escorting Ingersoll, said, "Why, no one made it. It just suddenly appeared by chance in this room one day." Reportedly, Ingersoll laughed because he saw for the first time the absurdity of attributing the universe to "chance." Just as "chance" was a nonanswer to the origin of the model of the solar system, it is even more of a nonanswer when applied to the origin of the universe itself.—*Robert A. Morey* ☐

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