

The Sword AND Staff

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

Are Visions, Dreams and Religious Experiences Proof of Salvation?

● By JAMES E. GIBBONS—1535 W. Fairfield Drive
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IN THE PAST, a sizable segment of the religious community has believed that conversion to Christ has not been accomplished unless preceded and climaxed by some unusual, and sometimes bizarre, religious experience. This sensational experience is subjectively sought usually by “praying through” (associated with a so-called “altar”), seeking a sign, a vision—seeing a light, or hearing a voice, etc. When finally and supposedly “attained,” to some it means their sins were thereby forgiven. To others (extreme Calvinists), God has assuredly let them know that they are among His predestined elect. The truth is that not all professing religious people have experienced these things (although they may love the Lord dearly). As a matter of fact, not all who have sought these experiences (real or imagined) have been able to have them—although they were deadly in earnest, and although they were told that they must have them before they could be saved.

Obviously something is strangely amiss somewhere because God wants all to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4-6). Let us look carefully into the Bible and examine the New Testament in particular on this matter.

The book of Acts in the New Testament has been called the “book of conversions.” In this short history of the early church we see how men were converted, how they became Christians. At least two of these records of conversion were accompanied by unusual and miraculous circumstances, but did this have anything to do with salvation? We shall now see.

The Household of Cornelius

The 10th and 11th chapters of Acts give the account of the conversion of the household of Corne-



lius, the first Gentiles to come into the church. To start with, Cornelius saw a vision of an angel in his house who actually talked to him (Acts 10:1-8; 11:13-14; etc.). Many today would declare that such a glorious vision would be definite evidence of salvation, but was that true of Cornelius? Did he think he was thereby saved? The angel told him to send for the apostle Peter “who shall tell thee *words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved*” (Acts 11:14). The parallel words to this in Acts 10:6 read: “...he shall tell thee *what thou oughtest to do.*” The messengers of Cornelius told Peter of the vision and how he (Cornelius) was waiting to “*hear words of thee*” (Acts 10:22). Upon

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—THANK YOU—

Proverbially *SPEAKING...*

KNOWLEDGE points the way; wisdom gets us there.

The Holy Spirit does not wash away our sins; the blood of Christ does this (Revelation 1:5), and because our sins are washed away the Holy Spirit comes into our lives to live (Acts 2:38; Galatians 4:6).

We reap what we sow, only in greater proportions.

If you live life in the fast lane, you may find it hard to slow down to make a right turn.

We need to live so close to the Lord that the devil can't come between us.

The Lord's Supper is a memorial to God's forgetting (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:12).

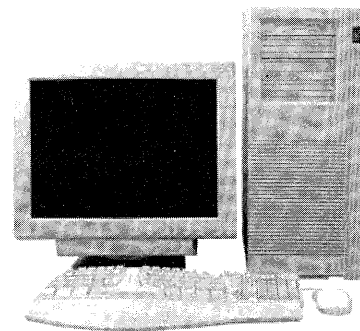
Let us preach as never sure to preach again as a dying man to dying men.

A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle and then lighting others (and, likewise, by loving others we lose nothing and everyone is made to gain as our whole surroundings become aglow).

We may not be what we think we are, but we are what we think.

Being a real Christian enhances your capacity to love your husband or wife even more.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS



THE MODERN MIND AND THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

ALTHOUGH we supposedly have freedom of speech, we live in a society today that is not conducive to believing, accepting or living the kind of Christianity that is taught in the New Testament. We live in a pluralistic, multicultural society that is largely controlled and dominated by secular, humanistic thinking people. This is true in the public schools and universities, and in the public media that seems to have a decided anti-christian basis and agenda. As television unabashedly spews out its pro-homosexual agenda, the unthinking masses are brain-washed into accepting this disgusting lifestyle and perversion as acceptable behavior. Religion, as such, is barred from the public schools (implying that it is irrelevant to life). At the same time children are taught that man is an animal that is the blind product of evolution (as opposed to intelligent design in creation). Then, religion that is supposedly practiced at large in our society largely has its vitals of relevancy sapped, being the remnants of a traditional, dying denominationalism permeated by modernistic unbelief. Materialism besets our society. All of this complexity and diversity has been homogenized into the anemia that makes up the modern mindset. The modern mind is elastic and very tolerant (except toward absolutes). It prides itself in supposedly being open-minded. But it is hesitant and reluctant to recognize and accept absolutes, and consequently to close the mental door in accepting final truth. All of this creates a definite and an almost insurmountable problem in people accepting the Christianity of the New Testament in its fullness. We are even told that it doesn't make any difference what a person believes just so long as he is sincere. The desire and need of searching for the truth and knowing it is stymied even before it is begun.

On the surface when we talk about the love of God and the Savior, that may sound good to the mind of modern man. But when this is really understood, it goes against the grain of his generic and fuzzy way of thinking. Love in John 3:16 implies that the world is lost in sin and needs a Savior. Being saved is being saved from our sins and Christ is the one and only means of this taking place. Jesus asserted, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He taught that there was one sheepfold, one entrance, and anyone who tried to "climb up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1-16). He told the unbelieving Jews of his day unless they believed on him, "ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:23-24). After his death and resurrection, Jesus gave the Great

Commission, saying, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). This implies that the world is lost and that unless men accept the gospel message, they will remain lost. Later as Peter preached in Acts 4:12, he said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." All of these statements constitute the very thesis of Christianity, which cannot be compromised without denying what Christianity is all about. All of this is audacity to the modern mind.

And the modern mind has a problem dealing with small numbers and what the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:13-14. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." This may be hard for many to accept, but "broad is the way" that leads to destruction (and, we are sad to say, most of humanity is on this road). The way that leads to life is narrow with few finding it. And the gate of entrance into this way is pictured as being strait (not straight). On maps the word "strait" is used to identify narrow and difficult passages. Few are willing to pay the price, to be crucified with Christ, nor to take up their crosses daily and follow him (Luke 14:26-33; 9:23-24). When many of the disciples of Christ turned away, calling his teachings "hard sayings," we read, "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:60-69).

Small numbers are not new for those who would be identified with God and follow righteousness (although the world may judge the validity of a group by its size). Of all the people in the world that was destroyed by the Flood, there were only eight righteous people saved on Noah's ark (1 Peter 3:20-21; 2 Peter 2:5; Genesis 6:1-13; 7:7). Ten righteous people could not be found in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33). In the time of Elijah when the nation was given over to idolatry, there were 7,000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:8-18), although the prophet thought he was the only one left (yet comparatively a small number). The history of the nation of Israel was one of only a small remnant being found faithful in

servicing God (Read Acts 7). The faithful have long been used to small numbers.

We are not writing these words to discourage, nor to excuse smallness, but to be realistic about our situation in today's world (lest we be intimidated and compromise to accommodate an ungodly age). Although they started out as a small band, the apostles did not draw back from the task laid out for them in the Great Commission. They did not feel inferior or intimidated that they were such a small number. They did not think in terms of our little bunch. They did not ponder, "How could the vast world of the heathen be lost, having never heard the gospel?" In no way did they regard their message as bigoted, but as that of the boundless love of God to save a world lost in sin. We have the same message to preach and judgment is God's department. Truth is truth regardless of the number who believe it or if no one believes it. □



Creation is Not Negotiable

WE ARE living in a world that is drifting deeper into unbelief. The Christian faith is under attack from many with positions, conditions and opportunities that would provide for them haughty disdain. If we do nothing about it we cannot expect anyone else to. The time is at hand to fortify our faith and come through safely, weathering the crisis and give an answer for the faith we hold (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 3:15).

Infidelity has raged over the centuries. Numbers of deluded souls have been led into spiritual bankruptcy due to sophisticated maneuvers of so called intellectuals. The attacks on God and His existence are incessant. Many feel Christians are asking them to gamble their lives on unproved assertions. There is ample proof of God and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Man has always had a deep-rooted sense of the divine. Man is curiously aroused by heaven. Modern and ancient records set forth man's urge to seek out divinity.

Atheism is not natural. Atheism is planted in the minds through doubt. Atheism breeds a wholesale disregard for authority. Disdain of God as the Supreme Authority deprives hearts of idealism, recognition of good or evil and moral convictions. Inordinate pride is the disposition seen in those who seek freedom from moral responsibility. "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works" (Psalms 14:1). Confidence in those who seem de-

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Creation is Not Negotiable

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vout, but are not, shatters faith (1 Timothy 1:18-20). Atheists must say, "I do not believe in God; I know that there is no God." This is filled with despair. Atheists enjoy little peace of mind. Madame Curie found "life barren." Robert Ingersoll found it "perfectly empty." Bertrand Russell "despaired that life was tortured and surrounded by invisible foes." Living the Christian faith approaches life or death with courage and peace (Romans 5:1-11; Philipians 1:23; 4:13).

God can be proved. Not by scientific empirical evidence as such (experiments and observations) but there is adequate information to make a case for God. The Bible announces that there is a God. In a plain, yet lofty way, it announces a conclusion which was drawn by the ancients. God was, is and will be. J.R. Dummelow said, "[N]o race or tribe of men, however degraded and apparently atheistic, lacks that spark of religious capacity which may be fanned and fed into a mighty flame." Therefore the world is incurably religious. Alexander Campbell argued with Robert Owens of the unreasonable nature of skepticism.

Observing the world demands a Designer. As a part of its original cause the universe suggests intelligence and purpose. From the microscopic to the stars it is not random but planned. It is no accident. The universe operates on precise astronomical laws. Atheistic science seeks to solve problems without God but the laws of nature force them to operate within predictable and discoverable laws. Who made the laws? Some are finding that the universe shows evidence of design and control by power that has something in common with our mind. The sun, moon, earth and stars are just right for man to live only on earth. Is it a plan or accident that the earth has the right atmosphere, amount of water, salt, air and so on? The human body is made up of multiplied trillions of cells. In the nucleus of the cell is found genes (DNA). If the code of instructions were put in English it would fill a 1,000 volume encyclopedia. It is estimated that the code of one body would span the universe. That is design. The human body is a veritable galaxy of systems all dependent, inter-dependent and independent. How? Evolution is a popular theory fostered by peer pressure. It remains unproven. There is no proof of evolution in embryology, vestigial organs (left over from primates), comparative anatomy of primates and humans because the laws of science work against them. Biogenesis is the law that liv-

ing organisms develop only from other living organisms and not from nonliving matter. Man cannot be derived from a rock. Moreover all things reproduce after their own kind. Dogs beget dogs, monkeys beget monkeys, cows beget cows and apes have never produced a human. Humans are God's special creation, different from the animals.

The modern battlefield is the Genesis Account. Evolutionists have attacked it and Theistic Evolutionists are compromising it. The only difference between a Theistic Evolutionist and an Atheistic Evolutionist is the "A" in atheistic. There are many in the religious world teaching that Genesis must be harmonized with atheistic evolution. They maintain that God used evolution to create. Theistic Evolution is popular because some want to walk in the middle of the road not wanting to appear "unscientific." The Christian does not have to be "scientific," only Biblical. Some are intimidated by impressive credentials and propaganda attacks on Christianity. The intimidated believe in evolutionary pseudo-science and that in some way God "worked by evolution." The Bible does not teach evolution.—*Don Hatch* □



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the arrival of the apostle, Cornelius again told of the vision, and then said, "Immediately therefore I sent to thee: and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear **all things that are commanded thee of God**" (Acts

10:33). After the rapidly ensuing events, we read of what happened to these believing Gentiles. "And **he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord**" (Acts 10:48).

This same apostle had preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, "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" (Acts 2:38-39). Who were the ones mentioned as being "afar off"? In Ephesians 2:11-17 (notice especially verse 17) we learn this expression refers to Gentiles (non-Jewish people). In other words, the apostle told the household of Cornelius the same thing

he had preached on Pentecost (offering the same promise)—**Repent and be baptized; you will be forgiven and receive God's Spirit.** This promise is for everyone who will do this, including Gentiles. Everyone who is Scripturally converted is converted in this way, “as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Visions and dreams have nothing to do with it.

And, again, this same apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:22-23, “**Seeing ye have purified your souls in OBEYING the truth** through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Furthermore, this same apostle likewise said in the same epistle, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doeth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20-21).

The apostle Peter later (after Acts 10), reviewing before the Jerusalem church and the other apostles what actually happened when he went into this Gentile's house, said, “And as I **began to speak**, the Holy Ghost [Spirit] fell on them, as on us **at the beginning**” (Acts 11:15). Also consider verse 14 again. Peter had not fully told them what to do in reference to being saved when this extraordinary manifestation of the Holy Spirit occurred as “at the beginning.” This plainly implies that this special outpouring of the Holy Spirit was not a common everyday experience in the early church. Why say “the Holy Ghost [Spirit] fell on them, as on us **AT THE BEGINNING**” (Pentecost: several years before) if it had happened with every conversion? This outpouring of the Spirit had nothing to do with saving them. Peter would tell them what they must “**DO**” (Acts 10:6, 33) to be saved (Acts 11:14). This special and unexpected outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to prove that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, should have the gospel preached to them (they had been “dragging their feet” in doing this)—it was not for salvation (Acts 11:17, 18). It happened before they were fully told what they must “**DO**” and as the apostle “**BEGAN TO SPEAK.**”

The Case of Saul of Tarsus

Saul of Tarsus, leading a great persecution against the early church, was on his way to Damascus for that very reason. As he approached the city, suddenly he saw a great light, he heard a voice and he actually saw Jesus in this heavenly vision (Acts 9:1-6). Many contend that Saul was

therewith saved, but is this the truth? Did this heavenly vision save him?

No. Three days later when Ananias came unto him, he still had his sins. In the record of Acts 22, Paul gives the details of Ananias coming to him. It was at this time Ananias said, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Why say such things to a poor, repentant sinner if he was already saved? This is no time for empty words. Now, remember what the Lord had said in answer to Saul's question on the road to Damascus. “Lord, what wilt 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” (Acts 9:6). This was part of what he “**MUST DO.**”

Then, for those who put great faith in “praying through,” please notice this about Saul (later called Paul). He fasted and prayed for three days (Acts 9:9, 11) and still had not “prayed through.” The truth of the matter is that a person cannot “pray through” to salvation. One must repent and be baptized for the remission of sins to get “through.” Therefore, Ananias urged Paul, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord?” (Acts 22:16).

What was the purpose of the vision if it was not to save Paul? Christ said to Paul, “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee” (Acts 26:16). Paul further said, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). He later wrote, “Am I not an apostle?...have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1). The purpose of the heavenly vision was not for salvation, but to qualify Paul to be an apostle of Christ, although arriving belatedly on the scene (1 Corinthians 15:7-9). Apostles were the “official” *eyewitnesses* of Christ.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Now examine the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. This sincere man was riding along in a chariot returning from Jerusalem when God directed the evangelist Philip to join him. The Ethiopian was reading from the Old Testament Scriptures and invited Philip to comment on it. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou

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believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:35-39).

You see the direction this religious discussion takes as these two men ride along in the chariot. You see the simple sequence. When the Ethiopian said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” What was the answer? “You must see a vision first”? No. “You must pray through first”? No. “The church must vote on you first”? No. It was rather, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” He confessed his faith and was straightway baptized. It was that simple.

The Other Conversions

Upon analyzing the different accounts of the Great Commission given by our Lord, we come to the conclusion that faith, repentance and baptism are necessary to becoming saved; then continuing in what has been commanded in remaining saved (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47). The conversions in the book of Acts correspond exactly and faithfully to this simple arrangement. Men preached the simple gospel. Sinners believed it, repented of their sins and were baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38-41; 3:19; 6:7; 8:12, 35-39; 10:48; 16:14-15, 30-34; 18:8; etc.) Paul asserted in 2 Corinthians 4:7 that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” Paul also says that “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). Nowhere is it recorded that God directly spoke from heaven to tell sinners what to do to be saved. Nowhere do we find angels doing this. The seeing of visions (whether real or imagined) does not save nor is it proof of salvation. God has ordained through the “foolishness of preaching” to save the world. This treasure is carried in the earthen vessel of man. God uses men to tell other men what to do to be saved.

Fact, Faith and Feeling

The mind of man with its intricate emotional makeup many times is tricky. It can prove to not be altogether reliable—especially when all of the facts are not in hand.

In the Bible we read of Joseph with his coat of many colors. His father had showed partiality in giving him this special gift which served only to make his neglected brothers more jealous. We know the story how these brothers sold Joseph into slavery because of their bitterness toward him. Dipping his coat of many colors in the blood of a goat, they brought it to their father. The heart of old Jacob was broken as he was overcome with anguish and grief. As far as he knew and was concerned, his favored son was dead; a wild beast had killed him and torn his body to pieces. He actually felt, acted and reacted as though it had happened. Many years later when word came that Joseph was alive and well down in the land of Egypt, he refused to believe it. He was so firmly convinced that his son was dead.

And experiences in religion within themselves prove nothing. One’s emotions and feelings are not a safe guide alone. A thing can be taught a person so strongly, and he believe it so assuredly, that he acts and reacts to it as though it were the truth (although it may not be; everything cannot be right religiously—there are too many conflicting beliefs). Fact, faith and feeling should be there, *and in that order*. Without the fact of God’s Word producing the feeling and backing it, our feelings are merely delusion. We are going to be judged by God’s Word, not by what or how we may feel about something.

Then, many times people seek after a tangible feeling or experience because they have little faith. But Paul says, “We walk by faith, and not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). We have seen faith come alive in such people. Then they stopped talking about feeling. When one truly believes, repents and is baptized into Christ, like the Ethiopian, he will go on “his way rejoicing.” But his personal makeup, disposition and circumstances will determine the degree of it. He has obeyed from the heart (Romans 6:17). He has done the right thing and is happy and pleased about it. His sins have all been taken away. His religious experience comes as a byproduct of his faith and not his faith as a byproduct of his religious experience.

Would you put your faith totally in Christ and HIS WORD and get your fixation off of yourself and your feelings? Do what God commands and He will take care of the rest. Unsolicited, feelings of assurance will come. We can take God at His Word. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). □

—A reprint from the past



“Be thou holy for I am Holy”—GOD

Salvation, Not Damnation

ALWAYS remember that God's will, His desire, is our salvation and not damnation. Christ came into the world to save sinners, not to condemn them (we were condemned already). "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:17-18). The 2nd epistle of Peter, 3:9, says that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Even under the law of sin and death (the Old Testament), God had no delight in the death of the sinner. Ezekiel 33:11 makes this plain. Notice the words. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die..." Likewise, notice Ezekiel 18:20-23 and 32.

Therefore, be reassured. When we err, trip and even stumble, don't give up. Repent. Get up and straighten up. God will forgive. If we don't give up, God will not give up on us. Let us continue on. He will be right there, forgiving and helping us make a "go" of it. He desires the best for us. And, "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:31-34). Also, check out Hebrews 4:14-16 and 1 John 1:7-2:2. Thank God for mercy and grace. May it inspire and move us onward and upward!—*J.E.G.* □

The Late Mr. Common Sense

TODAY we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years. No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape.

He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as:

- Knowing when to come in out of the rain;
- Why the early bird gets the worm;
- Life isn't always fair;
- Maybe it was *my* fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies:

- Don't spend more than you can earn.

And reliable strategies:

- Adults, not children, are in charge.

His health began to deteriorate when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining their unruly children. It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer Tylenol, sun lotion or a band-aid to a student, but could not inform parents if a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

Common Sense lost the will to live as the Ten Commandments became contraband, churches became businesses and criminals received better treatment than their victims. He began to lose ground rapidly when well-intentioned, but overbearing regulations were set in place – reports of a 6-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash (alcohol) after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, just to name a few.

His condition only worsened when it became not only punishable for you to defend yourself from a burglar in your own home, but opening the door for the burglar to sue you for assault.

Finally, there was no hope for Common Sense, after a woman failed to realize that a steaming cup of coffee was actually hot. After spilling a little in her lap, she was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death by his parents, Truth and Trust; his wife, Discretion and his children, Responsibility and Reason.

He is survived by his 3 stepbrothers; I Know My Rights, Someone Else Is To Blame, and I'm A Victim.

Not many attended the funeral because so few realized he was gone.—*Selected* □

Safe from the Commitment of Love

TO LOVE at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable...The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers...of love is Hell.—*Thomas A. Kempis* □

If your acceptance of Christianity was primarily on an emotional basis, and it didn't involve your mental faculties, you are in for an unstable, uncertain and bumpy ride in your religious life geared to your emotions.

The Seven Last Sayings of Christ from the Cross

1. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).
2. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).
3. "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
4. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).
5. "Woman, behold thy son!" (John 19:26).
6. "I thirst" (John 19:28).
7. "It is finished" (John 19:30).

A Lesson from King Midas

COMING out of the ancient Greek world, there are different versions of the story of King Midas touching everything and it turning into gold. But the gist of the different mythological accounts is pretty much the same. King Midas, because he had shown kindness and pity in a certain situation, was granted the privilege of having one wish fulfilled. The king thought for a moment and then said, "I wish that everything I touch would be turned into gold." And so it was. As he walked out of his garden, brushing against the beautiful flowers, they became rigid and turned into gold. Moving about in his palace, the whole place turned into gold. When he sat down, and began to eat, his food turned into tasteless gold. But what really threw him back was that when his lovely daughter came into his presence, and he lovingly embraced her, she immediately turned into a statue of hardened and lifeless gold. His kingdom and his whole world became a lifeless, gaudy and glittering mess. In anguish and desperation, he cried out for his wish to be taken back and reversed. And in the mythological account it was granted. He had learned his lesson as to what really mattered.

Perhaps there is a much needed lesson for us in this story. We live in a world beset by covetousness and materialism. Like King Midas, people, with their obsessive aspirations, seem to look upon everything through the eyes of materialism. They really believe that life consists in the abundance of things they possess. They stand in awe before material things. Success is gauged in relationship to the material. And like Midas touching his daughter, and she turning into lifeless gold, these lifeless values of how we esteem life itself are passed on to our children. How tragic! Would that we, like King Midas, could and would retract our obsessive preoc-

cupation with the material. Would that we could get ourselves detached from the paralysis of the lifeless mess in which people are ensnared today. Would that people look upon life in the light of its true meaning! Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (and this is not by touching everything and it turning into gold).

Please consider Luke 12:15-21. □

BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

1. How old was Adam when he died?
2. What two people in the Old Testament Scriptures were taken from this earth without dying?
3. Where was the false prophet Balaam from who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the children of Israel as they came into the Promised Land?
4. When Moses died after viewing the Promised Land, who buried him and where was he buried?
5. Which two sons of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel) had no territorial inheritance by name as a tribe in the Promised Land (explain)?
6. What two outstanding Old Testament prophets were involved in raising people from the dead?
7. What man in the Old Testament was able to go forty days and forty nights on the strength derived from eating one meal?
8. Who are six prophetesses mentioned by name in the Bible?
9. Jonah, instead of going to Ninevah to preach as God commanded, got on a ship going to where, fleeing from the presence of the LORD?
10. Where is the famous Scripture, "The just shall live by faith," first found in the Bible and then where do we find it quoted in the New Testament?
11. Where is the only record of Jesus ever writing anything?
12. On what three occasions did Jesus take Peter, James and John with him, who thereby became witnesses of what they saw?
13. What is the shortest verse in the Bible?
14. Where is a verse of Scripture that shows the use of the term "brethren," referring to Christians, includes women?
15. Where was the apostle Paul when he wrote the epistle of 1 Corinthians?
16. Whose name is jointed with Paul's in the opening salutation of the epistle of 1 Corinthians?
17. During Paul's prolonged ministry at Ephesus, who seems to have visited him from the church at Corinth?
18. Who is the only Christian mentioned by name in the epistle of Hebrews?
19. In addition to the gospel accounts, what New Testament writer in one of the epistles mentions the transfiguration of Christ?
20. Where was the apostle John when he saw the visions and wrote the book of Revelation?

(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 sincerely appreciated. □

FLORIDA:

■ "I appreciate so much you publishing *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. It means a lot to all of our family and has been a great help in our lives spiritually. I read the different issues over and over, and always get a blessing from them..."

TENNESSEE:

■ "I receive *THE SWORD AND STAFF* magazine. Thank you for this publication. It is great."

SOUTH CAROLINA:

■ "Please put me on the mailing list and send all volumes of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*..."

VIRGINIA:

■ "...I have read through all 9 books [bound volumes of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*] you sent me plus 69 [issues] I had before. I really do enjoy them and going back through them again. I pray the Lord will give you health and strength to carry on His work. May God bless and keep you."

■ "As we have no minister at the present time I am doing the speaking on Sunday mornings and teaching the Bible classes on Sunday and Wednesday. Having discovered some copies of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* left by our last minister, I have found them to be of much value in preparing lessons for preaching and teaching in our Bible classes. I have also been able to use a lot of the quotes from 'Barbs with a Point' for our sign board. I really look forward to receiving *THE SWORD AND STAFF* being sent to me personally... Thanks for the way the Truth of God's Word is presented in all your articles. So many articles and books that are being produced today are straying farther

and farther away from the Truth that sets men free. May you continue to stand firm and uncompromising in your stand for God's Truth and May Our God bless you and continue to use you in this endeavor."

PENNSYLVANIA:

■ "Please remove our name from your mailing list."

■ "I enjoy reading your articles. They are informing and beneficial..."

■ "Just a note to thank you for sending all of the printed materials. It is good to have *THE SWORD AND STAFF* in bound volume form. They will be placed in the church's library."

VERMONT:

■ "Please send all of the bound volumes of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. If the enclosed donation for shipping is not enough, I will send more. Thank you very much."

MICHIGAN:

■ "I thank you for your preaching with *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I hope this will help to continue your great outreach to many who are really interested in being in the Word and learning."

OHIO:

■ "Thank you so much for the quick shipment of goodies. I look forward to reading the bound back issues of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I also find myself three chapters from completing the book, *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*. What an awesome read!

"I appreciate your conservative approach to the Bible and look to glean many teachable truths that can be shared with my flock. May God continue to bless you and your work for him." (E-Mail)

INDIANA:

■ "I enjoy *THE SWORD AND STAFF* very much. Keep up the good work."

ILLINOIS:

■ "I would like to have the book, *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND: INSIGHT INTO 'END TIME' PROPHECIES* if you still have any available. Thanks.

"I appreciate *THE SWORD AND STAFF* so very much!"

Editor's Note: The book, *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*, has gone into three printings, and this third printing is now almost all gone (with less than 100 copies remaining). Obviously, this book has met a definite need. There is a question mark about there being another printing. So if you have been intending to obtain a copy, it would be well if you did this right away. Otherwise, it may not be available.

■ "I always look forward to receiving such an outstanding and edifying publication as *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I find your articles scripturally accurate and informative. I pray that you remain steadfast,

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS'...Response

(Continued from Previous Page)

immovable and always abounding in good works for the Lord with such an inspiring paper."

IOWA:

■ *"The first thing my wife...saw and liked was your book, POEMS OF THE SOUL AND PROVERBS. I will enjoy reading your material and will put it to good use...Again thanks. And that was prompt. I just wrote the email 4 days ago..." (E-Mail)*

MISSOURI:

■ *"If you still have the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND, send me 3 of them...I enjoy the paper."*

■ *"Please send all bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF and put me on your mailing list. Enclosed is a donation to help with expenses."*

■ *"Enclosed is a contribution for the one in prison who requested the bound volumes. I hope others will feel the need to help. May the Good Lord bless and keep you."*

■ *"Please find enclosed a check for all bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF and your book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND...and whatever else you would care to send."*

■ *"Please send me all bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF. I am enclosing \$_____ to cover the shipping. If there is some money extra, please use it in your work. You have a great paper and this is very much appreciated."*

ARKANSAS:

■ *"Please accept this \$_____ to send THE SWORD AND STAFF to the following people, beginning with number 1, volume 46—2008."*

TEXAS:

■ *"Please send 4 sets of the bound volumes. I want to give them to others. If I need to send more money for shipping, just let me know."*

■ *"All the issues are so good. I often zerox out various articles and send them around. But the issue you recently sent was so good; I would like to send the whole paper. In fact, I already sent my issue...I would like 4 more issues...That is wonderful you are giving the bound issues for free. Blessings to you."*

OKLAHOMA:

■ *"We do not want to receive any literature from your organization. Thank you."*

COLORADO:

■ *"I thought you might like to have a particular grammar error pointed out that was quite blatant in this last issue. In your editorial comments on page 2 in paragraph 2 you state a rule in parentheses that is incorrect. On lines 2 and 3 you say that the word 'we' is third person. 'We' as a pronoun is first person plural,*

nominative case. The way you used it was quite correct, but claiming it is third person is incorrect. 'It' is third person, or impersonal case. Just thought you'd like to know."

Editor's Reply: Looking back to the 'EDITORIAL COMMENTS' article, I admit there was a wrong choice of words in the way that I said them, but I was not using the expressions in a technical sense. I was not speaking grammatically, but I was speaking in reference to parties. Here is what I was trying to say: (1) One; (2) Another one (making two); (3) Others (pointing beyond 1 and 2, yet including them), then getting back to the individual "I" (me) problem, common to all of us. Perhaps this doesn't make sense to you, but this is what I meant. I trust you got the spiritual point of the article.

CALIFORNIA:

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

■ *"Please send 2 complete sets [the bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF]. I wish to pass on one set."*

WASHINGTON:

■ *"Thank you, brother, for your excellent work."*

UNITED STATES:

■ *"Could you please add the following person to the mailing list of THE SWORD AND STAFF to receive the paper? He is a relatively new brother in Christ and could use some of your encouraging messages. I can speak from experience and tell you that the messages in your newsletter have been helping me in my walk with the Lord. Thanks so much for your time in preparing the newsletter." (E-Mail)*

■ *"I was reading from volume 46, Number 1, page 5, 'Rules for Living.' I think it was in THE SWORD AND STAFF that I read about President Garfield being summoned to an urgent meeting. He chose rather to keep his appointment with the Lord around the Lord's Table.*

"I'm searching for that article to use for a Lord's Supper meditation. Do you recall it and would you have time to be of any help to me?" (E-Mail)

Editor's Reply: I think the following account is what you are looking for, which I copied from an internet source.

ANOTHER APPOINTMENT

JAMES A. GARFIELD was President of the United States of America, taking office March 4, 1881. On his first Sunday in Washington after his inauguration, a member of the cabinet insisted that a meeting must be called to discuss a matter that threatened a national crisis. The President refused on the grounds of another appointment. The cabinet member then insisted that the national matter was of grave importance, and that Mr. Garfield should break his engagement, but Mr. Garfield refused to do

so. Then the cabinet member remarked: "I would be interested to know with whom you have an engagement so important it cannot be broken." President Garfield replied: "I will be as frank as you are. My engagement is with the Lord, to meet Him at His house at His table at 10:00 tomorrow morning, and I shall be there."—**Selected**

PHILIPPINES:

■ "How I wish to avail of the "Special Opportunity... ALL OF THE BOUND VOLUMES OF THE SWORD AND STAFF ARE YOURS!" My only problem is that I have no dollars to send you to at least take care of the mailing...

"I am a Filipino...I have 9 children. Four of my sons and two of my sons in law are preachers. There are other young preachers around my house using the books in my library in studying and preparing lessons. How nice it is if those bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF were also in my library where they could avail themselves of very good materials..."

NIGERIA (West Africa):

■ "...Thank you for your paper sent to me. We are praying for you over there and your family. I want to renew THE SWORD AND STAFF paper until Jesus comes. Send all your books and booklets and the bound volumes. Thanks." (E-Mail)

Editor's Reply: It was very nice to hear from you. Our efforts have limited funds and resources, but, the Lord willing, we will try to send the bound volumes and materials as we are able.

Editor's Note: For those of our readers who would like to help financially in situations like these, the best deal that we have found shipping is to send the bound volumes in the flat priority boxes provided by the post office. The cost for sending a flat rate box is \$37.00 to foreign countries (many times higher than domestic mail). The box filled has this set rate. As we said, we have limited funds and resources, and if any would be disposed to help in this way, it would greatly aid the cause of getting out God's Word to different countries around the world.

■ "While agreeing on the idea that the O.T. scripture is only a shadow of the N. T., I still find it hard how to reconcile that idea with N. T. passages like Romans 15:4-5 and 2 Timothy 3:15-17, which apparently refer to O. T. Scripture. I should be pleased to have your explanation on this."

Editor's Reply: Certainly the O.T. Scriptures are inspired of God and, looking back as Christians now, they still serve their purpose in the plan of God. Besides prophecy and the progressive movement toward the fulfillment of God's purpose in reference to man, an example of how Romans 14:4-5 is accomplished is

seen in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. No, we no longer offer animals sacrifices, but God blessed those who served Him under that arrangement (until the "seed" should come). Notice their faith, and how it should inspire and comfort us to likewise trust God. Also notice what Paul said in Galatians 3, the Law (O.T.) was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, but once we have been brought to Christ, we are no longer under the schoolmaster (the O.T.). Both the patriarchal age (with no explicitly defined legal system) and the Old Testament age (distinctly law) served their purpose, showing the need and preparing the way for the coming Christ. Without law, man did not attain the righteousness of God. And with law, neither was it attained. Paul wrote, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). John stated, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

GHANA (West Africa):

■ "Brethren, I stumbled upon your website and have gleaned many useful articles and lessons...please put me on your subscription list...Thank you and bye for now." (E-mail) □

Cell Phone vs. the Bible

I wonder what would happen if we treated our Bible like we treat our cell phone.

What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?

What if we flipped through it several time a day?

What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?

What if we used it to receive messages from the text?

What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?

What if we gave it to kids as gifts?

What if we used it when we traveled?

What if we used it in case of emergency?

This is something to make you go....hmm... where is my Bible?

Oh, and one more thing...Unlike our cell phone, we don't have to worry about our Bible being disconnected because Jesus already paid the bill.

Makes you stop and think "where are my priorities?"

And no dropped calls!—**Selected** □

AMERICANS often mourn the horror of Sept. 11, 2001 when nearly three thousand lives were tragically taken, yet they keep silent as more than four thousand lives are taken each and every day through the atrocity of abortion. People protest the casualties of war; yet turn their heads away from the casualties of fifty million innocent victims resulting from Roe v. Wade.—**Copied** □

The Suffering Servant (Isaiah Chapter 53)

CONSIDER this very interesting section of Scripture, 1 Peter 2:18-25. It has to do with the relation of Christian servants to their masters. Christianity, by its very ethic and essence, eventually did away with slavery. This was especially expedited when both servant and master became and were Christians, brothers in Christ. (Read the epistle of Philemon). But in the meantime, servants were to adapt themselves to the situation in which they found themselves (even when they were under harsh, unchristian masters). They were to submit themselves to these masters “with all fear.” We believe this fear was not to be for their masters, but toward God (that what they did, even in these very undesirable circumstances, would be well-pleasing to God). The apostle Peter, over-all in this epistle, admonishes all of his readers to “pass the time of your sojourning here *in fear*” (1 Peter 1:17). Read this whole section of Scripture (1 Peter 1:13-17). It is the wholesome, reverential fear of God. The apostle Paul, dealing with like situations involving servants, wrote in Colossians 3:22 and 23, “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, *fearing God*. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” The apostles wanted these servants, by their restrained and conscientious Christian behavior, to bring glory to God.

Many times we read the latter part of this section of Scripture (1 Peter 2:18-25), stressing the need to follow the example of Christ, without considering the whole context and where the references come from in the Old Testament. They come from Isaiah chapter 53 and the context is that of the suffering servant. That servant was Christ. Paul, writing in Philippians 2, speaking of Christ, said, “But [Jesus] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a *servant*, and was made in the likeness of men” (verse 7). (Likewise, notice Matthew 20:28). So, Peter in addressing the servants in his epistle, points them to another servant, Jesus Christ, and how that he held up under the most adverse and severe of circumstances. They could readily identify with such a fellow servant and find inspiration and strength to endure in their own situation. Their Savior was a servant, too.

Now read 1 Peter 2:18-25 again and keep all of these things in mind.

“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is com-

mendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (NKJV) □

Mountains in the Bible



Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim

Deut. 11, 29

WE TALK about mountaintop experiences. Making a study of mountains in the Bible and things that happened in connection with them makes an absorbing study. Following, listed by name, are several mountains mentioned in the Bible.

1. Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4)
2. Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1-14; 2 Chronicles 3:1)
3. Mount Seir (Genesis 36:8,9)
4. Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb) (Exodus 34:4,29,30; Leviticus 26:46; Deuteronomy 5:1-21)
5. Mount Hor (Numbers 20:22-29; 33:37-41)
6. Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 32:49-52; 34:1-6)
7. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:11-30:20; Joshua 8:30-35)
8. Mount Tabor (Judges 4:4-14; Jeremiah 46:18)
9. Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:1-6; 2 Samuel 21:12)
10. Mount Zion (2 Samuel 5:7; 1 Kings 8:1; 2 Kings 19:31; Psalms 48)
11. Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:17-45)
12. Mount Ephraim (2 Chronicles 15:8; 17:2)
13. Mount Olivet (Acts 1:9-12; Luke 22:39-46)

There are other references to mountains in the Bible where a name of the mountain is not supplied. Among those are the mountain of Jesus' temptation (Matthew 4:8), the mountain where the “sermon on the mount” was delivered (Matthew 5:1), the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and the mountain in Galilee where Christ kept his appointment to meet his disciples after his resurrection from the dead (Matthew 28:7,16). □

“WATCH...”

Watch your thoughts, they become words.
 Watch your words, they become actions.
 Watch your actions, for they become habits.
 Watch your habits, as they become character.
 Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

—Selected

☰

BARBS

...with a POINT

▼

LUST is covetousness intensified.

If God is not first in your life, He is not in your life.

You must get right and live right before you can expect to die right.

The best way to “kill time” is to work it to death.

Strong drink is the devil’s brew to ensnare, enslave and make a fool of you.

You can run, but you can’t hide from God (Psalms 139:12, 23-24).

It is good to take a stand for Christ, but we need to do more than just stand there.

Throw a stick into a pigpen, and the pig that is hit will squeal.

People who are hard to “get along with” are likewise people who are not getting along well with the Lord or with themselves.

Your character is made evident in what you think is laughable.

What some “churches” mean when they talk about being “relevant,” is to accommodate the sinners in their sins.

You have no interest in that which you have invested nothing.

You do not cohabit and live together as man and wife until you are man and wife.

Let your words be better than silence or be silent.

When some people say we need to “think outside of the box,” it is more like opening Pandora’s box.

Procrastination is the thief of time.

With a musty, sweet and sickening smell, “pot” will lift you “high” on your way to hell.

The abundant life is not found in the abundance of “things” (Luke 12:15; John 10:10).

The more “way out” a person dresses, and mimics the world, the more evident and obvious are his insecurities.

Preaching should comfort the distressed and distress the comfortable.

The wolves and wild beast attack the young, the weak and the infirm first as they are easier prey (likewise, this is how the devil works).

Someone said, “There must be a God because it is so evident that there is a devil.”

We live in a strange society wherein the media would try to discredit a candidate running for public office because he doesn’t believe in evolution.

If you are a dishonest person, you have destroyed the foundation for all other good traits of character.

If grace does not make us gracious, and we continue in the crudeness of our sins, it has not accomplished its purpose in our lives.

Covetousness and selfishness are the next of kin.

Could it be that political “liberals” like to be liberal with other people’s money and political “conservatives” like to be conservative with their own money?

If you are not honest, are you expecting too much in wanting life to treat you fair?

When we appeal to the flesh in approaching people religiously, can we expect spiritual results?

Which is worse? A child afraid of the dark, or an adult afraid of the light?

Perhaps there isn’t anything more pathetic and pitiful to behold than to see a reactionary reacting against himself.

Count it as a day lost forever wherein nothing good has been accomplished and nothing new learned.

Zeal without knowledge is like a car speeding down the highway at a terrific speed, not knowing where it is going.

It is no time to rearrange the pictures on the wall when the house is burning down.

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people (and hell is a prepared place for an unprepared people)—*Are you prepared?*

Looking back is a sure way of falling behind. □

☰

Two Important Decisions

SOMEONE has said that two of the most important decisions that a young person will ever make are who their friends will be and who they will marry. And many times who their friends are will be the main factor determining who they will marry. Remember, the apostle Paul said, “Be not deceived; evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33, ASV). And 2 Corinthians 6:14 reads, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness.” So, young person, choose your friends wisely. □

The Manifold Wisdom



of God

By James E. Gibbons

EPHESIANS 3:10 speaks of the “manifold wisdom of God.” The word “manifold” simply means many fold. There are many folds and facets to the wisdom of God. The teachings of the Scriptures are profound and far reaching. Although some things can be readily understood, they are not fully grasped in one sitting; it involves a lifetime of study. Nor can we take one verse of Scripture and say “this only.” The truth of God is like a diamond with many radiant and sparkling facets. It is a coat of many colors. Ultimately, it is like Jesus said, “Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52). Humility is always in order.

To further illustrate, we are reminded of the story of three blind Hindus. Among themselves, they discussed what an elephant was like. So, to settle their discussion, they decided to station themselves where elephants passed by. One of the Hindus felt the side of an elephant. His conclusion was that an elephant was very much like a smooth wall. However, the second Hindu was able to handle the elephant’s trunk. He responded to the first Hindu, “No. That is not right. An elephant is like a tree.” In the meantime, the third Hindu was able to get hold of the elephant’s tail. He immediately responded, “Both of you are wrong. An elephant is like a rope.” All of them were right (up to a point) and all of them were wrong. There was more to an elephant than that to which each man had been exposed. (And many people today are like these three blind men; blinded by tradition and personal opinion, they grab hold of one verse of Scripture and loudly proclaim that they have all of the truth).

The problem of denominationalism that confronts us today in “Christendom” many times simply reflects not recognizing the “manifold wisdom” of God (as well as holding on to the doctrines and traditions of man). One denomination may seize upon one Bible teaching or verse of Scripture and emphasize it out of proportion to the rest of teachings of the Scripture (or totally ignore or leave them out). They may take part of the

truth and treat it like it is all of the truth. This can be seen in such commonly held doctrines as “faith only” and such Calvinistic teachings as evidenced in “predestination” and “once in grace, always in grace” (to name a few). Even names that denominational groups call themselves verify what we are saying. And what some people perceive as contradictions in the Bible, when properly understood, are not contradictions at all, but evidence of the manifold wisdom of God.

The Bible itself is the marvelous representation of the manifold wisdom of God. It is not just a book, but it is a library of 66 books. Paul admonished Timothy to “Study [be diligent] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). The first major division we recognize is the Old Testament and the New Testament. Here we see the spanning of three periods of history: the patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian ages. The manifold wisdom of God can be seen in an overview of these ages. The patriarchal, from Adam to Moses, being without law, showed the inability of man to lift himself by his own bootstraps (so to speak). He did not attain the righteousness of God on his own. Then from Moses to Christ, we recognize this as the Old Testament or Law period. Its strength only exposed the weakness of man. The only way righteousness could be attained by it would have been by perfection. One transgression made man as guilty as if he had broken all of the laws (Romans 6:23; James 2:10). Consequently, Paul concluded, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The Christian age, in its completeness, began with the death and resurrection of Christ. Its message is called the gospel, good news. What man could not attain without law, and then with law, now is able to be realized through the grace of God—forgiveness and being declared righteous by the blood of Christ. The patriarchal and Mosaic ages demonstrated the inability of man to save himself and made glaringly apparent his need of a Savior. These dispensations were “schoolmasters” to bring us to Christ. Thus, “when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son...” (Galatians 4:4; John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Romans 5:1-2; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25). The rest of the story is embodied in the New Testament Scriptures—God’s manifold wisdom and our hope and assurance.

God’s manifold wisdom can also be seen in our being fully equipped to every good work through His Word. Paul wrote to Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). In Romans 15:4, Paul likewise wrote, “For

whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Looking back to the Old Testament Scriptures, we find five different categories of writings as we designate them: (1) Law; (2) History; (3) Poetry; (4) Major Prophets; and (5) Minor Prophets. The New Testament Scriptures are likewise divided into five sections: (1) Gospels; (2) History; (3) Paul's Epistles; (4) General Epistles; and (5) Prophecy. The New Testament Scriptures specifically embody the Christian message. Sound doctrine is laid out before us. It deals with the sin problem. It tells us how to live the good life. We never cease to marvel at the purity and wisdom of God's Word. The Bible is not the product of man; it is the revelation of God.

Let us not subject our study of the Bible to sectarian usage or preconceived notions. Let us not single out a verse of Scripture that we think may support a denominational position, nor take one out of context and misuse it. Let us understand Scripture in the light of all other Scripture, the whole Bible, and thereby see the big picture. The manifold wisdom of God will be wonderfully evident. Let us seek to know it, benefit from it, and enjoy it in its fullness.

We close this little article with this little story. The story goes of this recluse and hermit who would not venture outside the closed doors of his log cabin, nor would he open his shuttered windows. But then one day he awoke to see a stream of light shining in. Somehow a knot hole had become open in the wall of his cabin. Drawing near, he peered through the hole. In amazement, he was able to gaze upon a view of a most beautiful sunrise across the valley, although partial and limited. He hurried to tell his friend of this magnificent view. His friend agreed, but said that he had been able to see an even more scenic view outside the cabin. He didn't have to look through a knot hole.

And let us stop looking through knot holes in reference to God's Word. Let us strive to understand and enjoy the fullness of the manifold wisdom of God. The big picture is beautiful. Let us be growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. Yes, and teaching men to observe all things that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). □

THE LOCAL CHURCH

TOO MANY today are set on building up man-made organizations and denominational machinery rather than functioning through and by means of the local, undenominational church (the only organization the LORD has sat up for getting His work done). □

You Must Not Quit!

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill;

When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile but you have to sigh;

When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit!

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of clouds of doubt.

And you never can tell how close you are—
It may be near when it seems so far.

So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit;
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit!

—Selected

"Thou, God, hast created us unto Thyself; hence our heart is restless until it rests in Thee."—Augustine

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Answers to:

BIBLE QUESTIONS

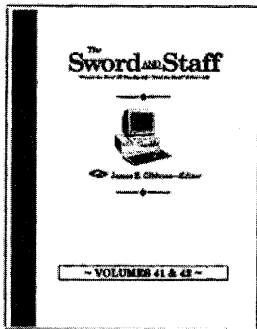
1. Genesis 5:5; 2. Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:1, 11); 3. Numbers 22:1-7; Deuteronomy 23:4 (from Mesopotamia); 4. Deuteronomy 34:1-6; 5. Levi and Joseph (Levi became the priesthood scattered throughout the land, and the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, were identified as tribes, and not their father Joseph); 6. Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:18-37); 7. 1 Kings 19:1-8; 8. (1) Miriam (Exodus 15:20); Deborah (Judges 4:4); (3) Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14); (5) Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3); (6) Anna (Luke 2:36-38); 9. Jonah 1:1-3; 10. Habakkuk 2:4 (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38); 11. John 8:1-11; 12. (1) The raising of Jarius' daughter (Mark 5:35-43); (2) The transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9); (3) Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42); 13. John 11:35; 14. Acts 16:40 (16:12-15); 15. Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8); 16. 1 Corinthians 1:1 (Notice Acts 18:12-17. He led in the opposition to Paul, but wouldn't it be nice to think that he was later converted like Crispis, another ruler of the synagogue—Acts 18:8. The fact that the name Sosthenes is included in the salutation implies he is known to the Corinthians); 17. 1 Corinthians 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:11; 18. Hebrews 13:23; 19. 2 Peter 1:16-18 (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36); 20. Revelation 1:9. □

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