

A photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled shadows on the ground. The path is composed of dry earth and some scattered twigs. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

The Advocate of Truth



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Defend Your Faith 3-4
How do you confront an atheist with the Word of God?

The Immortality Of The Soul: A Dark Age Creed 5
This popular belief is not according to the Scriptures.

The Resurrection Of The Dead 6-8
Reasons why the Resurrection is necessary.

Salty Water 8
The Lord healed some water with salt. How does that apply to us?

Life And Times Of The Apostle Paul 9
This is the beginning of a new series about the apostle.

Sixth Sense 9-10
Is there more to a person than just his or her senses?

Reasons Some Give Up 10-11
Jesus taught the reasons why some lose out on salvation.

How To Forgive 12-13
The Lord showed us how to have proper relationships.

The Signs Of The Times 14-15
Problems facing the world.

Questions And Answers 16-17
Why is it important to read the Bible?

The Spirit Of Ecclesiastes 12:7 18-19

The Children's Pages 20-23
Sabbath School Lessons
A Story - "Cathy's Gift"
Games and Puzzles

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DEFEND YOUR FAITH

by David Royer

I Peter 3:15 "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear,"

Source: New King James Version, for emphasis.

Before beginning, notice the words of Peter: Sanctify the Lord: set apart and regard Him as Holy. Defense: speak back or respond, remember a good defense is a good offense. When asked, be prepared but do not proselytize.

Where do you start? I suggest first using rational arguments to demonstrate the existence of God. You may not be successful. But if accepted, the next step is establishing the authority of the Bible. Now we have the luxury of using the Bible to build a strong case for our Christian beliefs.

The method of defending your Christian faith depends on various situations in which you may find yourself. No matter what the scenario, we need to be ready to provide a rational reply or reason for the hope that is in us. This article offers rebuttals for you to consider and use as appropriate when asked. I address only one of those scenarios.

In today's secular society, we will encounter atheists. Our approach should be cautious. I have found that a dialogue with an atheist ends up being "agree to disagree" and I satisfy my ego with simply maintaining a social relationship with the atheist, not to proselytize him. Why? In the atheist's mind, he is hardened to the position that there is no available, substantive evidence for the existence of any god.

Logic follows that if someone doesn't believe in God, then they're not going to believe in the Bible, and if you

start quoting Scripture, they are immediately going to tune you out. You are going to have to offer them proofs of another kind (rationality and scientific reasoning) in order to have a chance of them thinking about your belief: that there is a Supernatural, Higher Being: God.

DEALING WITH AN ATHEIST

Atheist Position: I only believe in something that I can prove/test with my five senses which include seeing, feeling, touching and hearing.

Christian Defense: Notice the atheist has to trust his senses to have this position. Could there be unknown or unforeseen deceptions? Yes, think of the many tactile and visual perspectives, angles of sight, and perceptions. Here the atheistic position attacks the "law of contradiction". Simply put, without trust and faith in one's senses, beliefs can be both true and false.

Atheist Position: I believe in Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. We have evolved to where we are today.

Christian Defense: Evolution is evident by observations around us today, and Charles Darwin is the hero of atheists; in that we agree. However, Darwin's "Theory" is actually a hypothesis that falls quite beyond the tenets of the scientific method (observation, experimentation, and verification).

Also, Darwin believed that there must be a Creator. He conceded the existence of God because there is so little of a chance or luck that life began on its own. In his words, "In my most extreme fluctuations, I have never

been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. I think that, but not always, that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.”

Atheist Position: I only believe in something exact that I can prove/test using the scientific method in disciplines such as mathematics. Math, as a science, is the capacity to prove discovery through hypothesis and documented assumptions and proofs.

Christian Defense: The common perception is that mathematics is a science. An exact science needs a human frame of reference. It is not the presence of assumptions that matters because all disciplines require fundamental assumptions and definitions; which, in math, needs to be precise. Precision is required so that its theorems can be proved with certainty. Here again, trust is required.

Mathematics also enables me to comprehend the eternal existence of God. For example, I can count from zero to one in fractions, but I can’t count backwards from one to zero in fractions. In other words, I can see how one can go from nothing to something, but I can’t see going from something to nothing. Something had to always exist in order for anything to exist.

This concept of existence brings up the fourth Atheist Position:

Atheist Position: There is no “higher-power” that created our universe.

Christian Defense: The origin of the universe has three possibilities: Option 1. The universe always has been here. Option 2. The universe created itself. Nothing was here before the universe. Option 3. The universe was created by someone or something.

Atheists believe there has to be a beginning. Hence the BIG BANG THEORY. The bed-rock law of those scientists (embraced by atheists) is the law of conservation of energy and mass. . . .from nothing comes nothing; nothing can do anything.

So, Options 1 and 2 can be thrown out based on scientific and philosophical grounds, (atheists will still profess faith in chance/luck). That leaves Option 3. THERE WAS A CREATOR, to which reason and evidence points.

Closing Thoughts and Idioms:

I hope this article offers you some ideas and alternative discussions with an atheist. Expect nothing. Accept the satisfaction that you are doing your best in defending Christianity and your reason for the hope that is in us *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*.

We do not need to see the artist, if his picture exists, to know that the artist exists.

Treating discussions, like it is a debate of science, will get you nowhere with a nonbeliever.

If you want to pray for your atheist friend, do it in private. Ending a contentious conversation by saying “I will pray for you” can be seen as rude. Christians believe that ultimately it is up to God to convince people to follow Him.

To convert someone, tell him or her to consider accepting absolutes like “good” and “evil.”

Humans developed mathematics in order to communicate and manage quantities. Therefore, it would have little value in proving God’s existence. Mathematics has to have a number, but God is infinite. So mathematics can’t take on infinity. If it could, faith would not be a requirement.

If we need FAITH to support any position, isn’t it nice to have faith, not in nature, but in a Creator: God and Jesus the Christ? See Romans 1:17-20 ... “The just shall live by faith”.

Being atheist takes more blind faith than being theist.

Source and inspiration from: Dr. R.C. Sproul, Ligonier Ministries and Charlie Campbell, Always Be Ready (ABR) ministry.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL: A DARK AGE CREED

Bond Tennant

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).

The theory of inherent immortality teaches that when what we call death overtakes a person, he actually becomes more alive than before death occurred. This theory is based on the supposition that somewhere within the human body is an elusive, intangible, and invisible entity or intelligence called a “soul.” The claim of theologians is that the soul is immortal or “death proof.” When the body dies, this inter intelligence, or real man, escapes from its prison house of human limitations and is free to enjoy life forever on a much higher plane of existence, unless it has been a wicked soul. In the latter case, according to traditional theology, the soul must suffer untold agonies in a burning hell of literal fire and torment.

The expression “immortal soul” and “undying soul” are so commonly used in religious circles and conversation that their verity is taken for granted by most who have not made an investigation as to their Scriptural foundation. The traditional immortality of the human soul is purely a product of man’s theories. It has no Scriptural support whatsoever.

The word “soul” as used in the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Professor Strong’s Bible concordance states that the word *nephesh* simply means “breathing creature,” or, freely translated, that which is animated or alive--a sentient being. The word is used in the Old Testament in connection with the lower animals as well as man. In Numbers 31:28, it is applied to such animals as “beeves,” “asses,” and sheep. However, if we were to insist that the Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated soul in the Old Testament, means “immortal soul,” then we would be bound to conclude that the lower animals also possess immortal souls. Few would be willing to accept this conclusion!

The word “soul” in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word *psuche*. We know that this word has exactly the same meaning as the Hebrew word *nephesh*, for the reason that the Apostle Peter uses it to

translate the latter when he quotes from Psalm 16:10. The apostle’s quotation is found in, Acts 2:27, and reads “...thou wilt not leave my soul [Greek, *psuche*; Hebrew, *nephesh*--sentient being] in hell [the grave, the condition of death], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Peter tells us that this is a prophecy concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus--that His soul was not left in death.

The word “soul,” and its plural, “souls” are used in the Bible many times, but in no instance is the thought even hinted that human souls are immortal. Whenever the Bible discusses the subject of death in connection with the soul, it distinctly and clearly states that the soul, even the body, is subject to death. For example, through the prophet, God said, “Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). In the New Testament, we read the words of Jesus, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna--destruction]” (Matthew 10:28). In this verse, Jesus says that even the souls which go to the Bible hell are destroyed, not tormented.

In Matthew 26:38, Jesus is reported as saying, “...My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death...” This is in harmony with the prophetic declaration concerning Jesus which says that his soul was made “...an offering for sin...” (Isaiah 53:10). Jesus’ soul died.

Another use of the Greek word *psuche*, or soul, in the New Testament is found in Acts 3:20-23, in which we have a prophecy describing the work of restoration, or restitution, that will be carried on by the Messiah following the establishment of His kingdom. We are told that then “every soul, which will not hear [obey] that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”

Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize the fact that human souls are mortal and subject to death, and that ultimately all wicked souls will be destroyed in everlasting death--not preserved and tormented, as dark age creeds would have us to believe.

PRINCIPLES AND REASONS

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

By Moises Torres M.

1. Why must there be a resurrection of the dead?

For God is not God of the dead, but of the living.

Matthew 22:31-32, “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”

2. What other reason supports the resurrection of the dead?

God will have a desire to the work of his hands.

Job 14:15 “Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands”

NOTE: As an artist, a painter, sculptor, or a writer, who is proud and appreciates the work of his hands, and does not want anybody to destroy his works, so God is found as a lover of his handiwork, and would not allow death to destroy his highest creation, man. The resurrection is a miracle that shows the power and mercy of the science of God to assure His work.

3. Did Job know about a resurrection?

Yes, and he also knew the way in which God raises up his people from the dead: “**Thou shalt call**, and I will answer thee.”

John 11:43-44: “And when he thus had spoken, **he cried with a loud voice**, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

NOTE: The manner in which Job speaks about his resurrection is very similar to the way the Lord raised up Lazarus from the dead, “he cried with a loud voice”. I Thessalonians 4:16 says, “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:”

4. Was the Lord Jesus raised from the dead?

The Son of God came in the flesh and was resurrected from the dead.

Romans 1:3-4: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

Romans 6:5 “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection.”

I Corinthians 15:13-23, “ But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 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. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept.

For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

5. Overcoming and destroying death and the grave are other reasons for the resurrection.

I Corinthians 15:25-26: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death." "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Revelation 20:14).

NOTE: Death was overcome by the Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection and is only waiting its destruction after the Millennium.

I Corinthians 15:51-57: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

NOTE: The Lord Jesus Christ overcame sin and death by his obedience; He overcome the grave and came out of there transformed as a celestial being. The prophet Hosea says: "...O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction..." (Hosea 13:14). The Lord Jesus Christ overcame death and the grave. Glory to God!

6. Why else is the resurrection of the dead necessary?

For Judgment and Reward.

John 5:28-29; "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil,

unto the resurrection of damnation."

NOTE: When we go to the grave we are just "sleeping" the sleep of death; but eventually, all that are in the grave will be awakened: The righteous for a resurrection of life, and the evil unto the resurrection of damnation. If we apply the terms of current technology to death and resurrection, we can compare it with the "pause button" on the keyboard of a computer: "click" is enough to suspend for a while the program we are using until we "click it" again to activate it and put it back in action: It is the same when we die. The Lord clicks our pause button, and we are suspended (sleeping) in time, until the day He "clicks" on the same button, and reactivates us to receive the reward, either for life or damnation.

The Preacher, in Ecclesiastes 9:5, seems to refer to this when he says, "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." This does not mean the dead are forgotten, but their memory, their thoughts and feelings are put on "Pause" until the time in which they listen to the call of the Lord to be awakened.

NOTE: The Preacher says that the same event occurs to everybody:

"For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by* all *that is* before them. All *things come* alike to all: *there is one event (Death)* to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner; *and* he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath. This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead" (Ecclesiastes 9:1-3).

As this event happens to everyone, just and unjust, clean and unclean, to good and evil, to those who sacrifice (obey) and to those who do not sacrifice, etc., then there must come a time of judgment to make a difference between these two kinds of people and give a reward to everyone according to their faith and works.

This is why this verse reads, "the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God." It would be pointless that the just and the unjust have the same

reward; hence there has to be a resurrection of the dead for judgment and reward.

NOTE: All the effort and achievements of man would be in vain if everything ends up in the grave. Where would remain then His love, justice, work, faith and hope?

Ezekiel 18:20 states: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die...” This implies the righteous shall live. And this will be confirmed by the Supreme Judge, so a resurrection of the dead is needed.

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.”

7. Is there implied a judgment of God in the resurrections mentioned in the book of Revelation 20?

Revelation 20:4-6: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. **But the rest of the dead** lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: **on such the second death hath no power**, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

NOTE: These Scriptures mention two resurrections, one for those who live and reign with Christ a thousand years, and the other for “the rest of the dead” who lived not again until the thousand years of the Kingdom of Christ are fulfilled. The purpose of these two resurrections show the justice of God, both for the just and unjust. Therefore, a resurrection of the dead is necessary.

Revelation 20:7: “And when the thousand years are expired...” And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (verse 15).

Salty Water

Jerry Womble

In reading 2 Kings 2:19-22, we see salty water. Elisha came to Jericho and when he met the people they pointed out to him the pleasant “situation” of the city. The reason they said situation is because of its location; it was a good, flat plain with mountains on one side and the Jordan river near on the east, but all that area was desert. It was dead because of the high content of salt in the soil and the water. It was on the road that connected Jerusalem to the Dead Sea area of Sodom and Gomorrah, a good area if only they had water. They had a spring, but it was so salty that it could not be used for drinking or raising crops. It was so bad that the ground was barren. We notice that Elisha asked for a new cruse, one that had not been contaminated but new and clean, and put salt in it. Salt was their problem; is he going to heal salt with salt? That seems contrary! His words are: “Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters...” All that Elisha did was carry out the will of God and the healing took place. All other springs in the area are salty to this day, but the one at Jericho is still fresh, and the city looks like a beautiful oasis. This is us today. When all the world around us is following false teachings and false gods, we need to be the fresh water. We are the salt of the world, the light shining in a dark period of time and a special people that God has called to spread His message in the last days.

Life and Times of the Apostle Paul

By Tim Buechner

We will begin our series on the life of the Apostle Paul by getting a good understanding of his background. Paul was born in the prominent city of Tarsus. Tarsus was a provincial capital of the Roman empire that had been declared a free city bringing its citizens privileges not afforded other locations throughout the empire, including Jerusalem. It brought freedom from taxes and was an economic, cultural and intellectual center. Along with Alexandria and Athens, Tarsus was a tier one city of high stature. One of the most important benefits of being from Tarsus was being granted Roman citizenship. The rights and privileges Paul had because of where he was from would later come to serve him well throughout his ministry. And, no doubt, the freedom Paul had also helped form his view of society and religion, and, his exposure to the political environment in both Tarsus and Jerusalem would also impact how he conducted his ministry and himself.

From a spiritual perspective, Paul was a Jew. But, not an average Jew. Paul had the opportunity as a boy to live in Jerusalem and study with a prominent teacher, Gamaliel. Like attending a prestigious university such as Harvard or Yale, Paul was educated by the best. Gamaliel was a Pharisee, which brought with it a certain perspective of the Scriptures, and, was well respected by many. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, Gamaliel was a high ranking member of the Sanhedrin and is reported to have provided written guidance on the appropriate keeping of the law and other legal ordinances, in addition to running the school of Hillel which Paul attended.

From a professional standpoint, Paul was a tent maker. In that part of the world, and at that time in history, no doubt it was an honorable and respectable business to be in. Paul appears to have been very successful, providing him the ability to fund his ministry and extensive travels (which was very unusual for the vast majority of citizens at that time in history).

Next time, we'll take a look at Paul's activities early in his spiritual endeavors as a leader.

Scriptural resources: Acts 22:1-5; 21:39; 5:34-40.



80% of what we think is taste is actually smell.

“Sixth Sense”

By Jonathan Fowler

Have you ever been faced with a hard decision, or maybe been at a crossroad, not knowing what to do? Perhaps you've already made up your mind on a decision and yet, there's something in the back of your head telling you to choose otherwise or change your answer. Our minds work in mysterious ways. Science has proven that even while we're awake, 80% of our brain's mental capacity is being used to process unconscious thought. We can see this everyday with how our minds think. Sometimes a thought, good or bad, will just pop into your head, or suddenly your mind remembers a fond memory. This is everyday proof your mind functions primarily off of subconscious thought. But can it be more than that?

“I believe that God has blessed man with a 'sixth sense', something that no other living creature has but man.”

Can it be more than just random thoughts being thrown from one side of your head to another?

What about intuition? The term “sixth sense” comes to mind: everyday cases like when you're cutting the lawn and you suddenly shut your eyes and shortly after a small stone hits your eyelid. Or an extreme case like when a soldier suddenly has a reflex to duck for no apparent reason and suddenly a shot just misses him. Is this unconscious thought, or something external? I believe that God has blessed man with a “sixth sense”, something that no other living creature has but man. It's something you

cannot quantify scientifically, but yet we see it every day. When you're baptized in Jesus and you receive the Holy Spirit, I believe that your "sixth sense" is no longer JUST your unconscious mind telling you to not do something. I think it's God influencing your decisions in everyday life. Your actions, your words, your acts of kindness, it's the

Holy Spirit guiding you, trying to keep you on the narrow path, the Shepherd guiding His flock, The Father guiding His precious child. So, next time you hear that little voice in your head telling you that something you're about to do might not be a good idea, it may be wise to listen, it might not be just yourself that you're agreeing with.

Reasons Some Give Up

By David DeLong

Jesus spoke a parable about why some people give up in their walk with the Lord. Let us examine this parable and apply it to our everyday lives. "And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 13:3-9).

In verses 18-23 our Lord gives the meaning of the parable. "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he

becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

We can readily see, in this parable, that in 3 cases out of 4 the people who heard or received the Word of God gave up in their walk with the Lord (the Sower). Let us now look at the 3 cases where this situation happened and see if we can determine some reasons why.

Seed By The Wayside

In this particular case, we are told by Jesus that the person who hears the Word of God and does not understand it, then Satan comes along and takes that Word out of his heart. Satan "catcheth away" the Word from the person's heart in various ways. One way he does this, when a person doesn't understand the Word of God, is to make the person believe that God's Word doesn't really matter. You have, perhaps, heard someone say, "well it doesn't really matter upon which day you worship. Just pick one in seven." This seems incredulous to us when we hear such a statement, but Satan has taken the Word of God out of the person's heart. With an attitude like that, the person cannot have a proper walk with the Lord.

Sometimes, Satan will tempt people with pride. Not understanding the Word of God, they may think that their opinion is the only proper one, and everyone else is wrong. He or she only wants to be the teacher, not the learner. These people may actually become argumentative, and

may go from church to church looking for people to agree with them. Finally, they may become disillusioned with others and quit going to church, or fall away from the Lord altogether. That is one reason that a "novice" is not to become an elder in the church. Paul wrote to Timothy: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (I Timothy 3:6).

At other times, the devil will discourage people by taking away the Word out of their hearts so that they lack faith. Romans 10:17 reads: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Without a proper understanding of God's Word, and the lack of faith because of it, a person may actually begin to feel that the Lord has forsaken them, and this may cause them to fall away. Whatever the method, Satan will "catch away" the Word of God from a person's heart if that person does not have an understanding of the Word. In such a case, the only thing we can do is to pray for those people to gain a spiritual understanding of the Word as we patiently try to witness to those who will hear.

Seed Into Stony Places

This situation, Jesus explained, is because of tribulation or persecution coming into a person's life, and he or she falls away. In today's world, many of us in the Church of God don't experience a great amount of persecution. Sometimes we may be denied a job because we won't work on Sabbath, but we are generally blessed by not being killed or imprisoned for our faith. Maybe that will change in the future. But, we still will have tribulation, and to some degree persecution, in our lives because we are warned in II Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Part of the tragedy is that some deny their faith in order to keep a job that requires them to work on the Sabbath. This is a complete lack of faith on the person's part. The Lord is not only able, but very willing, to supply our needs of employment if we are overcomers to the testing that tries our faith. If folks don't pass this test in their lives now, how will they have the faith to live for God if their very lives hang in the balance someday? This is a matter to be settled now.

Tribulation in our lives can come from many sources. Problems in our family or church can cause bitterness to spring up, if we let it. We are exhorted about this situation in Hebrews 12:14-15: "Follow peace with all men, and

holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled". Again, we are warned in Ephesians 4:31-32: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." I believe that bitterness is one of the greatest forces that causes a person to give up and fall away from the Lord.

Seed Among The Thorns

Jesus said that "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" will choke the Word. In today's world, especially, just to make a living seems to take a great amount of time and energy. Many cares come upon us which can rob us of our peace and strength. We may become exhausted or even "burned out." On top of everything else, there are always those people who ask others to do more and more, whether it be in the church or in society. It is all right, at times, to just say "no" to certain activities when we have become over-burdened with the cares of life. Jesus took periods of time to get away, with His disciples, and rest (see Mark 6:30-31).

When Jesus spoke of the deceitfulness of riches, I believe that He was warning His disciples that wealth tells lies, so to speak, and gives false impressions of security. It takes a certain amount of money, or goods, to support our families. But, may we ever trust in the Lord to provide for us instead of trusting in our riches to do so. Jesus taught that we can only serve one Master (see Matthew 6:24). Riches, in effect, can lie to us that we are self-sufficient. They can make us think that we are more important persons than others. And riches can even make us feel totally secure in life. But Jesus said, "...Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The "care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" can cause a person to fall away from God, or to give up.

Seed Into The Good Ground

This article would not be complete without mentioning the seed which went into the good ground. This involves hearing God's Word, understanding it, and bearing and bringing forth fruit, some 100-fold, 60-fold, and 30-fold.

How To Forgive

By David DeLong

This topic, at first glance, may seem to be self-evident. To forgive someone, you just do it. Right? It would be wonderful if it was always that easy. But, sometimes we struggle with forgiveness, especially if we live near, or with, a person who continually offends us. If we are a believer, there are steps we can take, and attitudes we can form, to really help us to forgive. Let's look at some of these.

Accept The Fact That We Must Forgive

Jesus made it very plain that we must forgive the person, or persons, who have offended us. It is actually a matter of spiritual life or death. In Matthew 6:14-15 we learn: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." In Matthew 5:23-24 we read concerning our brother: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." So, we can see that, not only are we to forgive others their trespasses, but we also are to ask forgiveness if we have offended our brother.

Remember That Christ Forgave Us

Colossians 3:12-13 reminds us to "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Furthermore, we find in Ephesians 4:31-32 that God Himself has forgiven us: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye

kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Knowing that both the heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, have forgiven us our sins, it is much easier to be willing to forgive others.

Pray For Help, And For The Offending One

We may need to ask the Lord to give us the compassion and the strength to forgive others. When our hearts have been softened and strengthened, we will be able to pray for those who have hurt us. Think of Jesus' prayer for those who crucified Him. As He hung upon the extremely painful and humiliating cross, He prayed: "...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do..." (Luke 23:34). The Patriarch Job benefitted greatly when he prayed for his friends who had been accusing him unjustly. We read in Job 42:10: "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before."

How Much Forgiveness Should We Give?

The Apostle Peter, like us, apparently had a problem with how many times should he forgive his brother who had sinned against him. We find this situation, and Jesus' response to Peter, in Matthew 18, beginning with verse 21. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be

made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

The Method For Reconciliation

The Lord Jesus gave us the method for reconciling with our brethren when they have done us wrong. We find this method in Matthew, chapter 18. Verses 15-17 instructs us: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Please notice these instructions, including the order of them, that our Lord gave. First, the offended person must go to the offender and confront him about the offense, alone. Many times the offended person will not go to the offender but, rather, will think about the offense, over and over, until he or she becomes indignant. These people may even think that the offender should come to them first and apologize to them. Often times the offended person will "blab" the situation to everyone who will listen. However, the offender may not even know that he or she has offended someone. In any case, Jesus said that the

offended party goes to the offender and confronts him. This, of course, will involve dialogue between the two parties. The matter, at this point, is a private one. No one else should know about the situation. The right ending to this scenario is, obviously, that the offending person apologizes, and the offended person forgives. This doesn't always happen, though. So, the next step therefore, Jesus said, is for two or three witnesses to become involved in the situation so that "every word may be established." The matter is now not a private one, but still the whole church doesn't need to know about it. However, if this doesn't end the controversy, then the matter is to be taken before the local church. One of two things usually happens at this point. There is a genuine reconciliation between the two parties, or else the offender will leave the church in a huff. If the offender will not hear the church, Jesus warned, then he or she is to be considered "as an heathen man and a publican." A publican was another name for a tax collector, who was usually a dishonest person. In other words, we are to consider the person as a sinner. Remember, however, that a sinner can still come to church, but cannot have any position, whatsoever, in the church.

Forgive Yourself; God Has Forgiven You

We may not think of the people who hurt us as actually being our enemies, but that is, in effect, what they are until the situation is cleared up. Jesus taught us in Luke 6:27-28: "But I say unto which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." Sometimes, our biggest enemy is ourself. There are times when we can't forgive ourself for something that we have done, even many years ago. The Apostle Paul may have had the problem of forgetting his past. He called himself the chief of sinners (see I Timothy 1:15). But, he also knew what he had to do in his walk with the Lord. He wrote: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Forgiving others, and ourself, is really what we must do. Right relationships are what pleases the Lord. God, and His Son, paid an enormous price for such relationships. May we be willing to pay for them, too.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

If you have any items of interest that you would like to submit to this segment, please send them to The Church of God Publishing House, PO Box 328, Salem, WV 26426-0328.

PROBLEMS FACING THE WORLD

According to some authorities, the top ten challenges currently facing the world are:

1. Deepening income inequality
2. Persistent jobless growth
3. Lack of leadership
4. Rising geostrategic competition between world regions
5. Weakening of representative democracy
6. Rising pollution in the developing world
7. Increasing occurrence of severe weather events
8. Intensifying nationalism
9. Increasing water stress
10. Growing importance of health in the economy

THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PROBLEMS FACING THE NEXT PRESIDENT

At the time of the writing of this column, the 2016 presidential election is still a little over a year away. However, it seems as though many candidates have been running for that office since the last election was decided in November 2012. Now there are many candidates. Two Republican candidates have dropped out. The Republican candidates who initially declared their candidacy for the presidential race represent the most in our country's history for a major political party! Three debates have been held among various Republican candidates with more debates scheduled by mid-March of next year. The Democratic candidates also plan at least six debates.

Perhaps all of these candidates have a desire to make this country better and to attempt to find resolutions to the many problems and challenges. Here are just sixteen of the many issues facing the next president:

1. Immigration policy reform
2. Drug policy reform and legislation
3. Gun control reform
4. Abortion and related research controversies
5. Higher education loan reform
6. Evaluation of civil rights progress
7. Federal deficit reduction and balanced budget
8. Tax reform
9. Debate concerning morality issues
10. Environmental issues
11. Campaign finance reform
12. Social Security and Medicare solvency
13. Welfare reform
14. Crumbling infrastructure in many areas
15. Severe weather and wildfire response
16. Blighted cities and resulting lower property values

Comment

The above list seems to only describe domestic issues. There also are the many foreign policy concerns which affect the United States. These encompass every region of the world. The candidates have put forth ideas and plans which they believe will be the most popular and garner the most votes. Such ideals and plans may sound good in speeches and on paper, but they lack foresight and wisdom that will benefit all.

PRIDE AND SELFISHNESS

The root of most of the problems facing the United States and the entire world is pride and selfishness. Pride and selfishness hinders genuine efforts to resolve problems. Pride and selfishness is not just limited to the leaders of nations, and to candidates running for public office, but includes the masses of people. We know that mankind in general has fallen to Satan's chief characteristics of pride and selfishness. Pride and selfishness have been the cause of much sin, sorrow, and evil among humanity. Pride and selfishness caused Satan to fall from God's favor. Pride and selfishness are the chief hindrances to man's ability in solving the problems which he faces.

EFFECT OF LOWER CRUDE PRICES

Lower crude prices have caused many to lose their jobs according to news reports. There is also a falling demand for oil field equipment which means less drilling. Lower crude prices have been in effect for sometime before the writing of this column, and no one knows when crude prices will turn around.

HIGHER OLDER AMERICAN'S HOUSE PAYMENTS

The following is a portion of an article by Paul Wiseman of the *Associated Press*. It appeared in the **Houston Chronicle**:

“WASHINGTON – Al and Saundra Karp have found an unconventional way to raise money and help save their Miami-area home from foreclosure: They're lining up gigs for their family jazz band.

They enjoy performing. But it isn't exactly how Al, an 86-year-old Korean War vet, or Saundra, 76, had expected to spend their retirement.

Of all the financial threats facing Americans of retirement age – out living savings, falling for scams, paying for long term care – housing isn't supposed to be one. But after a home-price collapse, the worst recession since the 1930's and some calamitous decision to turn homes into cash machines, millions of them are straining to make house payments.

The consequences can be severe. Retirees who use retirement money to pay housing costs can face disaster if their health deteriorates or their savings run short. They're more likely to need help from the government, charities or their children. Or they must keep working deep into retirement.

The baby boom generation was already facing a retirement crunch: Over the past two decades, employers have largely eliminated traditional pensions, forcing workers to manage their retirement savings. Many boomers didn't have enough, invested badly or raided their retirement accounts.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Office for older Americans says 30 percent of homeowners 65 and older (6.5 million people) were paying a mortgage in 2013, up from 22 percent in 2001. Federal Reserve numbers show the share of people 75 and older carrying home loans jumped from 8 percent in 2001 to 21 percent in 2011.

What's more, the median mortgage held by Americans 65 and older has more than doubled since 2001 – to \$88,000 from \$42,400, the financial protection agency says.

In markets hit hardest by the housing bust, a substantial share of older Americans are stuck with mortgages that exceed their home's value.

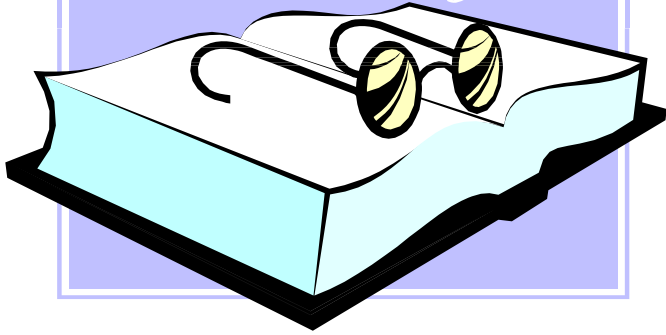
Comment

In spite of all government helps and assistance from relatives, many older Americans are overwhelmed in the making of their house payments. This is true for those who only rent. I heard in the news that there is a lack of affordable housing for older Americans in the most prosperous areas of the country.

In the Kingdom of God, all will not have to worry about affordable housing and being safe. “And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. BUT THEY SHALL SIT EVERY MAN UNDER HIS VINE AND UNDER HIS FIG TREE; AND NONE SHALL MAKE THEM AFRAID: FOR THE MOUTH OF THE LORD OF HOSTS HATH SPOKEN IT” (Micah 4:3-4).

BIBLE

Study



Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Why is it so important for one, who is searching for truth, to read the Bible?

ANSWER: The Bible itself will answer your question. Consider the following:

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9).

“Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word” (verses 12-16).

“My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word” (verse 25).

“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” (II Timothy 3:16-17).

QUESTION: Did the early church keep the feasts?

ANSWER: There is no record to show that followers of Christ continued to keep the feasts. The denominations that keep the feasts started to keep them many years after the early church was established. Jesus said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church (Matthew

16:18).

QUESTION: Please comment on what the parable of the importunate widow, which Christ spoke in Luke 18:1-8, teaches us.

ANSWER: The parable of the importunate woman teaches us an important fact concerning prayer. The intent of the parable is set forth in the first verse which reads, “And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

The parable speaks of a judge “which feared not God, neither regarded man.” “And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.” But the judge ignored the woman for awhile, and then concluded that “because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.”

We are not to take from this that our heavenly Father becomes wearied over the prayers of His people. This is not the lesson of the parable. It is, rather, that we should be constant and persistent in prayer; knowing that if our prayers are in harmony with our heavenly Father’s will they will be answered in His due time, and when it is best for us.

Verse seven reads, “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” God does “bear long” with His people.

He does not become weary of their pleadings and answer their prayers just to be rid of them as did the “judge which feared not God, neither regarded man.” God listens patiently and lovingly, until the time of His wisdom decides it is best for a prayer to be answered, and then He sets in motion the necessary things to bring about the answer.

Verse eight reads, “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” The speedy answer here mentioned might well seem to be long-delayed to the one who is praying, but not so to God. Even though God has been answering the prayers of His faithful people throughout the age, it has not seemed so to the less faithful, and many of these have lost faith, so that at the time of Christ’s return there is little true faith left in the earth.

Every faithful seeker after God’s blessings is rewarded. God has always supplied their spiritual needs.

QUESTION: What did Jesus mean in Acts 26:14 when he told Paul that “...it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks?”

ANSWER: The last part of Acts 26:14 reads, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

The plowman in Bible lands carries in his hand a long pole or goad, which has a sharp metal point or prick on one end of the pole. At the other end, there is a flat piece of iron which is used to clean the plowshare. Quite often the young ox which is not well broken in will kick because he does not like his work. When this happens, the plowman will hold the pole or goad in such a position that when the ox kicks again he will kick against that pick or sharp point. Therefore, the animal will learn it does not pay. Paul learned that he could not kick against the plan of God.

QUESTION: What is the origin of Valentine’s Day, and should children of God have anything to do with it?

ANSWER: This festival originally has a pagan origin. Upon investigation, it will be found that the word comes from the Latin word “valentines.” This word is derived

from the word “valens” which means “to be strong, powerful or mighty.” The day was originally dedicated to “Lupercus,” the hunter. This is really another name for Nimrod, the mighty hunter before (or against) the Lord, mentioned in Genesis 10: 9. Valentine’s Day was originally called “Lupercalia.” Nimrod had other names in the ancient world such as Bal, Baal, Pan, Saturn, etc. In the Babylonian’s tongue, the word for heart was “Bal.” *See Strong’s or Young’s Exhaustive Concordances.* So in honor of “Bal” or Lupercus, or Nimrod, valentines or hearts are exchanged on that day.

True children of God should live a separated life, and they must even live different lives than those who just fill pews in the nominal churches. Jesus said, “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). Disciples are learners, or pupils and followers. True children of God cannot compromise the truth! They cannot pick and choose. Selective obedience is sin, and this represents rebellion!

Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3) “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (verse 9).

QUESTION: Will you please comment about the slave girl who belonged to Naaman’s wife?

ANSWER: The Scriptural reference that tells about this slave girl is found in II Kings 5:2-3. This young girl is one of the unnamed women of the Bible. She was captured as a child when the Syrians raided Israel, and as a young girl, she waited on the wife of Naaman who was an important Syrian military officer who had leprosy. One day the girl remarked, “...Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy” (II Kings 5:3). The wife told Naaman what the girl had said, and Naaman set out for Israel.

It seems as though Naaman’s miraculous healing led to his becoming a worshiper of the Lord. This all began with the testimony of a young girl who had faith in God and confidence in the power of God’s prophet.



NOTE: This month, instead of "The Church Around The World", we are printing one of our tracts.

The Spirit of Ecclesiastes 12:7

The text reads: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Some believe that when a person dies there is a material part, capable of thinking, seeing, feeling and talking that leaves the body and goes up to God, if the person is righteous, and to hell if he is wicked. But notice, this text does not say anything about the condition of the person. It says when man dies the dust returns to earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it. If this text teaches what some try to make it, then it also teaches universal salvation, for just as universal as the dust returns to the earth just that sure does the spirit return to God. Then the spirits of the good and bad return to God Who gave them.

Again, you could not return anywhere unless you had

been there before. Then if these spirits, both good and bad, return to God, they were with God before. This would teach that wicked spirits were in heaven, and make God responsible for sending them to possess the infants at their birth, both wicked and good, and would make Him a partner in and responsible for the wicked spirits entering and possessing the wicked.

The facts are that there is no intellectual part of the body that leaves it and enters into reward at death. The word here translated "spirit" is taken from the Hebrew word "Ruwach" which means breath. The same word is translated breath twenty-five times in the Old Testament and refers to the breath of life.

In Genesis 2:7, the Lord says He breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life and man became a living

soul. When man dies, just as sure as the dust returns to the earth as it was, the "ruwach" or breath of life returns to God Who gave it. This refers to all men. It does not, however, teach that the actual breath goes to heaven where God is, but simply to His care and keeping. Suppose a man owns a farm in Missouri which he sells on certain conditions on time payments and goes to California. In a course of time, the man to whom he sells the farm fails or refuses to meet the financial obligation, the farm then returns to the man who sold it. The farm would not go from Missouri to California, but only to the care and keeping of the former owner, and so it is in this case, the breath returns to God's keeping Who gave it to us in the first place.

If the reader will kindly note James 2:26, where it reads, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Notice by the word "spirit" there is a small letter or figure, and follow this to the margin of your Bible, and you will find the same letter or figure. There it will say, "Or breath." You will find this in all Bibles that have references.

The word "spirit" when having reference to any part of man that leaves him at death always means the breath and nothing more or nothing less. But there is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit that dwells within His people. This is altogether different, and has no connection with the phase of the question above considered. The word "spirit" sometimes refers to our life also, the essentials of life, the thinking powers, etc., while it refers sometimes to our nature, as a bad spirit, or a lovely spirit was manifest, he was in good spirits today, etc.

As the Lord judges people at the general judgment and rewards them then at the resurrection, they are not judged or rewarded at death. See Luke 14:14; Acts 17:31; 2 Timothy 4:1-4; also Revelation 22:12.

Let us read these Scriptural passages to determine their meaning. Luke 14:14 reads: "And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." The Lord Jesus is telling us that when we give a feast we should invite the less fortunate people to attend, those who cannot repay us now. Our reward will come later, He assured us, at the "resurrection of the just". This verse proves that rewards will not be issued at a person's death, but will come later, at the resurrection.

Acts 17:31 informs us: "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." This passage is referring to the time when people will be judged by the Lord for their lives they have lived. Verse 30 refers to the time of ignorance when people, who did not know the Lord, were committing sins such as worshipping idols. God "winked" at this time of ignorance, but commands people to repent when they learn of the Lord and His way, because everyone will be judged on the day which God has appointed, not when they die.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-4 we learn very plainly: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Here, the Apostle Paul admonished Timothy to be always ready to preach God's truth to people so that they will adequately be warned for the coming of Jesus Christ. He is the one who will judge mankind "at his appearing and his kingdom", not when they die.

Finally, Revelation 22:12 warns us: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Again, we are instructed that the Lord will reward folks after He comes again. In this text we see that Jesus brings His reward with Him "to give every man according as his work shall be."

The Scriptures make it plain that no reward is given immediately upon a person's death. Rather, the deceased people rest unconsciously in their graves until the Lord Jesus raises them from their sleep. A time is then appointed for Him to judge everyone according to their works (see John 5:28-29).

At death, the breath of life (spirit) leaves a person and goes back to God's keeping. As was mentioned, this spirit has on life, no understanding, and no reward. It takes the resurrection, by the Lord, to restore the person's life and to give him or her a reward.

LESSON I

CHRIST DIES ON THE CROSS

Scripture Reading: John 19:16-24, 33-38.

Golden Text: John 19:16.

“Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.”

1. Who carried the cross on which Jesus was to die? Luke 23:26.
2. What was the name of the place to which they carried the cross? John 19:17.
3. Was anyone else crucified with Jesus? John 19:18.
4. What writing did Pilate put over Jesus’ head? John 19:19.
5. Why did the Jews object, and what did Pilate answer? John 19:21-22.
6. What was done with the garments Jesus wore? John 19:23-24.
7. The soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves, but why did they not break Jesus’ legs? John 19:32-33, 36.
8. Who came to take the body of Jesus, and what did they do with it? John 19:38-42.

NOTE: This lesson can be found also in Matthew 27:29-54; Mark 15:20-38 and Luke 23:24-47.

LESSON II

JESUS’ RESURRECTION

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:1-12, 36-53.

Golden Text: Luke 24:46.

“And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the

third day.”

1. What two men wrapped Jesus in linen clothes and anointed Him, and then buried Him? John 19:38-42.
2. How long was Jesus in the tomb? Matthew 12:40; Luke 24:46.
3. What happened when Jesus arose? Matthew 28:2.
4. What did the enemies of Jesus say? Matthew 28:12-13.
5. Were the keepers of the tomb afraid of the angel? Matthew 28:4.
6. Women came to see the body of Jesus and found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. What did the two angels tell the women about Jesus? Luke 24:4-8.
7. What did Jesus say to the disciples when He first saw them, and how did they feel? Luke 24:36-39.
8. Where did Jesus lead the disciples at this time, and describe the events that happen in Luke 24:50-53.

LESSON III

SIGNS OF CHRIST’S RETURN

Scripture Reading: Matthew 24.

Golden Text: Matthew 24:33.

“So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

NOTE: In our last lesson, we learned of Jesus’ resurrection and that He returned to heaven. We will now go back to when Jesus was alive to learn what He taught about the signs of His return to Earth.

1. What important question did the disciples ask Jesus as they sat with Him on the mount? Matthew 24:3.
2. Of what did Jesus warn them as He began to answer

them? Matthew 24:4-5.

3. What conditions did Jesus say would take place in the world which will be signs of His coming? Matthew 24:6-11.
4. How did Jesus compare the days just before His coming with the days of Noah and Lot? Luke 17:26-30.
5. What signs would take place both in heaven and earth just prior to His coming? Luke 21:25-28.
6. Is it possible to tell the exact time that Jesus will come? Why? Matthew 24:36.
7. How do we know that these events are signs of His coming? Matthew 24:32-33.
8. What has He commanded us to do in regard to these signs, and why? Matthew 24:42-44.

NOTE: How many things can you name which are taking place in the world today that are signs of the coming of Christ? Are you looking for the Savior to come? Will He find you ready?

LESSON IV

JESUS OUR FRIEND

Scripture Reading: John 15:9-15.

Golden Text: John 15:14.

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

NOTE: When Jesus was alive on Earth, He taught His disciples about love and that He was their friend. We should also learn to love Jesus and be His friend so that we may be saved.

1. How are we to abide in Jesus’ love? John 15:9. How did Jesus abide in His Father’s love?

NOTE: Abide means to endure without yielding; to accept

without objection.

2. How are we to love one another, and who is our example? John 15:12.
3. What is the greatest way we can show our love? John 15:13. Did Jesus do this?
4. How can we be friends of Jesus? John 15:14.
5. Why does Jesus call us His friends? John 15:15. A true friend will share his valuables, especially if it means a matter of life or death. Have you shared God’s Word with anyone lately, or are you keeping it all to yourself? God’s Word is life giving.
6. Why did Jesus choose us to be His friends? John 15:16. What does “go and bring forth fruit” mean?

NOTE: We must let Jesus abide in us, and keep His commandments. He showed us He is our friend.

A BRAND NEW YEAR

By Eleanor Hammond

A brand new year’s a splendid thing
 For one to use!
 A year to fill with all the things
 You wish to choose!
 Let’s see how many kindnesses
 Will pack in thee!
 Perhaps then at the end we’ll find
 A well filled year!
 Let’s put in smiles of folks we know
 And of our own,
 So this will be as bright a year
 As we have ever known!
 Let’s share our happiness and fun,
 Make folks less sad!
 We’ll find our year a bit more full,
 A bit more glad!
 A new year is a splendid gift -
 Now we begin it,
 Let’s stop and think a while and choose
 What we’ll put in it!



Cathy's Gift

Cathy was sitting on the living room rug. One by one she turned the pages of the big gift catalogue. Daddy was going to have a birthday in a few days, and Cathy was looking for a special present to give to him. But for many weeks, Cathy had been busy doing things for herself. She had forgotten to plan for anyone else. Now she had only fifty-five pennies saved to buy Daddy's present.

Cathy tried to think of the things that her pennies would buy: candy, gum, ice cream, or a newspaper. Not one of them seemed like a very good present for Daddy's birthday!

It was Friday afternoon and Cathy had finished her bath and put her toys away in the cupboard. She had already selected her clothes for Sabbath School and hung them on the low hook apart from the rest.

"Are your shoes polished, Cathy?" Mother asked, as she came through the living room and saw that Cathy was looking at the catalogue.

"Yes, they are all ready, too," Cathy replied. She was glad that she had remembered to do it. But then, Cathy was usually good at helping herself. Mother smiled and hurried upstairs to dust the bedrooms.

After Daddy came home and got ready for Sabbath, he went into the living room and sat in the big red chair to rest. Cathy was still thinking about his birthday. Suddenly her eyes began to sparkle. Her mouth curved into a happy smile. "Daddy," she said, as she climbed into his lap, "I have been thinking of something! If you had only fifty-five pennies to buy a present, what would you buy?"

"First, I would be sure that I had given five pennies for tithe. That would be for Jesus, and I would not use them. Then I would have fifty pennies."

Cathy had been so busy thinking of herself that she had forgotten to put away the tithe pennies! "But then there would only be fifty pennies!" she said frowning. "That will not be enough to buy a very nice present."

"Oh, yes!" Daddy said as he smiled and nodded his head. "I am sure Jesus would help me to find a special way to give a nice present and still give Him the tithe pennies."

Cathy did not answer. She got down from Daddy's lap and went to her room. She put her fifty-five pennies on the bed. Then she took five pennies and held them in her hands. They were bright and shiny and new. They were the prettiest pennies that Cathy had!

Cathy took a little brown envelope from her drawer. It was one Mother had given her for her tithe pennies. Cathy dropped the pennies into the envelope. As soon as the pennies were in the envelope, Cathy was happy again. She put fifty pennies in her blue purse.

Then she knelt by her bed. "Jesus, please help me to think of something special for Daddy's birthday," she prayed.

In Sabbath School the next day, the lesson was about helping. The teacher asked the boys and girls to tell of the things they did to help Mother and Daddy.

Almost all the children told what they had done to help their parents. But Cathy did not raise her hand. Cathy could not remember anything that she had done to help her Mother or Daddy. It seemed to Cathy that she had always just helped herself! She did not want to tell that she had only helped herself.

Then the bell rang, the bell that told boys and girls that it was time for church. Cathy was glad. But Cathy could not forget the lesson about helping. Even when Elder Mason was talking, Cathy found it hard to listen because she wanted to think of a way to be helpful at home.

Just then Elder Mason said, "Even boys and girls can give Mother and Daddy a little time to rest by helping with the household duties. Children can wash dishes, polish shoes, and sweep sidewalks." Elder Mason said more, but Cathy was thinking and did not hear. He had given Cathy an idea!

Monday morning seemed a long time away, but it did come. Cathy was busy in her room all day. First she set out all the supplies she would need: construction paper, scissors, pencil, paste, and plain white paper. As she worked, her heart was full of joy. This was to be a special surprise birthday card for her Daddy.

She had finished a lovely picture on the outside of the

special card she made. Now it was time for the message she wished to write inside. She would need her sister's help for this. Cathy got an extra sheet of paper and hurried downstairs. Then she told her sister the message she wanted to write. Jan carefully printed the message for Cathy.

Cathy hurried to her room to finish the special birthday card. This part of the surprise would take a little longer than the first part. Cathy had just learned her letters. She must go slow and carefully print each letter of the message.

Finally, Cathy had finished the card. She went downstairs and asked Mother politely if she may please have an envelope to mail a special letter. Mother wondered who the letter was for and she was about to ask. Then she saw Jan give her a wink and a smile. With that Mother handed Cathy an envelope.

Cathy went upstairs one more time, this time to finish her project. She carefully addressed the envelope. Now for the stamp. She checked her blue purse. Yes, she had enough, fifty pennies.

Cathy asked Mother if she could please walk down to the corner where the Post Office was and mail her envelope. Mother said yes. With a smile and Cathy was on her way. When she got to the Post Office she proudly asked for a stamp. She reached into her purse and pulled out her pennies. She gave some to the mailman, and he gave her the stamp in return. Quickly she put the stamp on the envelope and dropped it in the mail slot. A big grin spread over her face. She was anxious for tomorrow when the postman would deliver this special card.

When the mailman brought the birthday card, Daddy opened it and read the verse. He kissed Cathy.

"Thank you, Cathy," he said. Then he turned the card over and saw that something had been written on the back of it. He looked surprised and happy.

Cathy had written, "I will polish your shoes every Friday for your birthday present, and I will dust the upstairs rooms for Mother, so you can rest a little while before the sun goes down."

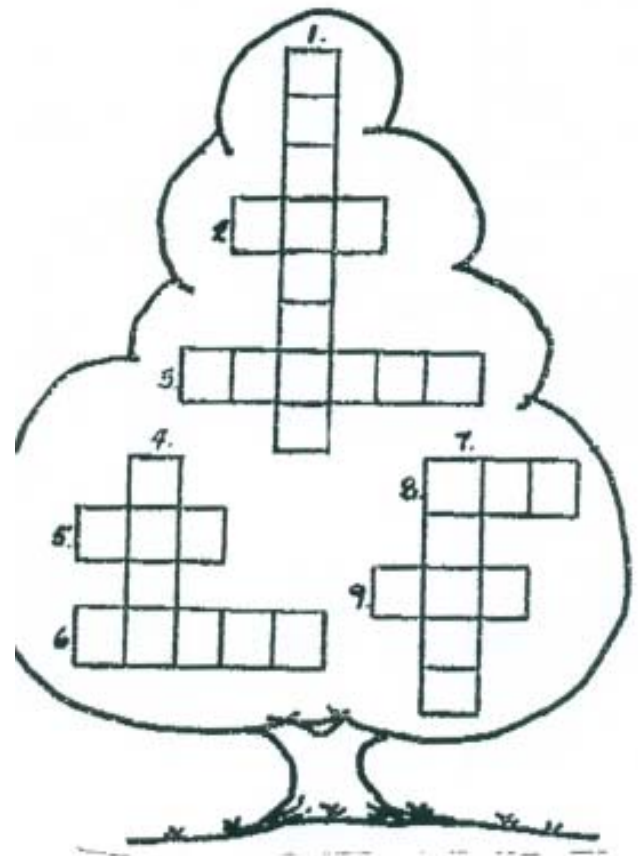
Mother looked pleased, too. "We are happy that you are learning to think of helping others," she told Cathy.

"This is one of the nicest presents I have ever received," Daddy said. He gave Cathy a real big hug and another kiss.

BIBLE TREES PUZZLE

The Bible texts below give the names of some trees. Fill in the puzzle spaces with letters which will spell the names of the trees.

1. Luke 19:4
2. Isaiah 41:19
3. Isaiah 41:19
4. Isaiah 41:19
5. Isaiah 55:13
6. Isaiah 14:8
7. Psalm 52:8
8. Isaiah 2:13
9. Matthew 24:32



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The Church

By David DeLong

Some people think the Church is a place,
A building that's made out of boards;
And those who do come, not looking for grace,
Are among the hypocrite hordes.

Others see church as a socialite game,
And so they wear the best fashion;
They're only out to get them a name,
And they use every means to just "cash in".

Many are lonely and want to attend,
Wishing to find a companion;
They're really only seeking a friend
To fill up their loneliness canyon.

A few understand the Church is a group
Of people who follow God's will;
They've severed the cycle of the world's loop,
And now they seek Truth to fulfill.

So, out of these folks, which one are you?
Do you meet for the right reason?
Or, does your body just warm up a pew
As you come to church for a season?

