

# The Good News

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## OF THE WORLD TOMORROW

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## WHEN YOU NEED A FRIEND...

**I**t's time we came to grips with a very real problem in society today! Many people are lonely and discouraged. They feel isolated, trapped, cut off from others. You might well be reading this because you are fighting your own private struggle with loneliness and would like to know what to do about it. **SEE PAGE 3.**





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# The Good News

OF THE WORLD TOMORROW

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# GOOD NEWS PERSONAL



## A Christian in Name Only?

**C**ould you be a Christian in name only?

Many people believe themselves to be Christians, but the fruit of their lives is not the fruit of the holy spirit, described by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23.

"The works of the flesh are evident," Paul wrote (verse 19). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

Some Christians seem to be content with just a label. But Jesus warned, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

True Christianity, according to Paul, is far more than just accepting Jesus in word, or even in emotion. It is accepting and fully devoting one's life to all Jesus was and is with conviction and understanding, and in full submission to Him, living and thinking as He taught and lived—something possible only through the power of Jesus living in you through the holy spirit.

Some people think they can achieve God's favor or even salvation by trying to keep His commandments. Others think they can be saved solely by faith in God's forgiveness of sin through Jesus without necessarily changing their way of life at all.

Both perspectives are equally destructive spiritually. One makes salvation something that can be earned by human good works, and the other denies the fundamental need to turn from the sin that required Jesus' death in payment. And neither



grasps the spiritual understanding of *why* God created mankind, and what mankind's ultimate destiny is—much less the vast gulf between the nature of man and the nature of God!

Jesus gave those who would follow Him a new commandment, one that both incorporates and gives renewed life and meaning

to the Ten Commandments: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

But how many have *kept* that commandment? How many have made it their life's work to live *that way*—the way Jesus Himself lived? How many "Christians" have committed themselves to the true *personal* pursuit of obeying God, and to burying *personal* prejudice, hatred, exploitation and injustice in all its hideous forms? How many truly *follow* the lead of the holy spirit and bear *its* fruit?

No person is perfect. But true Christians know and deeply understand their *need* for God's mercy. They cherish the love that has been given them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Their lives are fully committed to serving God.

They *believe* what He says, and they are dedicated to obeying Him. They are *growing* in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18). Their lives, day by day and year by year, are a stronger and stronger reflection of the life and mind of Christ. More and more, their lives bear the fruit of the holy spirit.

True Christianity is more than just a label. It is a way of life. It is *the* way of life. Is it yours?

*Joseph W. Tkach*

Pastor General  
Worldwide Church of God



# LETTERS

## "Fruits of the Spirit" series

I just want to tell you all how much I have enjoyed the "Fruits of the Spirit" series in *The Good News*. I have been able to use this series with good effect on the occasions when I have been asked to prepare the adult Sabbath school study at my church.

Reader  
Auckland, New Zealand

## March-April issue

I very much enjoyed your article "Purify Your Language!" (March-April). As a Christian and a linguist, I am keenly aware of the importance of the proper use of language.

John C. Birmingham  
Richmond, Va.

I just received your March-April issue and as usual I enjoyed the articles in it. It opens my mind to the real world and brings me more to God. Whenever I feel desperate and hopeless I reflect on what was written in the magazine and there and then it seems to relieve me of my worries and burdens.

Elissa P. Gaanan  
Davao City, Philippines

Your article "Why Did Jesus Need a Sword?" does perhaps show that His intent was to fulfill the scripture about being numbered with the transgressors. However, you are on very thin ice! He,



Courtesy of Austrian National Tourist Office

like Socrates, was arrested for His teachings, not for associating with a couple of men who had swords.

Do you really think that wearing a sword in those days made anyone a transgressor? Did they have a ban-the-sword law in effect?

The bottom line is that you have implied that good Christians should not have a weapon. Where are you from, sir? Most of my friends and neighbors have weapons, even assault weapons, not just for sport, but because we know that our founding fathers (those who used guns to kill English soldiers) intended for the people to have more power than the government. You must live in a monastery.

John R. Andrew  
Ellijay, Ga.

In the March-April *Good News* on page 10, Malchus is holding onto the wrong side of his head if his right ear was cut off (Luke 22:50, John 18:10).

Charles D. Chamberlain  
W. Franklin, N.H.

*Thank you for your letter. We apologize for the error.*

## "Learning the ropes"

I would just like to mention how pleased I was with the January-February issue. Never before have I encountered so many articles directly applicable to my situation in a single issue—my situation being that of a new Christian just "learning the ropes," and seeking as much guidance in Christian life-style and spiritual matters as possible.

A.E.  
Preston, Australia

You can only imagine how uninformed and misguided I was prior to studying your publications and Bible course and, I must add, seeking your ulterior motivations. I must say I have found no ulterior motives, just a good, old-fashioned, commonsense method of motivating the misinformed to seek the truth. After all the years, I feel as though the sun is just coming over the horizon—I have so much to learn.

Vernon C. Merrel  
Copperas Cove, Tex.

## Information appreciated

*The Good News* is a wonderful magazine. I have every book and booklet you have sent me over many years. Every one has been a blessing. But the biggest blessing of all is that my husband has

started to read your two magazines, at first secretly and now openly. And a girl at work also gets them now.

Mrs. E. Odendaal  
Standerton, South Africa

Thank you for sending me the free book *The Missing Dimension in Sex*. It came at just the right moment, so I can explain to my 14-year-old daughter the facts of life, and in the proper way.

Janet Gonsalves  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

As a regular reader of *The Good News* for 15 years, I wish to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to the writers of the wonderfully inspired articles which just keep on coming with each issue.

To the many servants of God from various parts of the world who have written material for *The Good News*, I know that readers worldwide are grateful for the dedicated hours that go into your writings.

Philip Sweetingham  
Hobart, Australia

*The Good News* welcomes your comments. Letters for this column should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity or space. Send all communications to our address nearest you:

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# When You Need a Friend...

By David Albert

**I**t's time we came to grips with a very real problem in the Church of God today!

Christ's Body should be "one big happy family," but the truth is that many of our members are far from happy. Many in the Church are lonely and discouraged. They feel isolated, trapped, cut off from the rest of the Body.

You may well be reading this article because you have your own private struggle with loneliness and would like to know what to do about it.

## Who's lonely?

Who is lonely in God's Church? Lots of people are!

The people who feel this way most are those who are cut off from the support the natural family usually provides. This group includes those the Bible calls "the fatherless and widows"—women and children without husbands and fathers, divorced and separated persons of both sexes and the elderly.

People battling sore trials such as alcoholism, chronic illness and long-term unemployment also often feel terribly alone in their struggles.

Many in God's Church are forced to bear up under numerous kinds of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual duress with precious little support from anyone else. Through long days and even longer nights they face their problems alone.

The feeling of isolation and loneliness they experience can be an even more painful trial than the original problem itself.

Cindy DeStefano isn't a mem-

ber of the Worldwide Church of God, but statements she made some time ago in the *Los Angeles Times* could speak for a lot of people who are. Cindy, 30, was confined to a wheelchair in a rest home, a victim of multiple sclerosis. She longed for companionship with persons her own age:

"I can't use my legs, but that's no big deal. I think that people who can walk should show people who are handicapped that they are wanted.

"Being here is... a bummer. It gets bad at night and on weekends when I have to be alone here. When I hear people say they're going to a party tonight or to a wedding reception, that's when it really hits me, and I wish the invitations, the people were there.

"So I cry. I cry a lot.... There's hardly anybody to talk to."

We have brethren in the Church of God who, like Cindy, cry a lot out of loneliness and discouragement—brethren who desperately need our help!

## Satan preys on the lonely

Being alone doesn't automatically mean being lonely. Some people prefer their solitude and manage quite well with little outside support.

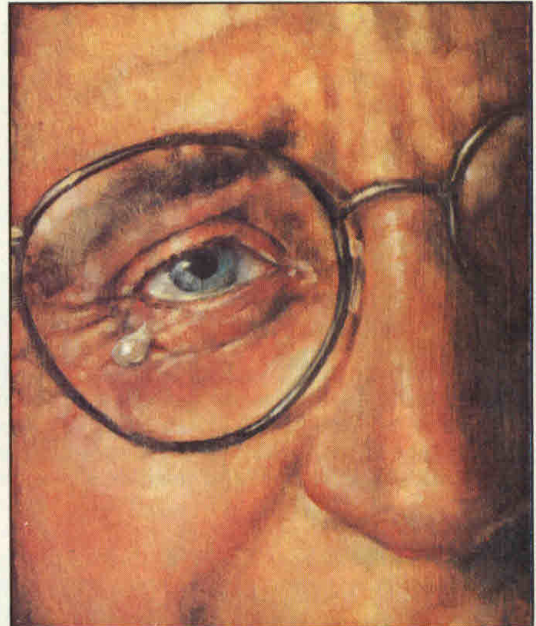
But why did God say in the beginning, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18)? What is not good about people being alone?

While we all need times of privacy, too much time alone tends to foster inward, introspective thinking and brooding that fo-

cuses the person too much on himself or herself. This is especially true if such aloneness comes in the wake of a personal trauma such as the death of a mate or the loss of one's job or health.

Then the person's thoughts are almost inevitably backward looking. They are full of blame, self-criticism, guilt and shame—the perfect climate for Satan's negative influence!

Satan preys on the lonely. They are perhaps his easiest victims. Knowing the devil's devices (II Corinthians 2:11), we may be



Dan Andreasen

sure he seeks to heap on even more negativism until he has the person so "down in the dumps" he wants to quit on everything, including life itself.

This is no doubt at least a part of the reason that God intended we all have companionship. The truth is that none of us functions well entirely alone, cut off from support and encouragement from others.

## The biblical antidote

There is a lot we can know and actively do in God's Church about the common human problem of loneliness. The solution lies in one big, beautiful Christian practice called *fellowship*.

True fellowship is unique to



Christianity. There's nothing like it available in the world around us, and it strikes to the heart of the problem of loneliness.

Acts 2:42 tells us that not only

did the early New Testament Church continue in the apostles' doctrine, but also in "fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

The Church wasn't only bound and knit together by ideas, concepts and values, but also by a special kind of camaraderie and closeness that flowed through the

# *If You're Lonely, You're Not Alone*

By Sandi Hague

**L**oneliness. It's a frightening word. We want to know we are needed, loved and appreciated, that others want to spend time with us and care about our welfare.

But everyone has known the pain of feeling cut off, rejected and totally alone.

Loneliness is the pain of emotional and social isolation. We were made to need other people, both intimate and social contacts, to be emotionally healthy.

The loss of a loved one, divorce, separation from friends, forced isolation because of ill health in old age and living alone—all are recognized potential causes of loneliness.

## **A new twist**

But loneliness, an old problem, has a new twist in the Western world.

Life has changed drastically in the 20th century. The emphasis placed on material goods and the decrease in importance of family and neighbor see us alienating ourselves from others, making ourselves lonely.

Society used to be a womb of human companionship. The extended family provided encouragement and guidance from relatives. If parents were busy, someone was always around to help out. There was a sense of belonging in the community, with weekly religious services, friendly local merchants and neighbors who stayed in the neighborhood for years.

This has changed in the Western world, especially on the North American continent and in the Commonwealth countries in the past few decades. In the United

States people move every five years on the average, 14 times in a lifetime. City dwellers not only don't know their neighbors, but are often afraid of them. The decline of attendance at regular religious services and the creation of conglomerate shopping centers lessen the familiarity we have with others in our communities.

The nuclear family and a few close friends are expected to provide the social contact and emotional support we need. But with half of all families not stable enough to stay together, one can't always turn to one's family. Even a strong family would show signs of strain from the demands made by society.

Who suffers most today from loneliness? Surprisingly, it's not the old or those who live alone. Not even necessarily the divorced or bereaved. Surveys show that adolescents and young adults are lonelier than any other age group.

This isn't what we've been led to believe about teens. Aren't the teenage years times of excitement, freedom, lots of friends and opportunities? Hasn't our higher-than-ever standard of living given teens everything they could want? Apparently not.

Teens may not see a lot to look forward to in this world. Because of accelerating changes, the job they are training for may not exist in five years. The number of stable, two-parent families in the United States is falling.

Adolescence is a tough time to begin with. Biological and psychological changes take place rapidly. If teenagers can't talk openly to someone about their feelings, they

may think they're the only ones overwhelmed by these changes.

During adolescence, children begin to separate from their parents physically and mentally—they truly become individuals. They've been subject to parental authority until now. Now their own emotions and thoughts matter greatly to them. To feel that nobody cares about those feelings is a very depressing and lonely feeling.

When children are young, self-esteem is heavily dependent upon the attitudes and comments offered by parents. Children need continued confirmation and acceptance from their families.

In the teen years, self-esteem is increasingly influenced by peers. But peers can be cruel in the treatment of those they feel are inferior. And adolescents tend to be quick to judge.

If teenagers don't develop adequate emotional and social contacts,

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A whirlwind  
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loneliness.*

they feel they've failed, and blame only themselves. Most teens, no matter how popular they seem, feel considerable tension over their status among their peers.

So many live in broken homes, without a stable family to give them support and a vote of confidence during this difficult period. And even in complete homes, the parents' attention and energies may be elsewhere, on their own crises



Church, making it a special community of believers.

Everyone in God's Church has experienced some true fellowship over the years. But are we losing

some of that quality? Of the end time, Jesus specifically warned, "The love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). Could we be moving in that direction?

Just what is fellowship? It is more than friendship, as good as friendship may be!

### Fellowship defined

Fellowship is friendship with a special spiritual component that can only come from a common calling, spirit and way of life.

It flows out of the oneness described in Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in

or, sad to say, on their own personal pleasures.

Because parents and teens don't often openly discuss their feelings, teens don't recognize that their parents may have gone through the same struggles they are battling. They may feel alone in their struggles for self-worth, identity and dealing with problems. Parents may not want, even now, to admit they had those same problems.

They demonstrate their differences and gain peer acceptance by inventing language terms, clothing fashions and other trends of their own. They may use drugs and alcohol for their emotional pain-killing properties, and to promote feelings of oneness with peers. They want to be separate from their parents, but that doesn't mean they no longer need and want their support.

Another popular "drug" is constant television viewing. A substitute for intimacy and the community, it tears down the possibilities of real friendships by giving viewers sky-high, unrealistic expectations of relationships.

Loneliness is linked more to lack of intimacy than to lack of popularity. An abundance of friends or a whirlwind social life doesn't guarantee stable relationships, and doesn't preclude loneliness.

### What is the solution?

Since loneliness signals a hunger for intimacy and contact with other people, the solution to the problem is to supply the lacking element. At least two kinds of friendship are required—intimate friends, and social contacts.

Teens should be looking to establish a broad base of friendships. No "one" can satisfy totally another's affection and self-worth needs. If a person builds positive relationships with many others, he or she will be less likely to be lured into a premature romance based on loneliness.

We need those with whom we can share our deepest thoughts and whom we know will not ridicule us. We need to provide the same service for our friends. We also should

get to know, or at least be friendly with, the people we see regularly in our community.

How can you help a younger person who is lonely?

Probably the greatest need in adolescence is to know there is someone who thinks you're OK with whom you can openly discuss your feelings. Adolescents benefit from mature, relaxed contact with adults.

Give them a chance to do well at something and develop a skill to boost their self-esteem.

Make yourself available; involve yourself in his or her life. Encourage getting a part-time job or joining a community sports team to help make new friends and develop skills.

Note how much you and the teen have in common, not how many differences there are between you. Society tries to separate us into distinct groups, as if people outside those age, economic or social groups could not possibly have anything in common.

Realize that your teenagers are not just an extension of your life. They will probably try to be different from you in many ways. Listen to them. Be patient with their changing opinions—maturity takes time—but remember that they still need the security of limits.

Guide them through the teen years, but trust them with a little more control of their lives. They'll appreciate your trust in them. They need direction and positive role models.

Loneliness is a problem in this society. It hits everyone. You can help young people make it through their teen years with less pain and loneliness. □



Hal Finch

you all." It's a common bond that comes from being members of God's one true Church.

But we can break fellowship down further and isolate specific factors that produce it.

The first and most important, by far, is not just human companionship! The apostle John made that clear: "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1:3). John wanted the believers to have fellowship, but notice the primary stress: "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Without contact with God and Christ, you may have friendship,



but not true Christian fellowship. Our spiritual contact with God guarantees that our contact with each other will be profitable and edifying.

No human or group of humans can substitute for contact with God. Many of us would like to see our needs met by other humans out of what one author called "the human connection."

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But the human connection is not enough.

Simply stated, we can't and won't be close to each other as members of God's Church unless we are first close to God. As we all draw closer to God, we will inevitably draw closer to each other.

Conversely, times of spiritual decline and drifting away from God will just as inescapably find us forsaking each other in the Church.

That's why each of us must recognize that our first line of defense against loneliness and every other negative emotion and circumstance is our personal contact with God. Properly practiced and experienced, that is fellowship, not a second-rate substitute! Fellowship with God is the best kind of fellowship there is.

Once we have established and are maintaining our contact with

God, what else contributes to true fellowship? Notice Malachi 3:16: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them."

There is tremendous value in the right kind of uplifting conversation among brethren. It strengthens us in the faith while binding us together in Christ's Body.

#### **Ways to fellowship**

Some time ago some longtime friends and I got together and enjoyed this very thing in the home of a fellow minister. We talked about our experiences in the Church, our trials, past feasts, lessons learned, good and bad times. It was a beautiful experience, rich and memorable for us all.

Something else that added to the occasion, and another factor we can use to enhance our fellowship, was a fine meal to which everyone contributed some part.

We do this by command on the Night to Be Much Observed and during the other festivals, but we need to employ this big ingredient of Christian fellowship throughout the year.

Brethren need to get together. With a little effort and planning almost anyone in the Church can play host or cohost to such an occasion and facilitate fellowship by so doing.

Remember that we are told to "be hospitable to one another" (I Peter 4:9). Those with resources to do so have a special responsibility to contribute to the fellowship of God's Church. And to their credit, some have done a marvelous job of doing just that over the years.

Potluck suppers and buffet dinners have been favorites of many in the Church because they reduce the cost for any one person and don't require elaborate preparation. And Saturday nights have seemed to be a traditional time for such get-togethers. I fondly remember many such occasions with brethren in many different parts of the world. They were some of the best times for

fellowship I have ever known. A wide range of additional Church-related activities can also serve as vehicles for our fellowship. Church and Bible study attendance, Spokesman Club, church picnics, ball games and socials all provide good opportunities for brethren to get acquainted with one another under a variety of circumstances.

#### **A twofold responsibility**

Some in God's Church have a special responsibility because of their opportunity to take the lead in initiating fellowship. Such members should take that responsibility to heart.

But those of you who are lonely and in need of more contact with others have your responsibility, too. "A man who has friends must himself be friendly," says Proverbs 18:24.

Often the lonely and isolated pull back from effective contact with others. They draw into a shell of self-pity and make it hard for others to reach them. By not being friendly they fail to encourage or develop friendships that may otherwise be available to them.

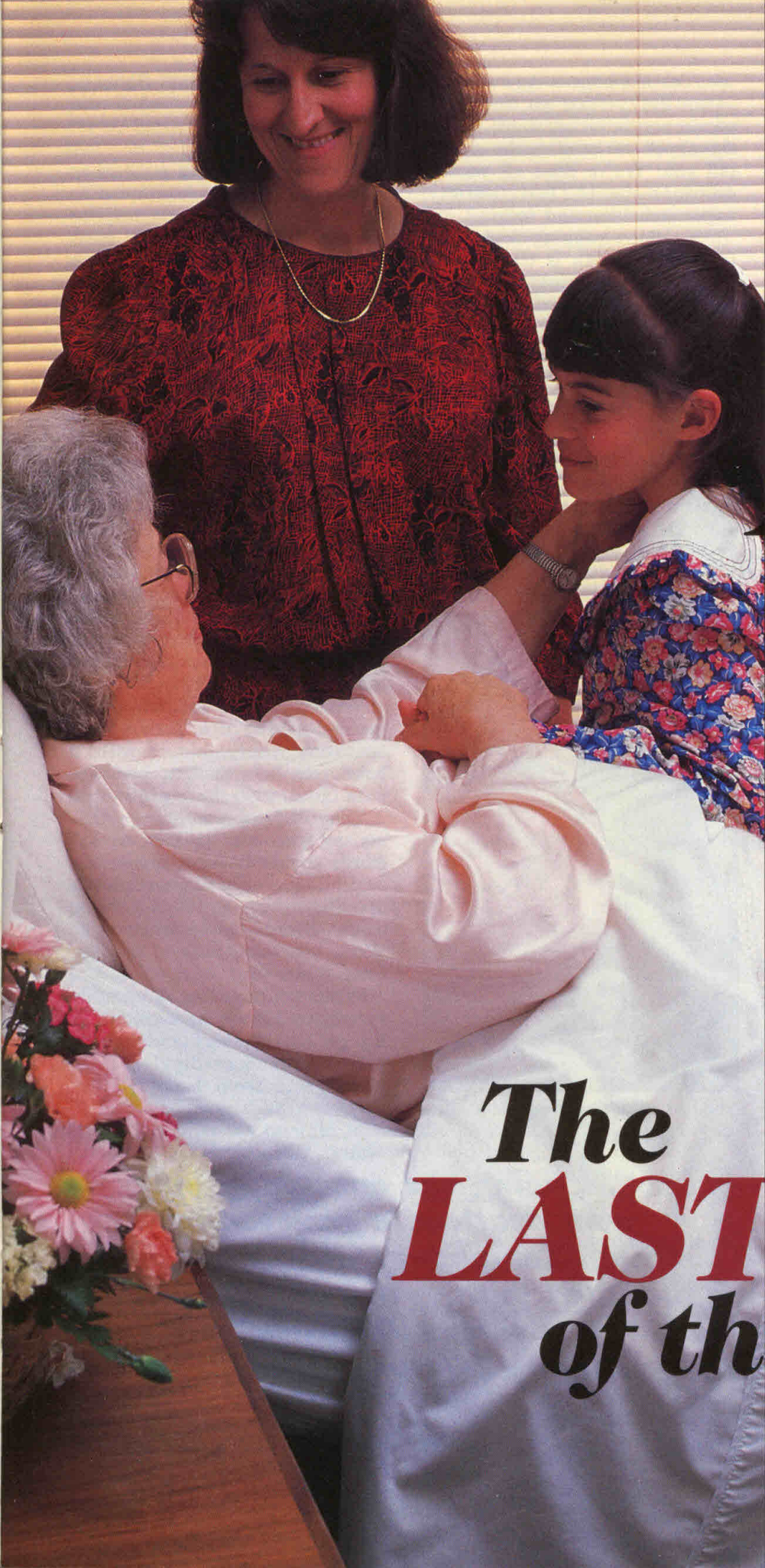
Sometimes the problem is not so much attitude as the lack of good social skills. These skills can be developed through study, time and effort.

In any case, let's all realize that fellowship is a mutual, two-way responsibility. It's not something someone can simply do *to* someone else or *for* someone else whether that person wants it or not. Long-standing and profitable relationships are almost always characterized by a high degree of mutuality where each person brings something of value to that relationship.

We have had brotherly love in God's one true Church, and we need to continue to practice it in spite of the fact that this age and its trials tend to wear us down and make us turn inward.

Let's practice brotherly love and true Christian fellowship, seizing every opportunity to keep these qualities alive in God's Church today. □





# The **LAST LAP** of the Race

**A**s I replaced the telephone receiver, my legs and knees went limp. My father was dead. Just that quickly.

There wasn't even time to tell him how much I loved and cared for him and appreciated him. I had been stingy with my words of love. Now, my opportunities were no more.

When my father died of a massive coronary while still in his 40s, I was devastated by the loss. Even now, years later, it's difficult for me to talk about him without tears.

It just didn't seem fair. I needed my father more than ever. My children needed their grandfather. He had always been there for us. Now he was gone.

## **Part of life**

Whether we like it or not, death is a very real part of life—of all our lives. Over the years, I've had to accept that more and more.

Just a few months ago, a friend

By Sheila Graham



of mine lost her mother to cancer. She was in her late 40s, as well. Now, another friend has lost his wife to the same insidious disease. She was even younger.

Why is it so difficult for the living to accept death? We don't want to think about it. We don't want to face it. It's hard for us to comfort those who have lost loved ones. We stumble in our efforts to talk to those who are terminally ill. Usually, we try to avoid the subject altogether.

We know we should be sympathetic to those who are suffering, but how? How do you comfort one so close to death? What words do you use?

Before the death of my friend's mother, I asked her to write to me and help me find some answers to those questions. Cathy was already too weak and ill and asked a friend in similar circumstances to pass along those feelings to me.

Both of these women had discussed their mutual sufferings and frustrations many times. I'd like to share some of their thoughts with you.

#### **"With grace and dignity"**

"Facing the specter of one's own death is a frightening thing. Temporary illness can be handled with grace and dignity, but dying with grace and dignity is more difficult. Cathy and I both have developed a very close relationship with our Creator and a very deep faith.

"When you are in severe, unrelenting pain, you find yourself feeling many different emotions. Such as wondering where God is. After all, He promised He wouldn't allow us to suffer more than we can bear. Yet here we are, in an agony, with no relief in sight.

"Even though you remind yourself that God promised never to leave nor forsake you, you find it very hard to realize that He really hasn't. God did say it is appointed to everyone once to die. So it's unrealistic to expect Him to heal us forever, every time, or we would never die. Therefore, we must all face our

own death sooner or later. But, it is not easy. "You go through a whole series of emotions. From the shock of hearing the doctor tell you 'We've done all we can do' to disbelief, fear, anxiety, anger, rebellion and tears.

"You have nagging doubts and fears. Your faith is tried to the breaking point. Even your religious convictions are tested.

"If you have not built your faith on a strong foundation, you may lose it all. If you have not 'proven all things,' you'd better do it now! Because this is no game. This is the real thing. The last lap of the race.

"Different people face death differently, but in every case, one's faith is tried. From depression and despair to total give-up-itis, as I call it. There are times

*Barry Stahl*



**"Facing the specter of one's own death is a frightening thing. Temporary illness can be handled with grace and dignity, but dying with grace and dignity is more difficult."**

when you say, 'Why fight it, what's the use?'"

#### **Preparing to help**

Their words ring in my ears as I remember the times I failed to be of much comfort or help to those suffering. How about you?

It's important to encourage and support the sick, but before visiting people who are ill, we should make sure we are prepared mentally and spiritually.

How?

First, we should find out if they should be visited. Talk to their close friends or relatives. If those who are sick are not up to seeing people yet, don't go. Unwanted visitors can cause the sick more harm than good.

Second, we should ask ourselves, Why am I visiting? Am I going there to uplift that person, to comfort and help? Visits to the sick should be more than social calls. The ill are not up to entertaining others.

When a visit is not in the best interest of the sick person, you can show your concern with a brief telephone call, a personal note or card or small gifts.

If an ill person would appreciate and is allowed visitors, several points should be kept in mind.

While seriously ill, most people are disturbed by noises they would all but ignore when well. When you visit, walk in quietly. Tone down your voice a little.

When you enter an ill person's room, you should be sensitive to his or her feelings and choose your words accordingly. Does your friend seem happy or de-



pressed? If you are shocked by your friend's condition, by plastic tubes, bottles or strange pumps, don't let it register on your face or in what you say.

Be careful not to sit on or bump against the bed when you greet your friend. Hand shaking may be painful, so ask about it or wait until you are offered a hand.

Visiting the sick is the time to be a good listener. Allow people to express how they feel about their illness. Empathize with their suffering. Offer your prayers and spiritual support in quiet confidence and faith.

Remember that your sick friends will not be at their best. Don't be surprised if they display some irritability or depression. It's difficult to be pleasant when the mind and body are suffering pain and perhaps also are under the influence of some drug.

Whatever you do, don't pity a sick person, but help him or her bear the burden. Prepare ahead of time to give of yourself. The person should feel strengthened by your visit, not drained.

Think about how you would feel in such circumstances. An understanding friend can be one of the most valuable helps to those who are suffering.

#### **If you're ill**

If you happen to have a long-term illness, there's thought-provoking advice from these courageous ladies for you, too:

"Learning to accept your condition and your responsibility for it is a step in the right direction. Distract yourself with service in every way you can, for as long as you can.

"Build yourself a network of physical and spiritual support. You're going to need them. And, pray always. Especially when you can't help anyone any more.

"Develop a close relationship

with God and ask Him to help you learn to suffer with patience—to endure unto the end. And to share that wisdom with others.

"Finally, be patient with yourself. Forgive yourself, remembering that we are only flesh, only



**W**hatever you do, don't pity a sick person, but help him or her bear the burden. Prepare to give of yourself. The person should feel strengthened by your visit, not drained.

human. Accept the help and support of others humbly and gratefully and always with thanks.

"Do all that you can, as long as you can. Then let God do the rest. Pray for wisdom and for relief and for the dignity to handle dying as gracefully as you would living."

A century ago, when death was imminent the majority of people quietly ended their days in the midst of family and friends in their own homes.

Now, this most personal, intimate passing from life to death most often occurs in hospitals or nursing homes.

To protect your family from having to make the difficult decisions that many times accompany dying, you can state your wishes

by writing them down in advance. You can also appoint someone else as a health-care proxy to be sure your wishes are carried out.

#### **Enduring to the end**

My friend's mother wanted to be the kind of person she had read about and admired—the kind who, in spite of pain and suffering, always inspired everyone who visited or helped.

Before Cathy died, her daughter told me that her mother worried that she wasn't always setting the right example for her family and friends in enduring to the end. Sometimes the unrelenting pain would be too much.

Remember Cathy when you are talking to those who are seriously ill. Don't expect them to act cheerful and as if they are

always full of courage and stamina in the face of their trials. Many times they may want to and not be able to.

We must all face that last big challenge—dying in the faith—some day. Let's try to help those who are right now bravely, with God's help, conquering that last enemy. Let's help them not feel isolated and neglected. Let's show our care and concern, with proper love and wisdom. No one should have to go through this trial alone.

"Death with dignity is indeed possible with God—and only possible with God. I pray constantly that God will help me to that end. It's all part of being a Christian. And, that is, after all, my profession." □



# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

## **What does the Bible say about euthanasia?**

There has been a great deal of controversy about the subject of euthanasia, or “mercy killing.”

*Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia* defines euthanasia as “easy or painless death brought on to end a lingering, hopeless, painful disease.”

Few, it seems, look to the Bible to see what God says. When we do, we find that from the beginning God intended that each human live out a productive and fulfilling life in preparation for eternal life with Him in His Kingdom.

We also find that the giving and taking of life is a prerogative that belongs only to God. With God is the fountain of life, says Psalm 36:9.

God has authorized man's governments to end the lives of those who have committed murder and the like (Genesis 9:6, Romans 13:1-4). But there is no support in Scripture for ending the life of an innocent person because of sickness, old age or disease.

The Bible shows that the weak are to be cared for and treated with patience, not murdered (I Thessalonians 5:14).

On the other hand, the idea that extraordinary measures must be taken to keep a terminally ill person alive as long as possible is not biblical either. There is no sense in prolonging a person's dying.

Many righteous people in the Bible knew when they were dying, got their affairs in order, gathered their families to say good-bye and simply died. It is not wrong to ask God in His mercy to allow a suffering person to peacefully die.

## **When Jesus Christ told the man to “let the dead bury their own dead” (Luke 9:60), did He mean it is wrong to attend funerals?**

The context of Jesus' statement shows that He offered this

man a chance to take part in His ministry—to become a teacher of the way that leads to eternal life. He told the man to “go and preach the kingdom of God.”

When the man said he had to first go and bury his father, Jesus told him to let the “dead” (those not aware of spiritual matters) bury their dead.

Was Jesus telling this man not to attend his father's funeral? No. A funeral usually takes only a short time, and Jesus continually showed that Christians are to feel compassion and show proper respect for others. Luke 7:11-15 tells of what happened when Jesus Himself once met a funeral procession.

Why, then, did Jesus answer the man this way?

Jesus realized the man was only making excuses. The man's father was probably elderly and did not have much time left to live. This man, hiding behind his father's condition, tried to put off the responsibility that Jesus offered him. His priorities were not based on faith and serving God first.

Had the young man wanted to, he could have found a way, without showing any disrespect, to have his father cared for and still serve God. That is why Jesus told him to let the spiritually dead (those who were not being called—Ephesians 2:1) continue to live their lives as seemed best to them.

This account shows that we should not let undue concern over physical matters distract us from serving God when He calls us to do His Work. Many are distracted, though, as the parable of the sower (Mark 4:14-20) shows.

## **Is there any difference between the holy ghost and the holy spirit?**

The King James Version of the Bible mentions both the “Holy Ghost” and the “Holy Spirit.” But the term *ghost* does not now mean what it meant when the

King James Version was published in 1611, and should be avoided to prevent misunderstanding. Modern Bible translations such as the New King James Version never use the term *ghost* to refer to God's spirit, meaning God's power, mind and nature.

In the Greek in which the New Testament was written, the original expression means, in modern language, “holy spirit.” In every case in the King James, the English words *ghost* and *spirit* come from the Greek word *pneuma*, meaning “spirit,” not some nebulous ghost or apparition, which is what the term *ghost* now refers to.

The King James, which unfortunately translates *pneuma* as “ghost” so many times, properly translates *pneuma* as “spirit” in places such as Luke 11:13, Ephesians 1:13, 4:30 and I Thessalonians 5:19.

When the King James Version was first printed in 1611, the English words *ghost* and *spirit* both had the same meaning. Thus it was natural for the translators to use both words in rendering the one Greek word *pneuma* into English. But this inconsistent usage has given some the false impression that a holy ghost and a holy spirit exist as two separate spirits.

The word *ghost* has become obsolete as far as communicating the meaning of the Greek *pneuma*. But many people continue to use the word *ghost* in referring to God's spirit. They think of God's spirit as some mystical, spooky *being*, rather than correctly thinking of it as His power and nature.

The only proper way to clarify the subject is to use the expression *holy spirit* in all cases to refer to the spirit of God, instead of translating one expression two different ways and giving unsuspecting Bible students the false impression that two different spirits are meant. □



# POSITIVE CHILD TRAINING

## Teach Honesty Early

BY DEXTER H. FAULKNER

PART TEN

“**Y**oung people today are taught everything from computer programming to ballet. But they are not taught values. We work on building bodies and minds, not character.”

That's how U.S. radio and newspaper columnist Dennis Prager described a mistake we all want to avoid when rearing our children.

Parents must be in the forefront of teaching values and character—in the home. At no time is this teaching more vital than in the formative years from birth to age 6.

One important element of character children need to learn is something we call *honesty*. What is honesty? Simply put, honesty implies a refusal to lie, steal, cheat or deceive in any way.

When you think about it, honesty is the major driving force behind other important elements of character. The person who is honest will be high-principled, incorruptible, sincere. He or she will have integrity—the *attitude* of attempting to do what is right under all circumstances.

Honesty is a key element of the Ten Commandments, the most comprehensive, far-reaching and practical set of moral principles the world has ever been given. The Ten Commandments forbid steal-

ing, adultery and bearing false witness, all forms of dishonesty. They prohibit coveting what belongs to someone else. Coveting

involves an *attitude of mind*—the desire to be dishonest with what belongs to someone else.

Obviously, honesty must become a fundamental human trait if we are to have a stable society where love and trust exist. The question is, *How* can we train our children to be honest?

### Honesty must be taught

We are born neither honest nor dishonest. Essentially, we know nothing at birth. We *learn* ways of thinking and acting—either helpful or hurtful.

We learn honesty or dishonesty by what others teach us through their words and actions. We roll these words and actions through our own minds and form personal attitudes about honesty.

Consider the sophisticated reasons adults give to justify their dishonesty: “I deserve a break.” “They’ll never miss it.” “I have to get ahead.” “Everyone else is doing it.” “I’m not hurting anyone.” “Who’s to say what’s right or what’s wrong?”

Where do you suppose adults or teenagers come up with these justifications? They learn them by seeing what society does, by the things other people teach them and from their own evaluations of what’s right or wrong





or good for them. That's why it's so important for parents to inculcate the value of honesty into their children's character. And the earlier in the child's life this teaching begins, the better.

### Looking at ourselves

To teach honesty, parents themselves must first have a strong sense of what's right or wrong. That's where the problem often comes in. We live in a society in which many people believe values are man-made, subject to personal interpretation.

If "being honest" is strictly a matter of personal morality, then, as Dennis Prager wrote: "Parents can't be expected to be sure of their own values. And even if they are, they might still feel reluctant to 'impose' their values on anyone else, including their own children."

Many parents make diligent *physical* preparations for the arrival of children. They will begin taking extra care with their diet and exercise. They'll take pains to learn how to physically take care of the newborn child.

But how many parents give thought to preparing themselves *morally and spiritually* for a newborn child?

To teach children honesty, parents must begin looking at their own values and beliefs. Having done this, how do parents go about the task of teaching their preschool children honesty?

### How children express dishonesty

Let's begin by looking at the ways a young child might express dishonesty. One major way is by committing some act in secret that the parent forbids, or that the child thinks is forbidden.

Often, when confronted with his or her deceptive behavior, the child will then engage in another form of dishonesty by lying about the situation.

Of course, the child will not have purposely set out to deceive the parent. Neither will all those

justifications mentioned above run through the young mind. That is, dishonesty does not have to be premeditated; it can overwhelm the child.

The dishonest act might involve taking some food without the parent's knowledge—perhaps putting one's hand in the cookie jar. It might involve stealing an object or money from a sibling or a friend. The child will then lie to cover up the sin.

To many parents, the very thought that *their* child would do such things seems abhorrent. Why, their child is the most obedient on the block! But you've probably read of cases where a teenager was hooked on drugs for years and the parents were the last to know about it.

All parents should assume that their child is capable of cheating, lying and stealing. That may be a bitter pill to swallow, but it's best to follow an open-eyed course about human nature.

One word of caution: Parents shouldn't act as though they are suspicious of their children. Nor should they treat their children as potential criminals.

What should you do if you find

vengeful motive. We're not dealing with a hardened criminal. What we do have is a *selfish* mind that puts its own needs above others'.

The child has come upon some activity or object that seems so pleasurable and, oh, so wonderful. The child simply allows himself or herself to be caught up in self-indulgence.

When this happens, it's a golden opportunity for the parent to teach principles of honesty to the child and make him aware of the consequences of dishonesty. How can parents do this?

### A case in point

A friend of mine related what happened to him when he was 7 years old. He was playing with about five children in a neighbor's apartment. The children were marching around the rooms in a line, playing a typical child's game.

Johnny (not his real name) spotted a rather large pile of change on a dresser. To a little boy it seemed like an unbelievable treasure. Immediately, his mind was flooded with ecstasy. How wonderful it would be to have and spend that money!

Johnny worked his way to the back of the marching group of children. During each trip his eager little hand scooped up quarters and dimes, cramming the coins into his pocket. Soon his jeans were bulging with metal.

He suddenly became tired of marching and suggested to the boys they go outside and play. As soon as they were outside, Johnny offered to take them to the candy store and purchase some goodies. The children protested they didn't have any money. No problem, he said, his father had given him plenty.

The group marched off to the store. Johnny soon spent every



Illustrations: Dan Andreasen

your child is being dishonest—is cheating, stealing or lying?

Let's remember that the very young child will probably not cheat out of some spiteful or



dime of the few dollars he had stolen on the things little boys love to eat.

He went home feeling good—that candy and ice cream had been so delicious. And he'd been the center of attention buying a round for the boys.

The next day he went back hoping to play with his neighbor's children at their apartment. He was met at the door by the mother and asked to step into the kitchen.

The parents asked Johnny if he knew anything about a pile of coins that seemed to have mysteriously disappeared the day before. His face flushed with fear but he maintained a stiff upper lip. He lied about the missing coins, saying he hadn't a clue as to what might have happened to them.

Well, then, they asked, where had he gotten the money to buy their sons ice cream? The fire was getting hotter. But Johnny had an answer for that, too—he thought. He said he got it from his dad. No, the neighbor parents said, they had checked with his dad.

### **A lesson learned**

That was it. He had been caught and exposed. Johnny started to cry. The parents then proceeded to explain the consequences of his action. First, his dishonesty had gotten their sons in trouble. The parents had first assumed they took the money.

The mother had saved those coins for laundry money. By stealing the money, he had deprived the family of something they needed.

By this time, Johnny was learning a good lesson. But there was more to come. The parents said they were very fond of him and had trusted him to come over and play in their home. But he had violated their trust. As punishment, he couldn't come over to play for two weeks. The heat con-

***All parents should assume that their child is capable of cheating, lying or stealing. That may be a bitter pill to swallow, but it's best to follow an open-eyed course about human nature.***

tinued when Johnny got home. His dad said, "Don't ever do that again," as he looked him square in the eyes. Dad proceeded to explain that Johnny's thoughtless deed had brought a blotch on the family name.

Needless to say, this boy had learned a great lesson about honesty. Johnny learned at an early age that dishonesty hurts everyone—including the doer of the deed.

Of course, parents should not assume that one lesson on honesty will suddenly make a child perfect. Parents must be diligent to continue teaching honesty—and taking action when violations occur.

Teaching honesty, however, should not just be a reaction to some violation. Parents should be dispensing positive teaching by using "preventive medicine."

### **Other teaching tools**

Parents can also draw lessons from this society. It's no secret that the world is full of dishonest practices—spy scandals, cheating in business, political peccadillos and so on. These can sometimes serve as the topic of conversation in which the little child, depending on his or her level of understanding, can be asked questions about such behavior.

You might want to rehearse different kinds of situations that

could happen to your children, asking them to think about what they should do.

Some examples: What would your child do if he or she found a wallet on the street? What if your child saw a friend or sibling do something damaging? Should he or she report the incident or remain silent?

Consistency is important to successful teaching and training. Parents must stick with their convictions, even when it would be easier to let offenses go unpunished. Constant attention and repetition reinforces the importance of honesty in the young child's mind.

Parents should establish firm standards in the home. Tell children what to expect if they lie, and then carry through with the consequences. More important, reward children for progress. Praise them when they tell the truth, especially if they "fess up" even when it seemed to be to their own hurt.

If parents teach honesty well, children will remember and apply the concept throughout their lives (Proverbs 22:6).

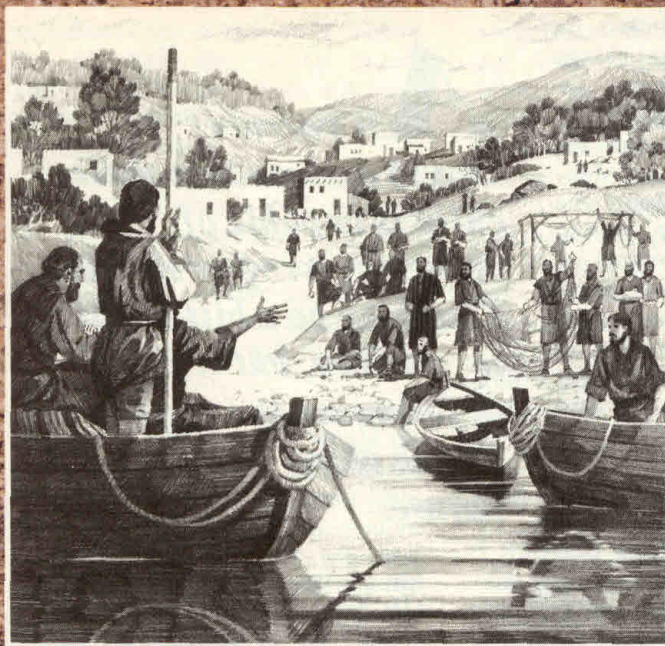
Above all, parents should practice what they preach. Parents who cheat on their taxes, pad expense accounts, steal from their employers (or employees) or display an attitude of "I'll do whatever I can get away with" are actually teaching their children an attitude of dishonesty.

In short, a child should learn the basic reason for honesty: We should treat others as we want them to treat us. Jesus articulated this principle, saying, "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Luke 6:31).

We want others to be honest with us. We don't want them to lie about us, steal our goods or be deceptive toward us. Honesty is what loving your neighbor is all about. Honesty is a character trait all parents should teach their children and build into their lives *early!* □



Artifacts discovered in excavations at et-Tell, site of biblical Bethsaida, include a Roman pilgrim's jar (below). A typical fishing village of first-century Palestine is re-created at right by illustrator Ken Tunell.



# Archaeologists Uncover BETHSAIDA

By Teresa Mastin





**A**rchaeologists announce they have located the site of Bethsaida.

The discovery settles a century-old debate over the location of the fishing village where Jesus performed numerous miracles. Among sites in the New Testament, only Jerusalem and Capernaum are mentioned more.

Bethsaida, which means "house of fishing" in Aramaic, is considered to be one of the springboards of Christianity.

The city was the hometown of the apostles Peter, Philip and Andrew (John 1:44). Near Bethsaida Jesus fed the multitude of 5,000 with two small fish and five barley loaves (Luke 9:10-17). It was from Bethsaida's shores that the disciples departed in a boat the night they saw Jesus walking on the sea (John 6:16-21). Here, also, Jesus healed a blind man (Mark 8:22-26).

#### **Layers of history**

From information in the Bible and in the works of Josephus, scholars were able to generally determine the location of Bethsaida as early as 1860.

However, in recent years, rocky terrain and heated conflicts between Israel and Syria made it impossible for archaeologists to examine the area.

After Israel occupied the Golan Heights in 1967, archaeologists conducted a series of test digs at et-Tell—the presumed site of Bethsaida—and found a layer that dated back to the time of Jesus.

Et-Tell is located just east of where the Jordan River empties into the Sea of Galilee. The

site covers a 20-acre mound some two miles from the sea.

While examining et-Tell, archaeologists discovered that biblical Bethsaida is only one of four cities that occupied the 80-foot-high tell.

The first two settlements date back to the period from approximately 3100 B.C. to 2850 B.C. The third was the Israelite occupation in about 1000 B.C. The fourth, found 4 feet beneath the surface, lasted from the late Hellenistic period until A.D. 67.

#### **Relevance of findings**

Under the reign of Philip, governor under the Romans, Bethsaida was elevated to city status. This indicates there was a population of at least 15,000, comparable to the other lakeside cities of Capernaum and Tiberius.

In A.D. 67, Roman soldiers around Bethsaida cut off the supply lines of Jewish towns in Galilee that were in revolt against the Roman Empire. The defeat of these towns made possible the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the later capture of Masada, Palestine's last Jewish stronghold.

Galilean et-Tell provides evidence that Bethsaida was a large city complete with wall, aqueduct and fine buildings.

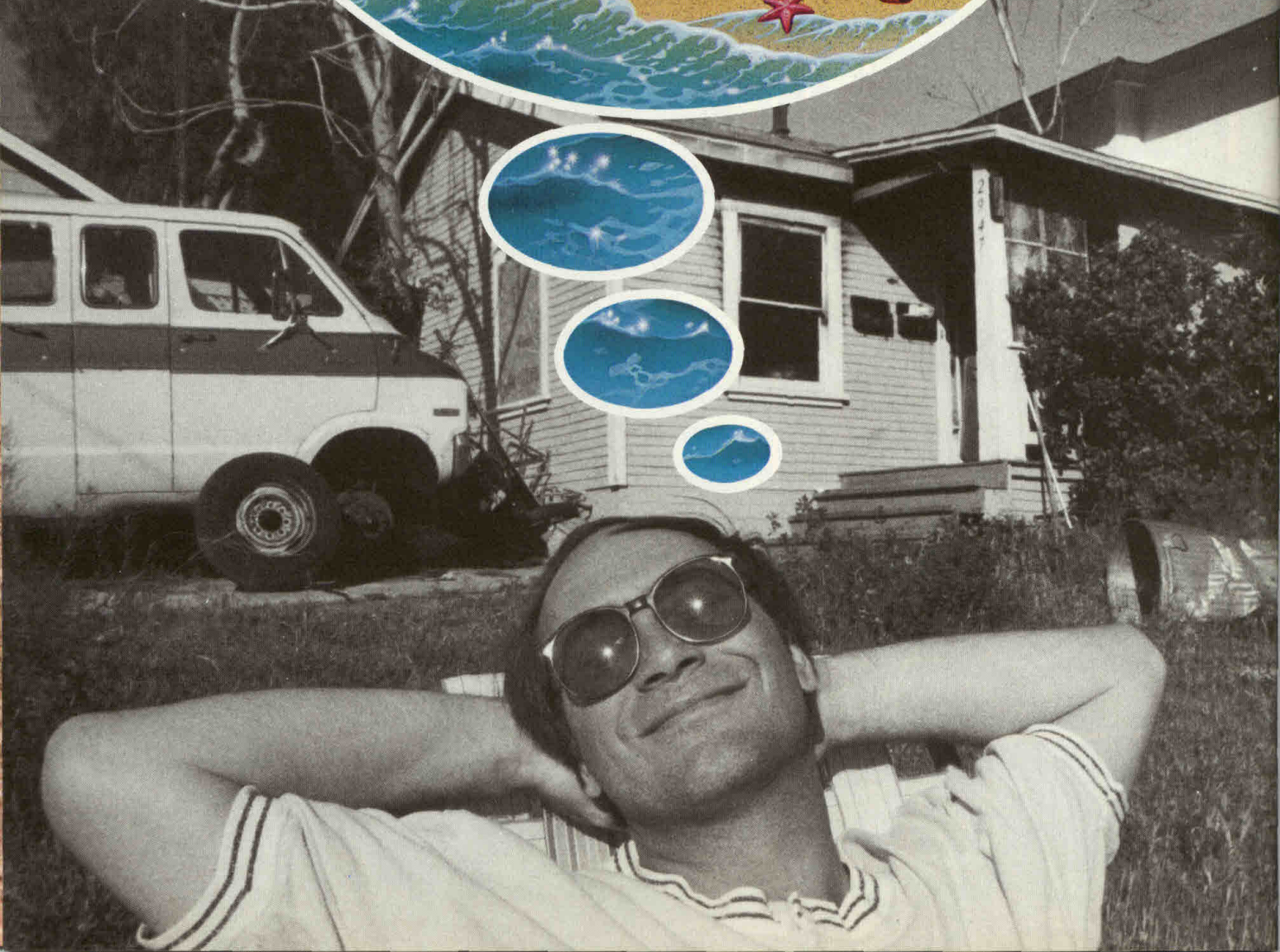
During the next several years archaeologists will make their way through the laborious process of uncovering the cities on the site of Bethsaida. Their findings will provide a more detailed view of the daily life of those who lived there. □

*Decorated stone (below) was part of public house at Bethsaida (notice meter stick). Photos were supplied*



*by Rami Arav of Golan Research Institute. Digs such as the one at Bethsaida are commonly conducted with help of volunteers supervised by professional archaeologists. Financial sponsorship is a major need of excavations.*







Long, long  
into the future,  
in a place  
far, far away...



# SOMEDAY ISLE

By Peter Moore

**"T**his is great! Nothing to worry about now — I've made it! All my problems are over. I knew it would happen some day. Fantastic!"

Is this you?

Well, no.

Is it anybody?

Well, no.

Which is surprising, because, paradoxically, we all have spent a lot of time talking and dreaming like this: "One of these days . . ." "Someday, I'll get lucky. I'll get a break. Everything will be just fine." "Just you wait and see, someday I'll . . ."

Why do we spend so much time on Someday Isle? We go there so often, find it so appealing, grabbing our thoughts, our imaginations.

"Someday I'll make it, when I get that break, when I'm rich, when I'm married, when I overcome that problem, when the children are grown, when I retire. Someday I'll work on my education, get a good job, get serious about my health. Someday I'll get somewhere, be somebody, do something worthwhile."

But Someday Isle is just a never-never land where no one's dreams come true, and where every success is trapped in a permanent state of procrastination—a fantasy island whose only sands are the sands of wasted time, and

whose only fruits are squandered dates on a calendar.

## What keeps us from succeeding

The frustration that keeps many of us from our desired destinations is procrastination!

The word *procrastinate* comes from the Latin *pro* ("forward" or "for") and *crastinus* ("of tomorrow"). In the root of the word we see the problem. Too often we are "for tomorrow"—mañana. We ought to be *for today* and *against tomorrow*. In fact, we should be *anticrastinators*!

As God's people, we cannot afford to put off growing and improving and overcoming, especially in the spiritual sense.

"Grow in the grace and knowl-



edge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," says II Peter 3:18. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul wrote that we should "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

And God wants us to succeed in the physical realm in addition to the spiritual. "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers," says III John 2.

What keeps us from real productivity, beached on the shoals of Someday Isle?

"Some of us use talking as a substitute for acting," writes Clinton McLemore in his book *Good Guys Finish First*. That's one ploy. Here's another: "By making endless lists of what we intend to do, we can avoid ever doing anything."

Yes, but these are just symptoms; there is more to it. As Denis Waitley says, "There isn't such a thing as a future decision, only a present decision that determines what will happen in the future."

So *now* should be when we start. Nothing will happen in the future unless we do something about it today. So why don't we start to do whatever will bring about what we want in our lives?

The answers are easy, but hard for many to face. A major reason we don't act is fear of failure.

This phobia, seemingly just another in a series of items people fear (spiders, people, a chocolate shortage, clothes-dryer fluff, warm beer), has more than one paralyzing agent that galvanizes us into inaction. It is based on our lack of self-confidence, and we lack self-confidence because of the danger of rejection. Sometimes we or others are too critical of what we are or do.

Because there is so much excellent material available on how to start changing such a condition, the purpose of this article is to present some simple steps to help combat the siren song of Someday Isle.

### Setting solid goals

Whatever the cause of our problems, many of them continue

to control us because we don't have an organized approach, a program, a schedule—a structure to hang our lives on.

Certainly, Matthew 6:33 gives us the spiritual framework we need to grow on: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [our physical needs] shall be added to you."

But without a physical framework to grow on, even a grapevine won't produce any worthwhile fruit—regardless of how good the soil, the rain, the sun or the vinedresser are.

So, in addition to our spiritual support, we need a physical program—a definite plan—a realistic schedule. But before the thought of having a schedule overwhelms you, consider one key all successful people use: *They write down what they intend to do.*

Well, what do you know? You can do that! And a scrap of paper is all you need. It doesn't require an executive-style, leather-bound, cross-referenced, 23½-days-to-a-page or 23½-pages-to-a-day extravagance. Whatever method suits you is what's important, and more important is to do it.

"Something as simple as making a list of what actually needs to be done can be a remarkably effective way of liberating a . . . person from the feeling that there is so much to do there's no point in starting to do it. Focusing on specifics often alleviates free-floating or generalized anxiety" ("The Six Stages of Change," *Sunday Times Magazine*, March 1987).

You want to succeed? If you are writing down your goals, even just "things to do today," you are succeeding.

"From the beginning, the beauty of setting a realistic, firm objective . . . is that it will in itself begin to define what it is you have to do to reach that end" (*Managing*, by Harold Geneen, Doubleday and Co.).

"Says Tom Hopkins, sales trainer and best-selling author . . . 'It's surprising—no, amazing—what happens when you write

down your goals.' Until they are on paper, dreams won't seem real or possible, [Jim] Leman [the editor of *Leadership Dynamics*] says: 'Writing dreams acknowledges that they exist. And the act of recording them plants a seed. Suddenly you won't be able to shake them loose; they'll start to demand time, attention, and nurturance'" (*Management Review*, August 1988, page 8).

The same applies to smaller, more immediate goals.

You are today the sum of your previous thoughts and experiences. You will be tomorrow the sum of today's thoughts and experiences. Writing down what you want to do will start you going in the direction you want to go to become what you want to be physically, socially, emotionally, financially, athletically—and, ultimately, spiritually.

As therapist Leon Prochnik puts it: "If you are prone to dwelling too much on how bad things are, list everything that you have done today which has moved you forward in some way. Regardless of how small it is, acknowledging that you are progressing *now* can refocus your energy from what you don't like about the present to what you do like about it."

It's important to start simply, to make it easy to achieve some successes. This will begin to form the *habit* of succeeding in your thinking and doing. One goal at a time, that's the secret.

The apostle Paul wrote: "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty [Paul knew where he was going!]. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (I Corinthians 9:26-27).

So start with a simple routine and easy goals you can handle even as the distractions come—for lo, they will come. That old fear-of-failure bogey will jump you if you take on too much or hesitate at any point.

Allow for accidents. A grand failure leads to nothing, while a small success may lead to an ultimate success that is not nearly so



small! Be on guard against pessimism and excuses. You *can* change. Read Philippians 4:13.

### Victory can be yours

You have probably noticed we've moved from setting goals to handling objections (this last phrase being a euphemism for addressing the resistance-to-change smoke screen we throw around us to stop us from going anywhere and to help us avoid confronting what might be our biggest fear—the fear of confronting our fear of failure).

But let's look at some exciting results of conquering whatever roadblocks stand in our way.

To repeat: Fear of failure—alias, why we only dream, not

Great sports heroes—perhaps more desirous of victory than some of us?—diligently work toward it.

● “Judy Simpson . . . was thrown out of the competition [at the world championships at Helsinki] after three, flat, non-counting throws in the javelin. . . . She said, ‘You can lose your chance by imagining how things could go wrong. . . . You must instead imagine how things can go right. . . . You imagine yourself in the arena, with all the shouting and the interruptions. Some people allow their imaginations to make them maudlin and moody. . . . You must use your imagination to pull you up’” (*The Times*,



**It's important to start simply, to make it easy to achieve some successes. This will begin to form the *habit* of succeeding in your thinking and doing.**

do—is often caused by lack of right confidence and rejection of ourselves by ourselves and others. Regular, 100 percent effective phrases we punch ourselves in the solar plexus with begin: “What if,” “I never,” “I couldn't,” “You can't,” “You never” and similar.

This is selfish talk. How should someone vying for a victor's crown function? How would such an attitude go over in the sports world? “Well, Coach, I knew you were tough to please, so I didn't do any training. I didn't capitalize on my talent, didn't develop it. I thought I'd better just stay safe. You can't be too careful!”

No, we wouldn't expect that from great athletes, would we? Certainly not. And God doesn't want us to have this kind of attitude, either. Remember Christ's parable about the wicked servant (Matthew 25:24-30)!

February 27, 1985).

● “Duncan Goodhew . . . broke the Olympic record in 1976 in a heat . . . but finished fourth in the world championships in 1978 after fluffing the opportunity to become the best. . . . ‘My mental preparation was letting me down every time. . . . At the Moscow Olympics [in 1980] . . . with 25 metres still to go [he was in front], I thought, ‘Duncan, if you don't do something you're going to lose.’ Suddenly the idea of losing was ridiculous. I touched the end of the pool. . . . I had done it’” (*The Daily Telegraph*, June 30, 1987).

● At the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984, what was Mary Lou Retton thinking as she stood poised to give the signal to the judges that she was ready to try to tie with the East German champion with a 9.95 for the gold

medal in the vault contest? “Did she say, ‘Don't panic. Maybe a silver or bronze isn't so bad after all. Well, here goes nothing!’? From listening to interviews from her and her coach afterward . . . this is the way we recall Mary Lou talking to herself the moment before her most important competition. . . . ‘This one's for you, Mom! Feeling strong now. When the pressure's on I always do my best. Need a 10. Got a 10! Let's go!’” (*The Inner Winner*, by Denis Waitley).

Do you get the picture of what you can do?

With your focus on a far bigger prize, go for a royal crown of eternal gold: “Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” Do it, not as athletes, “to obtain a perishable crown, but . . . for an imperishable crown” (I Corinthians 9:24-25).

Now it's your turn.

With your “10”—the points you're aiming for, the goals you wrote down to accomplish today, the stepping stones to the purpose you're living for—on a piece of paper in your pocket, in your diary or on your noticeboard, and bright in your mind, feeling strong now, you enter the arena. You “imagine how things can go right.” You don't “lose your chance by imagining how things could go wrong.” You concentrate on what you must do to achieve it. “Suddenly the idea of losing [is] ridiculous.”

And out there in front of “so great a cloud of witnesses . . . run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race. . . . Think of Him Who endured . . . so that you may not grow weary . . . losing heart. . . . Make firm and plain and smooth, straight paths . . . that go in the right direction” (Hebrews 12:1, 3, 13, *The Amplified Bible*).

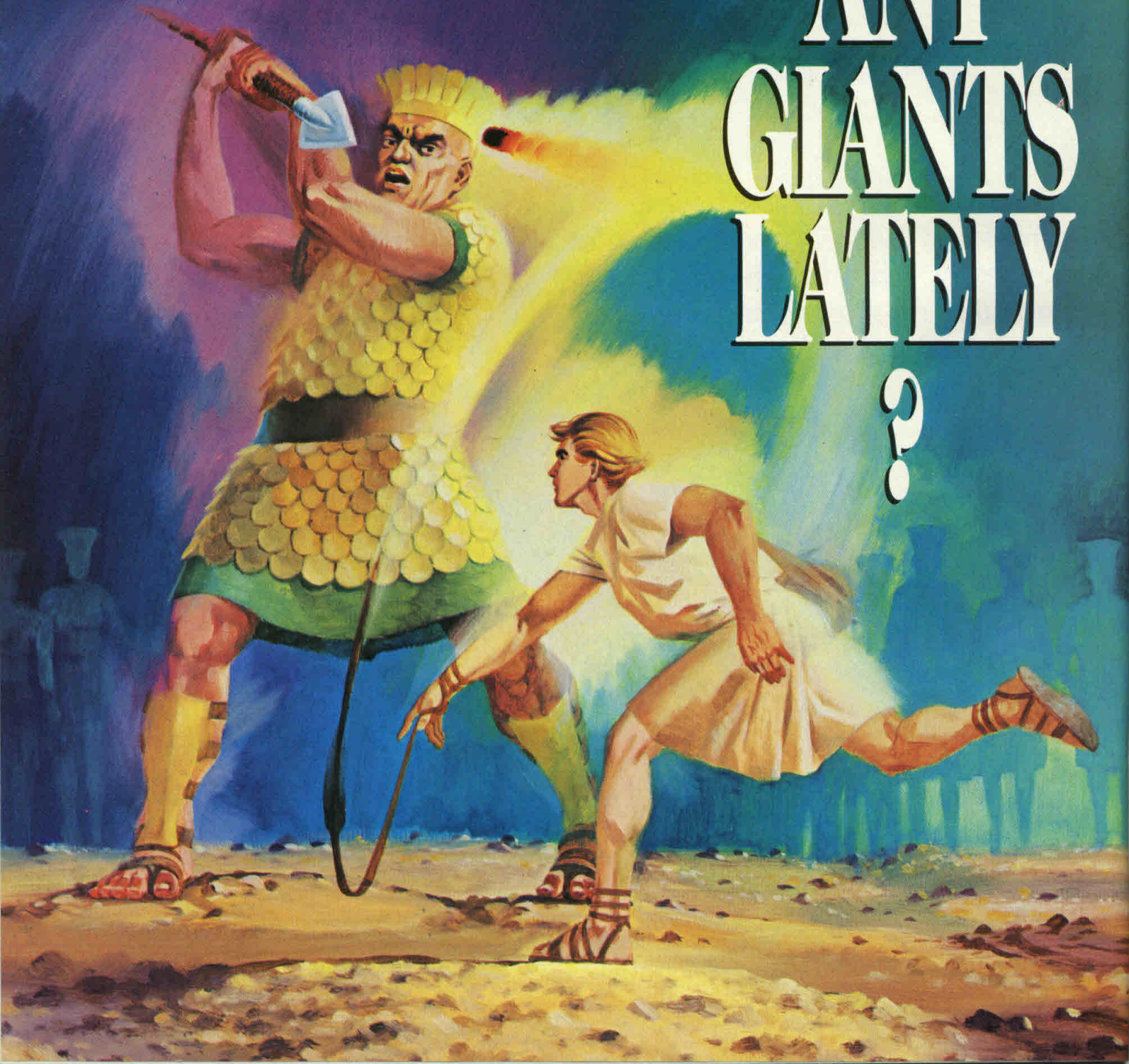
The nerve that never relaxes—the eye that never blanches—the thought that never wanders—the purpose which never wavers—these are the masters of victory.

Make every day victorious. Make today—*every day*—*your* “someday.” □



# SLAIN ANY GIANTS LATELY

?





# Are you facing a big problem? Are you running away from it—or toward it?

By Dan C. Taylor

**E**veryone experiences problems. Most of the time they are little more than inconveniences. But sometimes, we come face-to-face with a trial so pernicious, so overwhelming, that it seems to disdainfully snarl at us like some towering giant, daring us to do anything about it.

How about it? Do you sometimes feel crushed by the weight of the trials in your life? When the ordeal has passed, do you feel more like the victor—or the vanquished?

If you feel that your trials have been getting the best of you, take heart. There is a way you can cut that giant problem down to size and win a peace of mind you may have never known.

## Giants in the land

Sometimes we approach our problems like the Israelite spies who made the negative report to Moses in Numbers 13.

Yes, they noted the land flowed with milk and honey (verse 27). They even brought back some of the land's produce to show the other Israelites the evidence of the land's abundance (verse 23). But the longer they talked, the worse the report on the land of Canaan got.

As the fearful reporters droned on, some interesting changes took place in the focus of their report.

No longer were they concerned with the promises God held out to them. Rather, they began to focus on their own limitations and human weaknesses. The problems Israel would have to overcome in possessing the land got bigger and bigger.

At first, the inhabitants of the land of promise were merely

strong and their cities fortified (verse 28). Then things really started looking bleak. The Canaanites were not just strong, they were stronger than Israel (verse 31). Finally, it was hopeless. It seemed that the Israelites were only "grasshoppers" compared to the giants who lived in the land (verse 33).

Don't we do the same thing with our own problems?

Left to ourselves, we sometimes let inferiority complexes surface, and we think we are inadequate to the test. We forget that God is our deliverer. And we wind up suffering for it.

Have you ever limited God? How should you approach the problems you face in life?

## The example of David

Nearly three millennia ago, a young shepherd came face-to-face with a towering, snarling problem of his own. Almost everyone knows the story of David and Goliath. But few seem to understand *why* David triumphed over Goliath.

Purely on the basis of human reasoning, David should have been shaking in his sandals at the thought of facing somebody like Goliath. But that was not his attitude at all.

When we find ourselves in a trial we should keep in mind the story of how a faith-filled David fearlessly faced Goliath. David's example, recorded in I Samuel 17, is a blueprint of how we can successfully battle our problems and trials. Let's see what lessons we can learn.

## Don't be afraid

There's no doubt Goliath was a formidable opponent (verses 4-11). He may have stood about 9 feet tall—a huge man. And he had been a man of war from his youth.

Sometimes, the problems we

face are bigger than we are, too. Our trials can be every bit as frightening as the vision of some fierce-looking warrior who'd like nothing better than to use us for javelin practice.

David, however, was not frightened. On the contrary, he was indignant. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" David asked (verse 26). In other words, "Who does that guy think he is?"

Have you ever looked upon your problems that way? We ought to be indignant over problems that keep us from overcoming. Sad to say, the one with whom we usually wind up being indignant is *ourselves*. We tend to be the biggest obstacle in the way of our own progress.

Another thing to remember is that David was confident with reason. David knew God had delivered him before on several occasions (verses 33-37). He had no reason to believe that God would not give him victory over Goliath.

David had faith because he had experienced God's deliverance. David knew God was working with him, and that knowledge gave him hope and confidence.

You need that same kind of confidence when you are in a trial. You need to know that if you reach out to God for help, He will be there. And when you experience God's intervention, you will build faith you can draw on in future trials, just as David did.

## Know your weapons of warfare

When he faced Goliath, David used a weapon with which he was thoroughly familiar. He turned down Saul's suit of armor and implements of war (verse 39). Instead, he chose his own sling.

And even though he was expert with his sling, David chose five stones—not just one.

David realized he had to be prepared to do his part. He had to be prepared for a short or long test of his faith.

You, too must arm yourself with a weapon with which you



are familiar. What about God's Word? It is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). To use that sword you must be familiar with it. You need to know how it works and what it says and feel confident in using it (II Timothy 2:15).

And you also need to realize that you must be prepared for whatever length of trial God knows is best for you.

"Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:3-4).

### **Our own frailties**

Before David could gain the mastery over Goliath, the giant began to berate him and point out his deficiencies. Yet David told Goliath that in spite of the circumstances, God would deliver that boasting big man into his hands (I Samuel 17:42-47).

Like Goliath, our trials can sometimes be so bad that they almost seem to taunt us. Yet we need to realize that the battle is God's. We can draw on God's strength to give us courage to continue. We need to heed I Peter 5:6-10:

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

"Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

### **Don't procrastinate**

Given the bleak-looking physical circumstances, it would have been easy for David to ask for a vacation. But David "hastened" to meet his adversary. And when he was in position to deliver the

fatal blow, David reached in his bag, pulled out a stone and slung it with all his might.

The stone struck home! The once-ominous giant shuddered as his knees buckled and finally gave way. Goliath, that formidable mass of muscle, collapsed in a heap. David, with God's help, triumphed (I Samuel 17:48-49).

We often want to run and hide from our trials, or at least put off

## **T**he same God who delivered David from his giant problem can deliver you from any trial you face.

confronting them as long as we can. Instead, we should align ourselves with God so that, like David, we can deliver a fatal blow to our problems. God says if we draw close to Him, He will draw close to us (James 4:8).

### **God is our deliverer**

The same God who delivered David from his giant problem can deliver you from any trial you face. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

God will refine our faith. In Mark 9 Jesus Christ cast a deaf and dumb spirit out of a boy whose father brought him to Jesus. Jesus told the young man's father, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said

with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' " (verses 23-24).

We need to have our belief strengthened. And like the apostles did in Luke 17:5, we must ask God to increase our faith. It is a faith we cannot work up ourselves. As Paul wrote in I Corinthians 2:5, "Your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

We need the kind of faith that can come only from God—faith that can move mountains (Matthew 21:21).

God is every bit as willing to help you as He was to help David, if you ask. We need to have David's attitude: "Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. Morning by morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; morning by morning I lay my request before you and await in expectation" (Psalm 5:1-3, New International Version).

Why David succeeded against Goliath is simple: David didn't fear his enemy. He was confident in his relationship with God. He was skilled with his weapon. And David knew that it was God who was fighting with him and for him, and this gave him confidence to hurry to face his trial and not put it off.

You can have the same success against your problems and trials. It takes work on your part, but knowing that the Creator of the universe is fighting for you will give you confidence and peace of mind you may have never known.

In Philippians 4:13, Paul was inspired to write, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." There is no trial great or small that God will not help you with if you sincerely ask Him in faith and with patience. God will hear and deliver you, just as He did David.

So how about it: Do you have any snarling giants staring you down? God is ready and willing to do His part. But before you can become a giant-killer, you must, like David, do your part.

Think about it. Have you slain any giants lately? □



# The Colossian Heresy

*Jewish legalism—  
dissident liberalism—  
or pagan superstition?  
What was the problem  
that shook God's  
Church at Colossae?*

By K.J. Stavrinides

**W**hile Paul was in prison, most probably in Rome, heresy entered the church at Colossae, in Asia Minor. The news was brought to Paul by his close friend and co-worker, Epaphras (Colossians 1:7-8), who was a minister at Colossae (verse 7, Colossians 4:12).

The above picture is generally agreed upon with minor differences concerning the place of Paul's imprisonment. Some scholars pose the possibility of Ephesus, and others cite Caesarea. Indeed, a case can be made for each of these locations, though not with equal force. For the purposes of this article, these differences, which are peripheral to the nature of the Colossian

heresy, will be laid aside.

Scholars and laymen of various persuasions, indeed whole churches of different traditions, disagree in the way they understand the problem at Colossae and in the way they interpret Paul's admonitions.

Was Paul's intention to halt the advance of some philosophical sect? Was it to warn Judaizers who were arguing for circumcision? Was Paul informing the Colossians of their freedom from ordinances or from the ceremonial law—perhaps from the entire law given in the Old Testament?

It is on the central issue, then, that the disagreement rests, and that is precisely what will be analyzed below.

## **The source of modern confusion**

The problem at Colossae is heavily clouded by two assumptions that pervade commentaries and other exegetical works.

The first assumption is that Paul's warning to the Colossians, to beware of "philosophy and vain deceit" (2:8, King James Version throughout, except where noted), is an indication that a Greek or a Phrygian [Colossae was a Phrygian town] philosophical sect was invading the Christian congregation to entice members away.

The second assumption is that, in Colossians 2:11-16, Paul is concerning himself with the validity or invalidity of Old Tes-

tament practices such as circumcision, new moons, Sabbaths, etc.

On the strength of these two assumptions, scholars and laymen alike have looked for a solution that would involve an unhealthy intrusion of Greek philosophy in a Christian setting, concerning Old Testament practices. This, of course, has led to endless debates and general frustration.

The search for a direct influence of Greek philosophical schools of thought on Colossae pervades the work of both ancient and modern commentators.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) proposed that it was the Epicureans who were actively involved at Colossae. A similar thought was expressed, in the West, by Tertullian (A.D. 160-220), and commentators have followed suit ever since. Neo-Platonic thought has also been proposed as the underlying problem at Colossae, not to mention an admixture of Eastern and Western philosophy, all because of the superficial reading of the term *philosophy*.

In contemporary scholarship, the older and more traditional a commentary, the more inclined its author is to see a conflict between Paul's teaching and the discipline of philosophy.

In his commentary, Thomas Scott writes: "The Judaizing teachers seem to have blended their system, with speculation borrowed from the Pagans, and their different sects of philosophers." Later, in the same section, he adds, "The worldly elements of heathen superstition or philosophy, were blended with legal and other external observances." Finally, he looks back at his explanation and says: "Unless something of this kind be supposed, it will be found difficult to understand the apostle's discourse: for he spoke of philosophical delusions and legal ceremonies at the same time" (*Commentary*, Whiting and Watson, New York, 1812, volume VI, referring to Colossians 2:8-9).

The assumption that Paul is concerning himself with the



validity or invalidity of the Old Testament is even more pervasive and, in some respects, more difficult to correct. There is no doubt that the points Paul addressed (circumcision, ordinances, new moons, etc.) are clearly commanded in the Old Testament. There is also no doubt that they are a part of the Judaic faith and practice. The wrong assumption is that the Judaizers at Colossae were preaching the religion of the Old Testament!

Christ's confrontations with the Jews of His day show that He was at variance with their understanding and practice of the Old Testament, on almost every point. He was at variance with them on the purpose of the law (Matthew 23:23)—even on the value of their own tradition (Mark 7:7). The assumption that Judaism is the religion of the Old Testament is a gratuitous one. Certainly it is contradicted by Christ in the four Gospels in an explicit way.

Once the wrong assumptions are removed, the epistle to the Colossians can be examined with a fresh outlook on the problem.

#### Internal evidence

The Colossian heresy is attacked by Paul in Colossians 2:8-23. If one were to treat this passage as an oblique description of the problem, one could use the information given by Paul to draw up the following outline of its basic tenets:

1) It denied that the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in Christ (2:9).

2) It denied that the Christian was *complete in Christ* (verse 10).

3) It tried to supplement the freedom in Christ by introducing ways of heightening Christian spirituality. Some of the spiritual supplements, as recorded in Colossians, were: a) circumcision (verses 11-14), b) defunct principalities and powers (verse 15), c) eating, drinking, new moons, etc. (verses 16-17), d) voluntary humility and the worship of angels (verse 18), e) ascetic guidance (touch not, taste not, etc.,

culminating in a neglect of the body) (verses 19-23).

The above points indicate neither that the heretics were denying the value of conversion to Christianity nor that they were endorsing a departure from the Church of God at Colossae. They show that the heretics denied the adequacy of Christ (points 1 and 2). They were saying that Christians needed more for salvation than what Jesus Christ had to offer. They felt they needed to reappraise physical circumcision and certain ordinances concerning eating and drinking, along with some spiritual supplements, such as an attitude of humility and worship towards angelic beings. To these they added a form of asceticism that Paul does not omit to mention.

Paul's observation, in 2:18-19,

**The heretics  
were not denying  
the value of  
conversion to  
Christianity.  
They were denying  
the adequacy  
of Christ!**

is that these teachers were "puffed up" in their minds and had failed to hold "fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God" (New King James).

This language tells us that they were Christians rather than outsiders. They were obviously "holding to Christ" to some degree, otherwise Paul would have said that they had *rejected* Christ. In such a case, he could easily have dismissed them as unbelievers.

The heretical teaching about circumcision indicates that these

teachers were of Jewish extraction. They were Jewish Christians and, most likely, from Colossae. Had they come from another area, Paul might have made a point of mentioning it, as he did in writing about false brethren in Galatia (Galatians 2:4).

That the church at Colossae was primarily gentile is evident from the comment that its members once were "alienated and enemies" (1:21) in their uncircumcision (2:13), but now had been shown the riches of God's glory "among the Gentiles" (1:27). Paul's comments here do not indicate that the church had to be exclusively gentile. His comments would be true even if Colossae included some converts from Judaism.

#### A Judaic philosophy

At the time Paul was writing, Judaism was often referred to as a philosophy, even in Jewish writings. The Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus (circa 10 B.C.-A.D. 50) wrote of "the philosophy of Moses" (*De Mut. Nom.* 39). He also referred to Judaism as "the philosophy of our fathers" and as "Judaic philosophy" (*Leg. ad Cai.* 23 and 33). Similarly, Josephus wrote of the three Jewish sects as "three philosophies," i.e., three schools of philosophy (*Antiquities* xviii, 1, 2). It is readily granted that Philo and Josephus, writing in Greek, wanted to lend an air of dignity to the Judaic religion.

In this context, a closer look at Paul's statement in Colossians 2:8 would be of some interest: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." In translation, one gets the impression that Paul warned the Colossians against two evils, the first of which being philosophy, and the second being vain deceit. Paul was doing nothing of the sort. For a double warning, Paul would have had to write "through philosophy and through vain deceit." This is required by the original.

As Paul's statement stands, the expression *and vain deceit* does



not add a new element. In different terms, Paul was not objecting to the discipline of philosophy; he was objecting to "the philosophy" (the original has the article)—the specific philosophy known to his readers—which he designates as a "vain deceit."

In flowing English, one could express the above thought as, "Beware lest anyone take advantage of you through the empty deceit of the Jewish philosophy with which you have come into contact."

The presence of the article in the original ("through the philosophy") indicates that the Colossian heretics employed that very term for their teaching, perhaps for credibility (as in Philo and Josephus), and that the Colossian members also knew it or referred to it by the same name.

Thus Paul was not denouncing philosophy in general, but the deceit that this particular philosophy entailed.

### The worship of angels

Paul's statement in Colossians 2:18 shows that the self-appointed teachers at Colossae taught a doctrine of "voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." Of course, neither the Greeks nor the Phrygians had any concept of angels. This is clearly a tenet of Judaism. As for the term *ethelothreskeia*, which is employed in verse 23, in the original, it does not mean "will worship" but "self-chosen service" with a measure of self-abasement.

The tenor of the new doctrine at Colossae was that the Colossians were not *complete* in Christ (verse 10) and had a need to approach God also through angelic beings; but since the angelic beings are much inferior to the Supreme God, the Colossians would have to lower their sights, so to speak, by approaching angels first!

Knowing how angel worship developed in the Gnostic schools of the second century A.D. (the schools of Cerinthus and of Valentinus), it is easy to see how the Colossian error fitted an ear-

lier type of Gnostic doctrine.

In Colossae, the basic thought seems to have been the Christian's need to reach beyond Christ to a Supreme God through the mediation of angelic beings. These beings were of lower standing on the ascending scale to ultimate truth. Therefore the believers who sought to reach God directly or through one mediator, Christ, were presumptuous and needed a measure of self-abasement that would enable them to begin lower down on the scale. They could seek *gradual* completeness by invoking the mediation of lower, but more readily accessible, beings. This self-imposed humility, along with the active neglect of the body, would enhance their spirituality and their quest for completeness.

Paul's evaluation of the Colossian heresy was that it did not amount to true humility, as they had thought, but to a type of pride and carnality—a mere "shew of wisdom" (2:23)—that was setting Christ at naught.

Paul's understanding and teaching was that believers, who had gone through baptism, were members of the Body of Christ who is the Head. Since Christ had triumphed over all "principalities and powers" (2:15), they, as members of Christ's Body, had no need of anything beyond Christ.

### The roots of Gnosticism

Prior to 1945, Gnosticism was known from the counter-arguments found in the writings of the Church Fathers such as Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Although these writings contain Gnostic excerpts, their reliability was undetermined.

In 1945, an Arab peasant, Muhammad Ali al-Samman, came across a jar full of Gnostic books, known as the Nag Hammadi texts. These books not only have served to confirm the accounts of the Church Fathers, but have indicated that some Gnostic ideas can be traced back to New Testament times. An example of early Gnostic teaching is afforded us in the famous

Gospel of Thomas.

The Gospel of Thomas is believed to have been compiled around A.D. 140. Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard University has suggested that "the *Gospel of Thomas*, although compiled c. 140, may include some traditions even *older* than the Gospels of the New Testament, 'possibly as early as the second half of the first century' (50-100)—as early as, or earlier than Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John" (Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, Vintage Books, N.Y., 1981, page xv f.).

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 has also shed light on Gnosticism, because the Jewish sect of the Essenes can now be shown to have cultivated Gnostic ideas.

In light of the above discoveries, Josephus' *Excursus on Jewish Sects* becomes enlightening. Josephus' description of the Essenes speaks of a dualistic approach in the life of the entire Qumran community. They believed that "coming forth from the most rarefied ether they are trapped in the prison-house of the body . . . but once freed from the bonds of the flesh, as if released after years of slavery, they rejoice and soar aloft" (*The Jewish War*, tr. G.A. Williamson, Penguin, Baltimore, 1959, page 374).

The Essene held to his doctrine so dearly that he vowed to impart it "to no man otherwise than as he himself received it"—after rigorous initiation. The books of the sect were preserved with similar care, "and in the same way the names of the angels" (page 373).

The ascetic practices of the Essenes included complete abstinence from certain foods. The Essenes could touch neither oil, nor meat, nor wine.

Sabbath keeping likewise was the strictest possible among the Essenes. They "abstain from seventh-day work more rigidly than any other Jews." Their extremism on Sabbath keeping comes out more clearly in another statement of Josephus, in which he notes that they "do not venture to



remove any utensil or go and ease themselves" (page 373 f.).

The Essenes adhered to strict discipline. They avoided the pleasures of the body, they prohibited marriage, the possession of wealth or property, all secular talk, even the changing of shoes and clothes.

In searching for the broader roots of Gnosticism, one finds isolated but relevant ideas in apocryphal works, both Jewish and early Christian. The Jewish-Christian work of the second century A.D., *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, lists seven orders of angels and employs the same terminology as was used by the Colossian heretics. The two highest ranks of angels are in the seventh heaven, and are known as "thrones" and "powers" (compare Paul's reference to "principalities" and "powers" in Colossians 2:15).

Similarly, the Book of Enoch, the best source of information for the development of Judaism (written by Chassidic or Pharisaic Jews around 163-63 B.C.), speaks of "angels of power and angels of principality" (Enoch xi, 10).

The picture of 24 seats surrounding God's throne was not introduced first in Revelation 4:4. Even before the book of Revelation was written (prior to the end of the first century A.D.), the Jews were almost unanimously (not the Sadducees) teaching that everything had its angel. In the Book of Enoch 82:10 ff., the stars have their angels; each of the four seasons has its angel; each of the 12 months of the year has its angel and each of the 360 days of the year (the full extent of the year at that time) had its angel.

The Book of Jubilees claims that, on the first day of creation, God created various orders of angels: of the Presence, of the winds, of the clouds, of cold, of heat, of hail, of thunder, etc.

#### Paul's reply

Paul dismissed the doctrines that had been elaborated on the basis of premises such as the above. That is the impact of

Colossians 1:20, where he stressed that Christ was able, through His death, to "reconcile all things unto Himself... whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

By including earth and heaven, Paul was leaving nothing outside

**Christ, with His sacrifice, is able to nail every person's spiritual debts to the cross, thus triumphing over all principalities and powers.**

the mediating power of Christ. The vain deceit of the heretics was exposed. They were teaching the Colossians to give their allegiance to principalities and powers that, as Paul explained, were rendered defunct by Christ's triumph (2:15). Paul's advice was that they should not let anyone usurp Christ's portion and take their prize from them (2:18). To think otherwise was to be beguiled into a sense of false humility, into the lamentable state of worshiping created beings (angels) rather than the Creator Himself. The heretics were dishonoring Christ by trying some other approach to God.

Paul was explaining that, in the teaching of the heretics, Christ was losing the place He had in God's plan of salvation. It is for this reason that Paul began to explain Christ's office and function early in the book by pointing out that it "pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (1:19), and that it does so "bodily" (2:9).

The term *fulness* was always a special one for the Gnostics. The Colossian Gnostics may have used it themselves, and Paul decided to put it in context for

them using superlative language. Christ has the preeminence. He is *firstborn* of the dead, the *Head* of the Church, the *fulness* of God (Colossians 1:15-20).

#### Asceticism

"Touch not; taste not; handle not" (2:21) are not prohibitions of the Old Testament, neither are they an elaboration of any Old Testament command. As Paul pointed out, they were prohibitions drawn up "after the commandments and doctrines of men" (2:22). They have only a semblance of wisdom, but, in essence, they are a pretense that does not lead to any honorable end (2:23).

The Essenes had strict prohibitions with respect to meat and wine—even oil. Such items were not to be touched, let alone tasted. One can see the immediate attraction of self-imposed asceticism. It provided a feeling of superior spirituality. It gave the impression that the successful ascetic had managed to rise above fleshly desires and was now in a separate category.

Even the act of physical circumcision can appear to the ascetic as valuable, simply because it can be presented in dualistic terms. By mortifying the body of the flesh, the ascetic can claim to uphold the life of the spirit.

Paul's explanation dismisses the whole question as a sophism. If a Christian has buried the entire old self in the grave symbolized by the waters of baptism, why would he want to pretend that it can now help his spirituality? As might be expected, circumcision repelled the Gentiles. It does not appear to have been a major issue at Colossae, otherwise it would have been elaborated on by Paul in Colossians 2:16-23. Seeing that the Essenes were all Jews by birth, perhaps there was no reason to stress physical circumcision beyond the mere indication of an accentuated spirituality.

#### Judging others

Paul's warning concerning judging "in meat, or in drink"



(2:16) needs clarification. A poor translation into English has helped to cloud Paul's words and meaning. The original says nothing about food or drink; it speaks about the act of eating and the act of drinking. The terms *brosis* and *posis* refer to acts, not substances (compare I Corinthians 8:4 and II Corinthians 9:10 with I Corinthians 6:13, 8:8, 10:3 and Hebrews 9:10). Thus the question of clean and unclean foods does not even enter the discussion. As we saw earlier, the Essenes abstained from eating meat or any meat product—even though some animals were pronounced clean in the Old Testament for purposes of eating. Similarly, they would abstain from oil and reject any food that had been touched by defiled hands. Thus, had they been in Elijah's position, they would not have eaten food touched by a crow. Of course, they would not believe that God would have said, "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee" (I Kings 17:4).

As for drinking, there is no prohibition in the Old Testament that would affect anyone but a priest (Leviticus 10:9) and a Nazarite (Numbers 6:3). An ascetic teaching, however, such as that of the Essenes, could prohibit products such as wine and milk. It could prescribe times and conditions for the use of other foods; it could also regulate the amounts so as to protect the members from the evils of luxury or excess.

Paul's answer to the ascetic content of the Colossian heresy is that such matters "are to perish with the using" (Colossians 2:22). The sense of this verse is similar to that conveyed by Matthew 15:17 and I Corinthians 6:13. There is no moral value in prohibitions enjoined for purposes of asceticism.

The references to ordinances (Colossians 2:14) and other practices, even new moons and Sabbaths (2:16), are likewise not to be confused with the religion of the Old Testament. As we have seen already, the Essenes would not remove an object on the Sab-

bath, neither would they allow the natural functions of the body.

One can imagine how inane the Colossian heresy was in attempting to hold onto anything mentioned in verse 16, for example, once a Christian had lost sight of Christ's direct mediation. As Paul points out with logical force, what is the point of subjecting oneself to decrees of any sort after the fulness of Christ has been set aside?

In this context, the decrees or ordinances were of human origin and gave only an appearance of wisdom and knowledge. In reality, they had nothing to do with a knowledge of God's law or of God's plan of salvation, which are fully accounted for in Christ.

Paul is not saying that there was no value to obeying God's law. He is saying that any act one could care to mention—circumcision, keeping new moons, Sabbaths, etc. (2:11-17)—cannot replace or transcend Christ.

This passage is often lifted out of context of the Colossian heresy and quoted in isolation as proof that Paul was doing away with the law. An example of this accusation is found in Acts 21:21, where Paul is said to have forsaken Moses and dismissed the customs, including circumcision (a confusion of what Paul was really teaching).

In order to illustrate how ludicrous the accusation was regarding the abolition of the law, we can imagine what Paul would say if someone were to suggest that his teaching was, in fact, condoning lying, allowing stealing, permitting coveting—or going along with any other violation of God's law: Paul would say that his teaching was being perverted. The issue at Colossae was a heresy that sought to transcend Christ. Paul could point out that, without Christ at the center, absolutely nothing would stand, no matter how many of God's commandments one would care to keep, and no matter how strictly one were to keep them.

The reason for this claim is plain: Such acts *do not involve the removal of sin*. Only Christ,

with His sacrifice, is able to nail every person's spiritual debts to the cross (2:14), thus triumphing over all traditional and nontraditional principalities and powers.

Whatever had power over man's spiritual life—whether an order of angelic beings, or an ascetic principle—it was already superceded by Christ. He was now "the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God" (2:19, NKJ).

The judging that was going on at Colossae was misguided (2:16). In any case, the force of this verb (to judge) is not negative; it does not mean "condemn." Indeed, how could any member at Colossae prevent others from condemning him?

The force of the above verb is that the Colossians *could* do something about this problem. It means, "Don't allow anyone to take you to task." The matters listed, despite the claims of the Colossian heretics, could not transcend Christ who is now the *body*, the substance, the very center of God's plan of salvation. All else is a mere *shadow* that holds no value as a replacement for Christ. After all, the Colossians were members of the very Body of Christ!

The heretics, then, were ignorantly trying to push the church of Colossae out of the light and into shadows! Even God's law had a "shadow of good things to come." Even so, it could not "make the comers thereunto perfect" (Hebrews 10:1).

The Colossian heresy, then, can be seen, in context, to have been caused by Jewish Christians who had fallen prey to early Gnostic teachings. Paul, in turn, addressed this local problem, not by reference to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is nowhere quoted in Colossians because it is not in question. He addressed the problem directly, by centering the minds of the Colossians on the completeness and fulness in which they shared as veritable members of the Body of Christ. □



# Are You Merciful?

**B**efore he was struck down on the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul (then Saul) was a fanatical Pharisee.

During the persecution on the Church in Jerusalem, the deacon Stephen was murdered after delivering a God-inspired rebuke to the Jews.

Apparently, Saul supported, if not instigated, the mob (Acts 7:58, 8:1).

Saul zealously sought out Christians, persecuting and arresting them, to try to stamp the new Church out of existence. He might have succeeded had not God intervened.

With the persecution on the Church in full swing, the very name of Saul struck terror into the hearts of Church members. You can be sure that God heard hundreds of prayers daily concerning Saul.

God answered the prayers of the Church.

He put a sudden stop to Saul's rampage. But not in the way the brethren would have guessed!

When God struck Saul down in the middle of the road, many in the Church probably would have been relieved if God had left him there—permanently! Instead, God brought this misguided Pharisee to repentance, and was able to use him as a leading apostle.

The Church was not thrilled at the news of the conversion of their once ardent enemy. They could not conceive of Jesus Christ being so merciful to a man who was so desperately bent on

*Countless times we  
ask God to forgive us.  
Yet how often  
do we grant mercy  
to others?*

By H.F. Terry



Ken Tunell

destroying His Church (Acts 9:26).

Soon, however, they came to see just how great God's mercy was, and they came to love Paul very much.

Because of God's mercy, Paul went on to help establish the Church and carry the Gospel to the gentiles. Through his epistles, Paul has benefited the Church throughout the centuries.

Our heavenly Father doesn't always mete out to us the punishment we deserve for our sins. He sets a tremendous example of parental restraint, one we are called on to imitate. Our heav-

enly Father is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy... He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:8, 10-11).

Do you truly understand and deeply appreciate God's mercy?

## The impossible

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" asked Peter.

Jesus answered, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). Jesus also tells us to love our enemies, so that we can be the children of God (Matthew 5:44-45). Why? This is surely a command that most people find hard to obey. To love someone who slanders your name, despises you or perhaps has even tried to kill you

might seem impossible.

And, indeed, with men this is impossible. But with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). It is possible to love your enemies, but it requires the special power that comes only from God's holy spirit.

Jesus set the ultimate example during the final hours of His crucifixion. Hanging from a stake,

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*Artist's impression shows Saul, archenemy of the early New Testament Church, being struck down with blindness on his journey to Damascus.*



horribly disfigured and suffering from intense pain, He beseeched God to forgive His tormentors (Luke 23:34).

By ourselves, none of us could have fulfilled an equal task. In such a situation, were it in our power, we might call down a legion of angels and reduce such a mob to a pile of smoldering ashes.

The human mind, apart from God, is not merciful!

### **Jonah's lesson**

Remember what happened to Jonah? God told this Israelite prophet to warn the city of Nineveh of its imminent downfall.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, one of the most bloodthirsty powers of the ancient world. The chief god of the Assyrians was called Assur, a fierce god of war. The Assyrians spent their national strength appeasing his demonic appetite.

Surviving Assyrian carvings depict their military campaigns against other nations. These records in stone are grisly relics:

might use the Assyrians to punish Israel (which God did by 721-718 B.C.), he certainly would not have wanted to help save the Assyrian empire.

Jonah repented of trying to dodge the job God gave him. After three days and three nights in the fish's belly (verse 17), Jonah knew he needed a lot of God's mercy, which God provided (Jonah 2:10). Jonah went to Nineveh and preached God's warning that Nineveh would fall in 40 days (Jonah 3:4).

Could a sweeter thought have entered Jonah's mind? He was thrilled at the news that this beastly nation was soon to be erased from the earth. But it didn't work out that way. Nineveh's city officials, including the king, heard Jonah's warning and believed God. The king declared an emergency state of fasting and repentance, and God decided not to destroy the city (verses 5-10).

But Jonah did not want God to show mercy to these barbarians, though he himself had recently received God's mercy. Jonah

should we not be willing to forgive the slights that other people do to us, when they repent?

### **Exercising mercy**

Jesus told His disciples, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Today Jesus Christ is building His spiritual Temple, His Church (Ephesians 2:21). In the process, He is using only the finest building materials, including the godly characteristic of mercy.

Being merciful is prerequisite to entering God's Kingdom. We must ask God to build this aspect of His character within us. Otherwise, our human minds are like Jonah's, desiring harm on those who cause problems for us.

We can begin exercising God's mercy right in our own homes. Paul tells men not to treat their wives harshly (Colossians 3:19) and not to provoke their children to anger (Ephesians 6:4).

As husbands and wives, we can demonstrate mercy toward each other by not flaying away at each other's faults. We will not be hasty to pass critical judgment on each other, and we'll be ready to forgive each other's mistakes.

If we are merciful to each other in our families, we can all gain better understanding of God and His government. Children, especially, will be better able to accept God as a merciful being.

Then we can exercise mercy toward neighbors who live around us, as well as toward people we work with and come into contact with daily. We will quickly extend forgiveness when it is asked for.

In Isaiah 55:7 we read: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

Our loving God is filled with mercy for mankind. Even His punishment is always dealt out of His mercy. Ask Him for this quality of mercy in your life, and ask Him to help you show it abundantly. □

## ***If God was so merciful to forgive a bloodthirsty city, should we not be willing to forgive the slights that other people do to us?***

They show men impaled on tall poles and hoisted high in the air. The Assyrians were also known for skinning their victims alive. The purpose of such torture was to strike terror into besieged cities and speed their capitulation.

When God instructed Jonah to preach at Nineveh, it was a tremendous act of mercy (Jonah 1:2). But what was Jonah's response? He fled in the opposite direction (verse 3)!

Humanly speaking, we can understand his terror. The entire world feared the Assyrians. And if Jonah had some idea that God

lacked that quality of mercy in himself.

So God tried to teach him a lesson in mercy. He caused a beautiful plant to spring up and provide Jonah with welcome shade from the hot sun. Almost as quickly, however, God caused the plant to die (Jonah 4:6-7).

When Jonah grieved for the plant, God asked if it was proper to pity a single, mindless plant, yet not extend mercy toward the people of Nineveh (verses 9-11).

The lesson for us should be clear: If God was so merciful to forgive such a bloodthirsty city,



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