

## TV — It Brings Out the Worst in Us

by Ray L. Straub

\$130,000.00 per minute! What could possibly cost that much? Answer: the cost of advertising on prime time television. The total spent on TV commercials went up from \$414.6 million in 1967 to nearly \$3.5 BILLION in 1977?

Ninety-seven per cent of U. S. households have television sets. Nearly 45 per cent have more than one. This means that 73 million households are watching television. Time spent watching ranges from 30 hours and 14 minutes per week by adult women down to 22 hours and 36 minutes by teenagers.

With such an enormous investment of resources, gaining such a sizeable amount of attention, the responsible must take note! The television industry has awesome power to manipulate. It strongly influences our lives. It seeks to dictate our interests, our amusements, what is worthy of our attention, what we should learn, how we should feel about important issues, and what we should buy. In essence, television seeks to impose on humanity its own life-style.

What is more sobering is that we are being manipulated without real regard for our moral and spiritual welfare. The standard governing the content and quality of programs has far less to do with what is right than with what makes money. Pursuing this endeavor, the industry demonstrates its ruthlessness.

For years, among the three major networks, CBS held a com-

manding lead. The system offered telecasts attempting to feature clean-cut, high standard, family viewing.

ABC, habitually in third place, risked daring changes in an effort to improve its position and succeeded in taking over as the leading network. Local affiliates began switching to the new leader, allowing ABC to charge higher rates for advertising.

Seeking to regain its standing, CBS president, John Backe replaced John Schneider as head of the corporation broadcast group. He turned out Robert Wussler, who had denounced ABC's highly successful "Happy Days" and "Lavern and Shirley" as unacceptable comic book broadcasting. His job was turned into three parcels. A key move in this shake-up was the appointment of Robert Daley to head the CBS entertainment unit.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wussler, by the way, was in his position only 18 months before new major changes came about.

Mr. Daley was handed, among other challenges, the job to "get the kids." Even though they are not the most ardent watchers of television in total hours, it has become apparent that they control the sets in the eight to nine evening time slot when advertising is most expensive. CBS made attempts to capture this audience but failed to make the "top 20."

Not only does television show little sympathy for employees within the industry, but it also

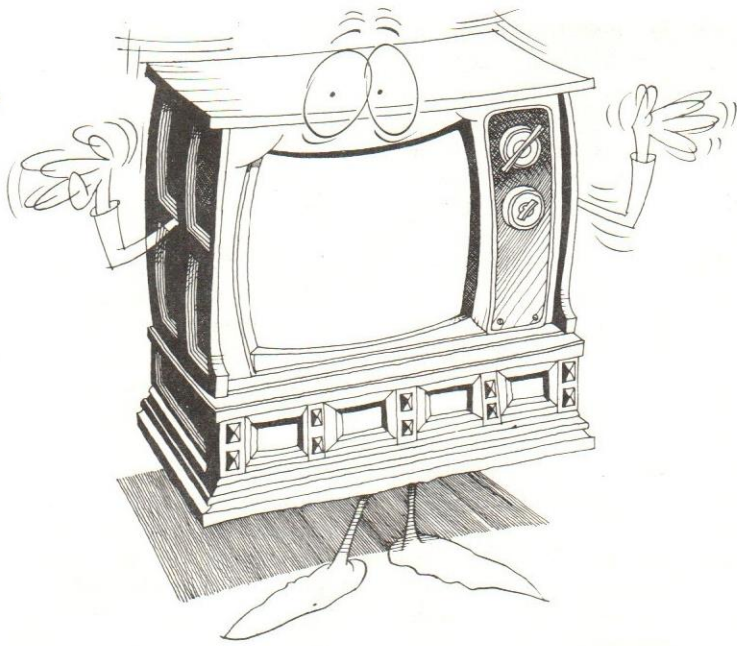
demonstrates little concern for the good of humanity. Because competition is so severe, program managers offer viewers that which turns the most sets to their channel, regardless of its overall effect upon the various age groups.

Recently, violence with ample blood and gore was nearly a daily viewing menu. Because of public pressure, mainly through the American Medical Association and the National Parent and Teachers Association, violence was reduced. The welcome trend continues. "Starsky and Hutch," often cited as being the most offensive because of its excessive violence, is dwelling more on comedy and the relationship between its two police heroes.<sup>2</sup>

The trend away from violence is far from a panacea. As the spilling of blood decreases, the themes involving sex with all of its deviations increase.

ABC got a good start with its reasonably mild "Charlie's Angels," providing detective fare with an extra dimension for the benefit of male viewers. The short-lived "Logan's Run" was placed opposite the Monday night football games, giving it slim chances for survival. To beef up the male viewing audience, the designers for this CBS entry asked its heroine to wear a skimpily little frock resembling baby-doll nightgowns. Whatever help this may have offered to capture the "girl watchers" it wasn't enough.

The most talked about visual



offering by ABC was "Soap." This show stirred considerable controversy before it was aired. It concerned one husband who was impotent, another who was being blackmailed by one of his mistresses, and whose wife and daughter were sexually involved with the same man, a tennis teacher. Additionally, there was a character who was a transvestite, wanting a sex change operation.

The U. S. Catholic Conference denounced the program as "leering sensationalism under the guise of comedy." The Southern Baptist Convention stated that the show "irresponsibly laughs at and shamelessly exploits the tragedies of adultery, homosexuality, impotence, incest, crime and senility." Surprisingly, "Soap" was even denounced by the liberal National Council of Churches.<sup>3</sup>

With the controversy at an exciting pitch, ABC aired the program considering that the publicity and notoriety would provide them with one of the largest viewing audiences ever. While the audience was sizeable, it fell far short of expectations. The show has since dropped in the ratings to 15th. The producers contemplated airing the once-weekly twice as often next season. May the American public see the nature of this trash and force it off the air before *this* season ends.

In near contempt for the morals of its audience, ABC insisted upon airing the broadcast sufficiently early in the evening to "entertain" an estimated seven million youngsters. Congratulations to the 15 local affiliates who have refused to air the program!

In the face of this kind of broadcasting to the public along with other depraved offerings such as "Forever Fernwood," Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association intoned, "I don't know of a single obscene TV show on the air today."<sup>4</sup> With such attitudes prevalent in the world of entertainment we are in trouble!

In addition to imposing its mindless violence, depraved sex and bankrupt ethics onto the populace, the TV industry has shown inadequate regard for truth. Expressions such as "heightened truth," "symbolic truth," and "fictional truth" have become part of the industry vocabulary.<sup>5</sup>

The fruits of such a psyche was hardly better demonstrated than in the mini-series "Washington: Behind Closed Doors" which was loosely based on a novel by former White House aide John Erlichman. Names were used and characters selected and directed in ways that made it impossible to miss identification with former White House residents and employees.

Having established these iden-

tities, considerable liberty was taken with the truth. While some previously seen in Washington can hardly be appropriately defended for their past actions, the TV industry retains the responsibility of maintaining a clear distinction between fact and fiction. Its manipulative capacity is too pronounced to abandon that obligation!

Before one gets too angry at the industry, a more important consideration must be recognized. Those offering the shows are providing what the public wants to see. Lacking in intelligence, decency, worth, and taste as they are, the programs surviving are those that are watched. The industry contends that it is the viewing appetite of the people that determines the nature of the programming. This suggests at least some truth.

If it is true that TV shows us what we want to see, it is apparent it reflects and exposes the worst in our society. Why should a socially and morally healthy society find entertainment in watching people exploit and kill one another? What can be said of the persons who spend nearly 30 hours per week watching a constant display of undisciplined and lustful natures?

The dismal situation demands positive action on the part of the Christian. Few can organize crusades, as necessary as they appear to be. The least the children of God can do is to discipline their own tastes. Realism teaches that not many will quickly change their TV viewing habits no matter how faulty. Suggesting such would be a matter of shouting into the air from the proverbial ineffective soapbox.

Rather than wait for a crusade there are basic values to be protected in the face of the assault upon them by entertainers. Consider some of the following suggested safeguards:

A strong family unit should be maintained. This advice is not unrelated to threats upon our moral values by TV viewing. Television threatens family unity and purpose more than any other preoccupation.

How often has a television program denied the family of pleasant meals around the table? Times spent eating and visiting together are precious and irreplaceable. Scooping food between our teeth while gawking is a poor replacement to the sharing of ideas, opinions, goals, and information that foster the stability of the family unit.

How many worthwhile activities inside and outside the home are bypassed in favor of a television show? Do you hesitate to visit friends because you prefer to watch TV? Do friends come into your home and you fail to turn off your TV set?

Have you ever missed a church service because you were anxious to see a certain TV program? Some confess they have. It's a tragedy that such a large segment of our society enjoys little activity outside the home, has few friends they enjoy spending time with, has little outlet beyond the adolescent offerings of the television industry. What a waste!

Where is the television set located in your home? Is it situated so that you can watch it while eating? What a waste! Move it so that you look at and see people you love during mealtime.

Is the television in the center of your living area located so that every member of the family must either join in watching or spend time in the solitude of his own bedroom? What a waste! How excellent it would be to have adequate room for the "noise center" in a family room, leaving a living room area for quiet allowing other family members to read, write, converse, or listen to good music. If you are not blessed with such an arrangement, use the "off" switch on your television as often as possible so that your family can learn to appreciate quiet.

Television is not all bad. It brings interesting news reports, sporting events to those interested, and some acceptable family-oriented programs. Areas with education channels have the added advantage of a good amount of information-oriented programming. This

does provide opportunity for the family to view together and actually find their interpersonal relationship and reactions stimulated.

Finally, the Christian must remember that the management of the television set is a responsibility in stewardship to God as is any other of his possessions. The piece of furniture with its mechanical array has no moral sense. It is the user who makes it good or bad.

While it is not entirely so, it is certainly possible that the television set mirrors our own moral values. We watch what interests us. It nourishes our spirit and molds our attitude.

Among the fruits of the flesh are adultery, fornication (gross indecency), uncleanness, lasciviousness (sexual irresponsibility), idolatry, hatred, etc. It is true that one sees such sinfulness in daily life, and the stories reveal little that is new. However, having to tolerate it during our outside routines should diminish our appetite for misbehavior in our homes!

Paul advises the Colossians, "For ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God . . . Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence [evil desires], and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:1-5).

Our homes, to be strong, must be a sanctuary from the evil influences seeking to manipulate changes for the worse. Let all Christians learn to maintain tasteful standards that reflect an appetite displaying God's influence in their lives.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- <sup>1</sup>*Newsweek*, October 31, 1977.
- <sup>2</sup>*U. S. News and World Report*, September 12, 1977.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup>*Time*, September 19, 1977. ◀BA▶

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## WHAT ABOUT TOMORROW?

A little boy was asked by his geography teacher about the shape of the world. He responded, "My daddy says it's in awful shape."

The physical shape of the planet earth has not altered, but the boy's father had rightly observed that many things are not the same among the inhabitants of this world as they used to be.

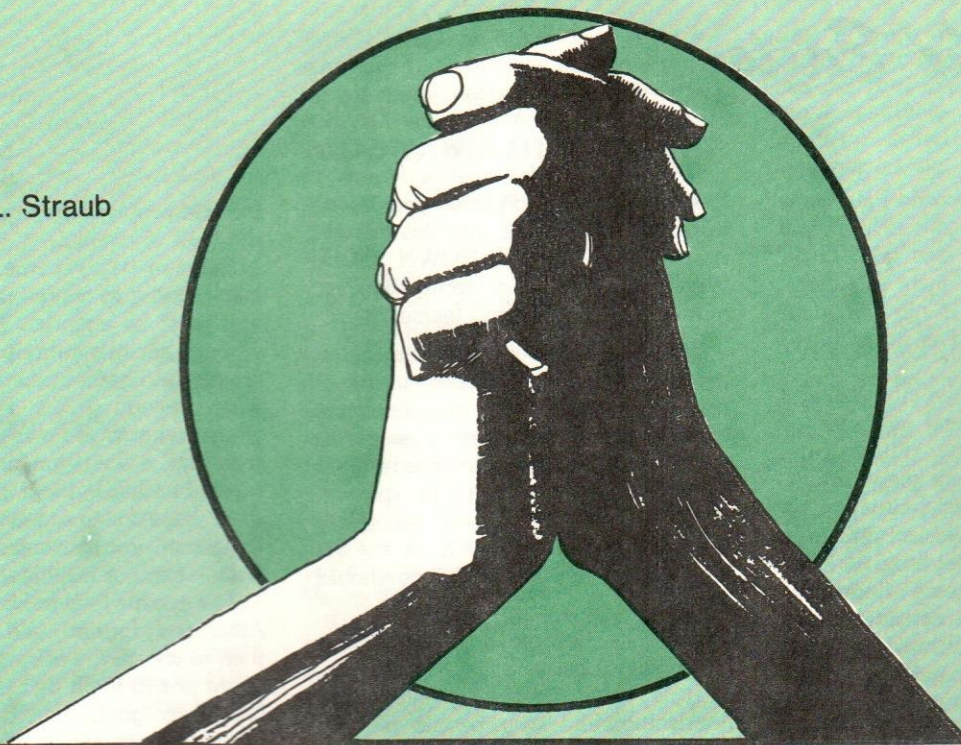
Economically, there is a terrible imbalance of assets. While some governments are almost bankrupt, there are men of great riches living within their borders. Other citizens among them are destitute. Inflation everywhere makes living conditions difficult for millions of people.

Dishonesty, immorality, and violence have reached proportions not known in the last centuries. Nations are distrustful of each other; and they have a greater capacity to destroy than ever before in history. What is next?

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30).

The darkest part of the night is often just before dawn. We look for the new day when Jesus shall come and reign righteously.

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## WHY PRAY?

**P**raying is much like dieting and exercising. Numbers of well-disciplined, wise and honest folks know they should eat less and use their inert muscles more. How good the resolve but how useless if not acted upon!

We also intend to pray more consistently, more fervently and at greater length. How honorable!

There comes a time when we face the dismal reality that our prayer life is in a state of atrophy. It's shrinking, weak, powerless and pitiful! There may be some comfort knowing that those neglecting prayer run in the millions, but not much. The person who has cancer or heart disease is hardly consoled by the knowledge that there are multitudes of fellow victims.

Apparently, the non-praying are getting by. Seldom even thinking about it suggests to them that the urgency to pray is hardly imposing. Without it their religion serves to remain intact. They're comfortable in church, and their piety matches that of other church members in good standing.

So, why pray?

Without good reason to spend time talking to God, it won't be done. Few are idle, looking for something to occupy their time. Moments will be set aside for prayer only if such is warranted.

There are many adequate reasons to pray. A review of some should stimulate increasing urgency to pray.

We pray because we want and need to communicate with God. An elementary doctrine of Christianity concerns itself with the breach between an absolutely righteous God and the impotent sinful ego in humanity. People seek the favor of God, but they cannot be, have or do what is needed to earn it.

The impotent ego is characterized in Jeremiah 10:23b, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "O wretched man that I am," Paul ponders, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death."

The recognition of futility in attempting to deliver himself from

sin is the springboard which sends man in search of God. When people realize they can do nothing, God can do something.

Faith, repentance and grace bridge the gap between the compulsive sinner and a righteous God. The mention of grace and mercy implies unilateral costs. While it means a relationship exists between two, the full price is paid by only one. Obviously, it was God who paid so that we may be reconciled to Him.

Many pages have been and are being written to describe the glories of the gospel of salvation. No tongue or pen has unfolded it adequately and never will until all will be known in the hereafter. While the magnitude of God's achievements through Christ cannot be fully comprehended, they are splendid.

Who can receive this extraordinary benefit lukewarmly? Who can be passive about it, as though the demonstration of God's grace is routine? Who would be reluctant to converse with One who

presented it to us as a gift?

To take benefits for granted is to sin callously. It is ignoring obligations to be grateful. It says that we deserve all goodness that comes our way. Among men such an attitude is nauseous, and God probably feels the same (Revelation 3:16).

We communicate with God out of gratitude. He justified us, removed guilt for our sins, redeemed us, gave us joy, peace and transcendent hope. He is worthy of our adoration and praise. May thanksgiving be spoken in constant prayer by those who have been redeemed. God deserves it!

We pray to God because we need His presence and help. There is no reason to be timid about presenting our needs to the Father. He invites us to do so. The model prayer taught by Jesus advises we

refers to our relationship with God; whether it is real or pretentious. Using expressions that are not uniquely religious, "spiritually" would suggest the mind and its functions. The Holy Spirit reveals the mind of God, and man's spirit refers generally to the working of his mind. Hence, the extend of our "spirituality" would be the measure by which God's thinking and ours blend. Do we think as God does?

It is a serious mistake to assign to God the attributes and thought processes we feel He should have. We want God to be against what *we* oppose. We want God to punish those *we* feel deserve it. We want God to hate the activities and habits *we* hate. Some presume to tell others what God likes and dislikes; whom God loves or rejects; how God handles problems; how

a petition is presented to a compassionate, all wise, infallible God, it would be dealt with in the best manner without further concern about approaching Him. It would be like feeding data into a computer with the full expectation of accepting whatever answer is returned. There would be little need to address it more than the one occasion on the same issue.

The logic is sound. We don't think of God as one who is prone to misunderstand, underestimate, overlook, react without adequate sensitivity, or dismiss the needs brought to His attention. We may falter but God wouldn't. Why persistently repeat our requests? What can that get us?

Among other lessons, the invitation to persistence demonstrates God's accommodation of our emotional involvements. He is asking us

## Speaking to God is a normal response to loving Him.

ask for daily bread, forgiveness and deliverance from evil (Matthew 6:11-13). "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. . . . what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11).

Speaking to God is a normal response to loving Him. The experience of true love assures that we will neither ignore nor fear the object of our affection. Among humans, failure to communicate is a prominent cause for deterioration in relationships. Since God and man are both personalities, it is reasonable to assume that failure to communicate with Him in prayer taxes that relationship, also. It's easy and rewarding to talk to God.

Praying tells us something about our own spirituality. "Spirituality"

God analyzes behavior. They describe a god who is a mere product of their imagination.

Spirituality is a *blending* of wills, not the imposition of our will upon God's. This harmony between Creator and creature is enhanced through prayer.

Our spirituality is measured by the ease with which we can talk to God in prayer. Some find praying awkward and discomfiting. It gives them the feeling they are talking to some non-existent or invisible person. They find it difficult to speak without seeing someone listen. They can't think of anything to pray about after a few seconds and quit. It's a long time before they try again.

In contrast, Jesus' teachings invite God's children to ask with persistence. The parables of the troublesome (importunate) friend (Luke 11:1-13) and the judge who was bothered by the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), teach an amazing truth! Ponder the implications of these illustrations, and the gracious invitation they offer.

Reason would dictate that once

to come to Him in distress, in doubt, in perplexity with our passionate desires and needs. The invitation assures that God will hear us in the emotional state we find ourselves. He advises that we must not jump to conclusions regarding His answers too quickly. What we have in mind may be directed toward His mind more than once, fervently, and with expectation. The invitation encourages us to concentrate on the blending of our goals with the Divine Will.

Spirituality suggests resignation. The model prayer says, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Jesus asked straightforwardly, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

The word "Lord" suggests ownership. The tetragrammaton, four Hebrew consonants from which some futilely attempt to ascertain the name of God and always end up devising one, was translated "Lord" in most instances by the translators of the Septuagint. Since names for God

characteristically go beyond that of mere appellation to describe His person, power and man's experience with Him, the translation was appropriate. The title, "Lord" proclaims God's cosmic and personal lordship. (A comprehensive analysis of the Greek "kurios" [Lord] may be found in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume III, pages 1058-1085, edited by Gerhard Kittel and published by Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

If we are owned by a "master" the authority of our Lord's will is understood. Prayer is the means through which we become increasingly resigned to God's will. The extent of our resignation demonstrates our spirituality. He who is truly spiritual will continually focus on a "meeting of the minds" with his Maker.

Less important but still significantly worthwhile is the therapeutic value of the act of praying. Perhaps not even the "prayer warriors" think often in these terms due to their appreciation for the more obvious values.

Therapy concerns remedial adjustments. It seeks to find relief

from disorders and distress. How can praying have therapeutic value?

The answer becomes obvious in pondering the analytic nature of prayer. Jesus advised that we should enter our closet and after shutting the door offer our requests. God who sees in secret will reward openly (Matthew 6:6).

What is the advantage of the closet prayer?

One benefit is the lack of distraction. We can concentrate on our prayers better. Also, we are less distracting to others who may be nearby. These advantages are minimal in comparison to the real reason Jesus offered for the closet prayer.

In that closet, when we are alone, none hearing us but God, there is hardly the slightest motive for pretense. Public prayers tend to become performances. This is not to suggest that entry into the closet for prayer removes all disguises. Some are so conditioned to pretending that they go on doing it even when they are alone.

Continual closet prayer sessions cause honesty to surface. The innermost being begins to emerge

and speak to God. The person praying takes a genuine look at himself. He reviews and evaluates his role in the world, in his family, and in his church. He begins to see the places where he knows he wears a mask, and where the real individual is manifest.

In the closet we begin to discuss our own real and special needs. Public prayers often parrot the petitions that are repeated in nearly every prayer offered. There is no use "playing the broken record" in the closet! It's time to get personal, serious and specific.

The quality of solutions to problems depends upon the clarity with which the problem is understood. Failure to fully understand the question correspondingly compromises the value of the answer. A man's judgment cannot exceed in quality the amount of information he has.

Presenting our problems to God in the honesty and closeness of the closet draws out a more comprehensive analysis of our status, our deficiencies and the demand for faith to trust God.

There is healing, wisdom, strength, revelation, progress, godliness, compassion, joy, an invigorating love for God — and ever so much more to be found in that small closet when we use it to pray.

Reviewing the section of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians found in chapter 5, we note power in its short meaningful phrases. "Rejoice ever more. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks" (verses 16-18).

Let's not ask, "How do we pray without ceasing?"!

Those who are in the habit of praying have no problem with this. While they hardly send *words* heavenward without ceasing, they know that one prayer fuels them to continue only until the next opportunity to talk to God comes along. They're not planning to serve God without regular communication with Him. Their love makes prayer pleasant. They don't forget, because praying is essential to their very existence. **◀BA▶**

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## OUR INWARD RESPONSE

Do we recognize the Divine Presence in our lives? Is the Spirit of God leading us? Since we are guided by numerous outside influences it is important we know the powers that affect our lives.

Two of the disciples of Jesus had a wonderful experience shortly after the Lord's resurrection. They were walking along the road discussing the events of the previous days, "And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them" (Luke 24:15).

They didn't know that it was Jesus. After quite a lengthy conversation and partaking of a meal together, their eyes were opened and they recognized their Master. Perhaps the incident that caused them to know Jesus was the custom of offering thanks when they broke bread. However, Jesus left them at that time.

Then they recognized something unusual. "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures" (verse 32).

Those men experienced a relationship with Jesus that was unique to them, but very real. They had been with their beloved Master long enough that even though He disguised Himself from them there was an inward response that surfaced.

Jesus is not with us now, but His Spirit is. He said, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). He has sent His Spirit, but do we recognize it? Are we close enough to the Lord that we recognize His Spirit? Do our hearts burn within us when His Spirit speaks to us? If we have enough in common with our Lord we will recognize His Spirit and respond.



# Don't Get a Divorce!



**A** strong and enduring society is based upon the stability of its families. Humans are fitted for social life by the family. Other agencies are called upon more and more to substitute for the home in preparing its members to meet life's challenges, but none is as good.

Substitutes are needed because household togetherness is weakening; much of this blamable onto and indicated by the escalating divorce rate. In 1910, one out of ten marriages ended in divorce. By 1973, one out of two married couples called it quits.

What kind of future have we when every other marriage is headed for dissolution? Who is imperiled? Is it the couple? the children? the relatives? the witness of the church?

A remark often heard is, "I don't feel sorry for the divorcing parents. They are suffering the consequences of their own problems. It's the children I feel sorry for!"

It is wise to feel sorry for the children, and it is equally wise to feel sorry for the parents, the grandparents, all the relatives, their friends, the church, and for just about everyone else! Everyone

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is victimized by divorce. Reputations are laundered, torn and wasted. Security is undermined. Years of investment are obliterated. A constant parade of explanations are demanded. The entire procedure assaults what is best for humanity.

I find it difficult to write on this subject! Close relatives and other dear friends have been victimized by the divorce trauma. I sympathize and agonize at the thought of adding to their discomfort. It helps little to intensify the distress of the suffering. I'm not superior to them and have no right to display a holier-than-thou attitude toward any. God loves them as much as He loves me.

Someone must speak out on this issue! Merely lamenting is not an adequate response. My expressions are not offered to bring condemnation but to plead with those who remain in position to turn back the dangerous rise in the number of divorces.

Marriage after divorce was once

forbidden by many churches, no matter what was the cause of divorce. Some retain this position. Ultimately, only the policy that accurately describes Jesus' teaching deserves to claim God's endorsement.

Jesus' attitude toward divorce and remarriage is cited in Luke 16:18, "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery." He forbids marriage by any man who has divorced his wife and to any woman who has been divorced.

In Matthew 19 we are given additional information. It is important that the setting of this passage be understood.

The Pharisees wanted to know whether it was "lawful for a man to put away his wife for *every* cause" (verse 3). They sought to identify Jesus' viewpoint on this sensitive issue with one of two prominent rabbinic schools then extant.

One, the Hillel school, permitted divorce for minor offenses, such as a poorly cooked meal, accidentally breaking the husband's favorite dish, or an inconsequential personality flaw. Rabbi Shammai

headed a more conservative school, forbidding divorce for any reason other than sexual immorality.

The unfolding of Jesus' answer deserves careful attention. He said, "Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (verses 4-6).

These simple truths emerge: 1) God made male and female intending that they remain together as long as both live; 2) they live together as one flesh; 3) even the close relationship between parent and child must give way to the husband-wife tie; and 4) what God puts together man must not separate.

Matthew 19:9 states the principle already quoted from Luke 16:18, but it includes an *exception clause*: "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

The sin of adultery is committed by everyone who remarries after divorce, the only exception being sexual immorality (Greek *porneia*). This is confirmed in the verse which follows. The Pharisees initiated this discussion, and the disciples sought reinforcement of Jesus' position by concluding, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry." Jesus acknowledged that they understood correctly. Those divorced may not remarry.

Paul wrote, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (I Corinthians 7:10, 11).

In the verses following, he comments on the unequal yoking of a

believer with a non-believer. He states forthrightly that the *believer must not leave*. It is the Christian's responsibility to funnel a godly influence into the home. On the other hand, the believer may allow the non-believer to leave if he/she decides to do so. Paul observes, "A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace" (verse 15b).

It is agreed that Paul is permitting separation, but whether the believer who is left alone has the Biblical authority to remarry is an unresolved question. Not to be

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"under bondage" to some means that God regards the marriage to be broken, allowing the believer to remarry. Others disagree, insisting that remarriage is not permitted unless the original couple wishes to do so.

Assuming the former view, there are only two grounds for divorce after which the Bible permits remarriage: 1) sexual immorality and 2) being divorced by an unbeliever.

Taking the latter view, that the departure of the non-believer does *not* constitute grounds for remarriage following divorce, only *one* cause for divorce allows an innocent party to remarry (illicit sex).

Let the Bible be understood. What God joins together, man does not put asunder; not with his attorneys, judges, courts, briefs, settlements, or any other agreement, litigation or document. Only those whom God releases from marriage vows are legitimately free to marry again.

Although Christians cannot speak for those of the world, they can absorb for themselves a new respect for God's wisdom concerning the sanctity and permanency of marriage. The increasing divorce

rate is evidence of departure from God's standards for a marriage.

It has been appropriate for churches to officially recognize the one grounds for divorce enunciated by Jesus which allows the privilege of remarriage. There is no need to be more rigid than Jesus was. However, after clarifying this, members have shown a tendency to assume liberties, presuming that remarriage is acceptable without giving serious, deliberate consideration to the cause of the divorce. Some seem to have concluded that in a general sense marriage after divorce is allowed.

Such permissive thinking is miserably erroneous! God condemns as adulterous *every* remarriage after *every* divorce for *every* cause with the exception of *one*; singularly, sexual infidelity. A child of God will not commit adultery.

What about the seriously troubled marriages? Must we be unfeeling about opposing divorce when there is obvious, continuing incompatibility? Why bind two people together when they would be happier living apart? Why not end an arrangement that produces tension and misery to the point of being gradually suicidal?

A marriage in distress faces three alternatives: 1) restore the marriage, 2) continue it in its distressing situation, producing conflict, upheaval and injury, or 3) end it in separation or divorce.

None wants to long remain in a home that is a battleground instead of the sanctuary it is meant to be. To remain together only to carry on insulting and fighting, both verbal and physical, is hardly wise or virtuous. To continue is not an acceptable alternative.

Divorce is a choice, but perhaps we have too freely settled for this alternative. It is not God's will that conflict in the home be intensified until its occupants can no longer be reconciled. Habits and life styles must be changed so that trouble is reduced and peace produced. The warped mentality which suggests that arguing among couples is an innocent way to let off "steam"; that it is helpful and therapeutic has not learned of the health



which comes from living in love and peace.

Let's examine the rationale of divorces.

1. *Our marriage cannot be restored because love is gone.*

Certainly a marriage without love is in deep trouble. The loss occurred because at some time it was accepted when it should not have been. Love is not purely an emotional impulse. It is the product of thoughtful giving, sharing and caring. It is the reward of patient, tedious work. It emerges when bad thoughts, suspicions, guilt, and disrespect are resolutely pushed aside. It is the product of unrelenting devotion to an imperfect mate. It is being content only when the object of our love is happy. Love loses its power when it gets too little attention; when other indulgences cheapen it. The lazy don't love; they leave.

The prime emotion of a Christian is love. It is the experience by which he is assured of God's existence. Without love there is no God, no redemption, no hope. A Christian cannot confess his inability to love humans and at the same time give assurance of a valid faith in God. Those who love God, their brethren and their faith in God can assuredly love their mate.

2. *"My children are better off in a more peaceful climate."*

Amen!

Let them be given a more peaceful home, even though strenuous effort is required. Has consideration been given to losing an argument? admitting fallibility? accepting imperfection? being patient with interruption and inconvenience? doing without some possession?

Everyone appreciates the value of a smoothly functioning family in preparing children to assume a responsible role in society. Both parents are needed to have a complete family. Terminating hostility in front of the children does not come by excusing them but by suppressing the squabbling. Parents who want good conduct from their children should behave themselves.

3. *"I made a mistake, and I owe*

*it to myself to find myself — and to find meaning, fulfillment, happiness, etc.*

These statements survive because they contain truth. The attempt at self-discovery may be worthwhile, but divorce seldom enhances it. No person can be enraptured by his find if it reveals a self-indulgent person who is shutting people out while living in bitterness and self-pity. To be happy is to get along well with others and finding what we may contribute to the well being of those around us.

Fulfillment is a satisfaction gained through victory. It is overcoming, turning back threatening forces in our lives, advancing step by step. It is fulfilling aims, contributing hope, making lives more worthwhile because we are there. The failure of divorce can produce none of this.

4. *"I have become convinced that it is God's will that I remarry."*

To assert that God's will and ours are in accord challenges us to be as honest and objective as possible. God is blamed for too many willful acts.

God's instructions on divorce and remarriage are clear. He will not contradict in a personal

message what he placed into His Word, the Bible. As stated previously, if a divorce is not caused by sexual immorality, it is God's will that there be *no* remarriage. Anything else is not God's will — it is *against* His will.

Suggestions for those who remain married may help to prevent dissolution with its misery; heartache, conflict; feelings of guilt, sorrow and defeat.

1) Remember the marriage vows. Partners in marriage stated they would cling to each other as long as both live. If both live, they must remain true to their promise to God. He made the husband and wife one, and He won't accept man's separation.

Married couples should strictly refrain from even hinting at the possibility of divorce. The mention of the word introduces unacceptable compromise. Even though there are pressures, strain and difficulty, talk of divorce should be kept out. Solutions must be sought and found which will keep the marriage functioning. Surviving challenges to a marriage can strengthen the tie if there is determination present.

2) The Bible says that a man must love his wife as he loves his own body, and no man ever hated

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## UNJUST JUDGMENT

by Bonnie Jean Carrier

Lord, do not judge me as I have judged him;  
You know how deeply he was living in sin.  
I quoted our doctrine, your Scripture I read,  
And he claims that he knows you, at least he has said.

But the Lord seemed not to hear me for His head was bowed low  
Remembering my sins; then turning to go,  
He stopped for a moment, looked me straight in the eye,  
And said who made you judge, surely not I.

Then He left me alone and I knew what I'd done —  
I'd quoted this Gospel, forgetting His Son  
Who died on the cross my sins to erase,  
So I too, might look on His Heavenly face.

So forgive me dear Father for what I have done.  
Guide and direct me in the paths of Your Son.  
Please help me to leave the judging to you  
And love all my brothers as You'd have me to do.

his own flesh, but he loves and nourishes it. One mate needs to learn to please the other, demonstrating concern for the other's comfort. This does not suggest that every fanciful desire must be indulged, but it means that harmony and happiness are goals that deserve devotion.

The Bible also states that the body of one mate belongs to the other (I Corinthians 7:3-5). Conjugal dues should be paid. If you are not ready to invest your life into another's, don't marry. Let the selfish, the uncaring, the childish and the insensitive remain single because their demands are unjustifiably taxing on a marriage.

3) Marry within your faith. Few are deeply religious when they marry, carelessly allowing priorities of less value to influence decisions. Religion has a way of generating importance later, widening differences in marriage partners.

Some anticipate converting their mates after the vows are made. Sometimes this works, momentarily giving evidence that the strategy is effective, but this kind of success is unlikely.

A meaningful faith must be shared. Our faith dictates our life style. To marry a non-believer suggests that you are entering marriage with a difference of opinion concerning values, philosophies, goals, discipline, priorities and almost everything else. Since the life style of a Christian is a matter of conscience and eternal importance, your mate may feel that you are exacting more than your share of demands. The agony caused by unequal yoking has been prolonged and severe.

4) Listen to the advice given by those who love you. If your contemplated marriage strikes those close to you as being ill-advised and is causing your loved ones grief, you are probably on your way to experiencing more intense grief of your own! Carefully consider your plans because misery is an unwelcome permanent house guest.

Infatuation can be gloriously ecstatic. Our surroundings turn to

paradise, and we begin to see and experience beauties we never knew existed. For the first time in our lives we seem alive!

This new crush can also blind our eyes, dull our thinking and invite us to swim in quicksand. A marriage is good only as long as it holds excellent and substantial promise that it will last happily as long as we live. It needs God's gracious benefits, and the marriage will not enjoy these if it conflicts with His will.

Let's take a new appreciative look at our homes. They are God's permanent gift to us. Here we can love, converse, teach, laugh, cry, play, share, study, worship, grow and succeed wonderfully. There is no adequate substitute for your home, your church and your God. Appreciate the home He has given and work with Him to continually make it better.

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## THE DREAM FAMILY

*(Continued from page 3)*

but time has proven it to be true. The family which has remained true to each other has an inner satisfaction that is unmatched by any other experience in the world. And there are many extra benefits, too. If there were stronger family ties, there would not be the jails full of disillusioned young people; nor the skid row streets of our cities full of brokenhearted men whose objectives in life have been taken from them; nor the tired women who are having to work and raise their children alone.

The family which serves God together in sincerity and truth and with a true love for Him has an excellent chance of having a happy and loving relationship with each other. They have the greatest opportunity of realizing the dreams of their youth.

"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 5:32, 33; 6:1-3).

## DISCIPLINE: EXPOSE OR IMPOSE

*(Continued from page 17)*

the child will be able to better elect and develop a life style that will be commensurate with the principles parents are hopeful of accomplishing.

While this article has dealt a great deal with the parent/child relationship in the natural family, it is well to suggest that the very same criteria can be utilized in the development of discipline in the family of God.

A careful Bible student can observe the methods of Jesus, the master teacher, who by His example provided the people of His day an example, a choice they could make for themselves and for their benefit and by this they were to be called His disciples. Simply stated: those who have established for themselves a discipline based on the example left by our Master are called disciples.

Discipline is not to be equated with restrictions but rather with a narrowing of the path people will choose to walk for themselves. These choices are best made when one has observed a model of these ideals.

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## THE CYCLE OF CHILD ABUSE

*(Continued from page 15)*

*Crisis Care Centers* have been set up where the child can be temporarily placed by the parent during times of stress. When the parent has recognized her problems and learns to foresee conditions leading to a possible abusive situation, it is reassuring to know such a center is available.

The *Parent Aide Program* has been established. This program is made up of volunteers who work on a one to one basis with the parent. The volunteer becomes a friend who listens, who goes on outings with the parent to give a break from tensions in the home, who becomes available at any time the parent calls. In actuality, the parent aide becomes a best friend

# Annihilation or Eternal Torment?

*Which teaching does the Bible uphold?*



by Ray L. Straub

**J**ohn 3:16 is assuredly an outstanding verse of the Bible. It provides a message of hope which is easily understood. Every Christian seems to love it and believe it.

But do they? While it may seem needlessly provocative to question Christendom's belief in John 3:16, it is necessary! Those who accept the message in this verse cannot reconcile it to the doctrine of eternal torment. This suggests that the many who teach that unrepentant sinners will spend an eternity in a torturous hell are at variance with the message of John 3:16.

Note John's words: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The verse mentions that having eternal life is the alternative to *perishing*. Paul puts it in these words, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Here eternal life is the alternative to death.

Believers in eternal torment teach that when the unyielding sinner dies, his soul immediately departs the body and descends to a place of torture. There, being fully conscious, he agonizes, scorches, scalds, and burns with excruciating, unbearable pain without letup, throughout all eternity. Proponents of this doctrine must forgive me and everyone else who attempts to describe the horrors of this eternal torment, because tongue or pen cannot get close to describing these horrors. However bad one can possibly imagine it to be, it's worse — and it never lets up or quits.

Those who embrace annihilationism consider the concept of eternal torment to be blamably sadistic and blatantly unbiblical. The doctrine of annihilation teaches that God will destroy those who refuse to do anything about their sinfulness. They will be burned up. They will cease to be.

While a study of God's punishment awaiting the ungodly is hardly uplifting, the information the Bible gives is included for good reason. There is little to be gained through adopting perverted Greek Platonism and attempting to pass it off as God's intended dealing with His enemies when the Bible teaches differently. It is wiser to be accurate than misled. Imaginations about eternal torment are horrifying, intimidating, wrongfully used to frighten people to repentance, and they misrepresent God.

John 3:16 states that those who receive God's beloved Son will not perish. Conversely, any who will

not receive this gesture of God's love will perish. This does not suggest eternal preservation, even if in torment. "Preserve" and "perish" are antonyms; they have opposite meanings.

The Bible teaches that the soul who sins will die (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). When it comes to the experience of death, there is no difference between man and animals. "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast" (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20).

Eternal torment or annihilation deal with life after death. It is true that the physical bodies of humans and animals face decay, but what about human souls?

The Bible answers, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). This verse must be examined carefully. Some note God's threat to destroy both body and soul in hell, placing emphasis on God's threat and "hell." Overlooked are words such as "destroy" and "both body and soul."

The message assures that we are not to fear those who can kill the body as they can destroy both body and soul in hell. What God can do to the body He can do to the soul. Only God can do to the soul what man can do to the body. The Almighty can *destroy* both!

"By the blast of God they *perish*, and by the breath of his nostrils are they *consumed*" (Job 4:9).

"The wicked are overthrown, and are not" (Proverbs 12:7).

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Malachi 4:1).

Speaking of that "Wicked" who will be revealed just before Jesus' second coming, Paul writes, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall con-

sume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (II Thessalonians 2:8). "Consume" and "destroy" carry the same meaning.

#### *When is Judgment?*

Believers in the teaching of eternal torment err in designating the time of judgment. If a person's soul goes to heaven or hell at death, this is judgment. Nothing good could be added by sending a verdict to people already in heaven, and what purpose could condemnation serve to someone who has already been agonizing for centuries in eternal torment?

Does the Bible teach that judg-

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#### **"What God can do to the body He can do to the soul."**

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ment takes place at the moment of death?

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (II Peter 2:9). The unjust will be *reserved* unto the day of judgment. Punishment takes place *then*.

When is this day of judgment?

Paul said it was future. Felix wanted his wife, Drusilla, to hear Paul's defense of his faith, and when summoned Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and *judgment to come*" (Acts 24:25).

Matthew, chapter 25, contains three parables, all dealing with judgment. These illustrate the criteria by which humanity will be qualified for eternal life. The third story speaks of a division of the sheep from the goats, the former representing those worthy to enter the kingdom of God and goats standing for the rejected.

When does this judgment take place? "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats"

(Matthew 25:31, 32).

Paul underscores this truth, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (II Timothy 4:1).

If the Bible accurately speaks of a judgment taking place at Jesus' second coming, the proponents of the illusory eternal torment doctrine render it superfluous!

#### *Objections*

As with any doctrine widely taught and embraced, there appears to be basis in the Bible for support. We evaluate them.

*II Thessalonians 1:9*: "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

This verse is used to defend the eternal torment because it defines "destruction" as removal from the presence and glory of God, and it uses the word "everlasting."

It simply affirms that the destruction of the ungodly is everlasting. None returns from it. It offers an excellent definition of annihilation!

*Jude 7*: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

None needs to quarrel with the adjective "eternal" describing the fire. What it did to the cities is remembered. "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha *into ashes* condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly" (II Peter 2:6). The eternal fire turned its victims to ashes, which confirms the teaching of annihilation.

*Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17*: (these two verses are almost identical): "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Again, the descriptive terms "eternal" or "unquenchable" in picturing the fire are not a source of conflict. It is the *effect* of the fire that is at issue. These verses say the chaff will be burned up — annihilated.

**Mark 9:43-48:** "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

The "hell" referred to in this passage is recognized to be Gehenna, a garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. It was a place where the fire's consumption of trash sent smoke into the air constantly, and where larvae had an endless supply of food. This setting prompted Jesus to make an application of Isaiah 66:24. This verse finds obvious reference to the *carcasses* of men; not their souls.

Thinking of the devastation caused by worms and/or fire that cannot be quenched, one realizes that the effects are everlasting. It is total destruction.

Traditionalists suggest this passage allows for the concept of annihilation, which allowance is commendable and obvious. To sustain their own teaching of eternal torment they propose that the undying worm indicates everlasting decay. This is like "eternal shrinkage"! Who can imagine such an unlikely prospect? God hardly communicates in self-contradictory ideas? Gehenna was a place of annihilation.

**Revelation 14:10, 11:** "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath

of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

This passage stands out as the most meaningful support of the eternal torment illusion. The language seems to indicate that those who worship the "beast and

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**"God's love is beautifully real, but His wrath is also actual."**

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his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand" (Revelation 14:9) will be cast into a sulphurous burning lake, there to be tormented day and night forever.

Were this the only passage describing the punishment of the wicked, we could readily accept its seemingly obvious meaning. However, it is not the only passage. Its message seems to contradict other evidence already cited on this subject. Hence, we look to other passages of the Bible for explanation.

"The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea . . . For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever" (Isaiah 34:6-10).

The object of God's wrath here is Idumea, the land of the

Edomites. This grew out of Edom's continuing, unsatisfied hatred of Israel. More judgment of Idumea and Seir is pronounced in Ezekiel 35 and 36. In these chapters there is repeated reference to desolation.

Hence, the judgment against Idumea is that of much bloodshed, desolation, and the smoke of their torment ascending forever. Can the continual ascension of the smoke of their torment conclusively mean a literal smoke that ascends eternally, and that it is indication of people being incessantly scorched and scalded?

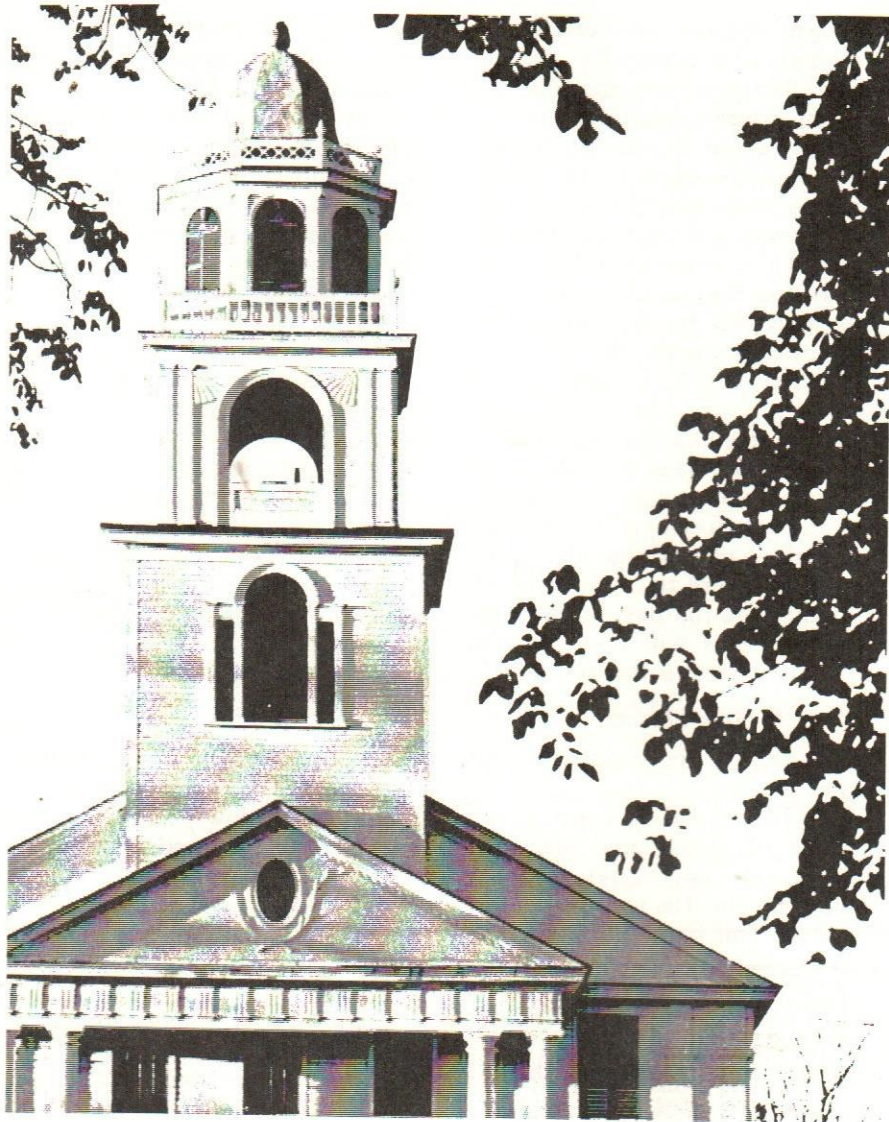
If such were the case, this smoke should be seen today. Idumea was a real country, with real boundaries, real people and real possessions. If the eternal fire was real, it is still real today and can be located. If it cannot be located, the smoke referred to in Isaiah 34:10 must not be literal.

This same kind of punishment awaits "that great city, Babylon" (Revelation 18:10). "Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning, and famine; and she shall be *utterly burned with fire*: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, standing afar off for the fear of her torment" (Revelation 18:8-10). It becomes obvious there is symbolic meaning intended by the phrase, "the smoke of their torment."

"And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, *making them an ensample* unto those that after should live ungodly" (II Peter 2:6). Here Peter supplies the meaning. Devastation by the hand of God is not purely for punishment, but it signals a warning to those who witness.

God's love is beautifully real, but His wrath is also actual. It is in this context that John 3:16 becomes so meaningful. God's love sent His Son so that whoever believes in Him will not be annihilated but will live eternally.

◀BA▶



by Ray L. Straub

## *Church Services Offer Witness*

**M**ost congregations deeply appreciate having visitors because they bring delight and inspiration to the church services, arouse curiosity, and intensify efforts to perform well. Nothing brightens and stimulates a church service as does the presence of several guests.

A healthy church focuses on means to favorably impress these prospects. Those who show interest in our church bring hope for

growth. A progressive church looks for means to influence those who honor it with a visit.

Even though the presence of visitors is of significant value, often the church service programs and procedures demonstrate little regard for the visitor. Instead, they reflect membership indulgence! Those in regular attendance please themselves with little regard for their guests. Serious attention needs to be given to making the

church services interesting, inspiring and memorable to the visitor.

The worship service should communicate a genuine love for God, reflecting an awareness of the divine Presence and bestowing the abundant honor due Him. The meeting ought to convey a feeling that God loves the congregants. The urge to perform and be noticed must give way to the essential purpose to exalt God and His Son.

Concern must be directed toward making worship services a positive witness to visitors, demonstrating our joy in the Lord. Our church service program deserves review to assure that they are not the mere product of tradition, showing little concern about how they impress our guests.

Besides offering expressions to God, our worship is a form of testifying to others. It is the product of the intensity and quality of our devotion. It divulges our collective thoughts about our heavenly Parent. It tells visitors what we want them to know about our relationship with God. We must avoid giving a witness that is limp, unattractive and pointless.

This article suggests ideas on how church services may be refined to offer a more inspiring testimony to honored guests. It is offered to those members and congregations who have interest in offering effective witness to those who visit our services.

The reaction of potential or expected visitors should be kept in mind when worship services are designed and performed. What is of interest to guests deserves consideration. That which may cause awkwardness, uneasiness or boredom should be eliminated from the program.

### Usher

The usher's role is significant! He is the official greeter, making him the first personal contact at church. Therefore, he should be genuinely cheerful, offer a warm welcoming handshake and see to it that guests are comfortably situated.

Visitors should not be expected to look over the seating situation, having to select for themselves a place to sit. Regular congregants should be reminded periodically to sit forward, leaving seats at the back for visitors and those who arrive late. The usher should help guests locate a comfortable seating area. Where there is insufficient space for a group, the usher should feel free to ask members to move, allowing visiting families to sit together.

Where nursery service is not provided, it becomes the usher's responsibility to see that infants are not overly distracting. Some parents are not as sensitive to the disturbances caused by their children as they ought to be, and the usher should represent the interest of the congregation in communicating the need to maintain proper respect for the worship in progress. Because this task is difficult does not excuse its being ignored!

Ushers should introduce visitors to other members of the congregation when opportunity presents itself, either before or after services. If possible, names should be repeated to assure that guests leave knowing the names of several members. This will give them a stronger sense of fellowship.

### Song Service

Why do we sing congregational hymns or songs?

It is because they express our feelings of praise and worship, sharing our emotional feelings about God and His involvement in our lives. This segment of worship

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### **Our church service program deserves review to assure that they are not the mere product of tradition. . .**

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enables every member of the congregation to participate soulfully in collective worship.

It is not necessary that one have extensive musical training or a good voice to join in the singing. Those whose sounds are noticeably off pitch might squelch their volume, but there is little reason why anyone should refuse entirely to sing. The words and music will inspire those who cooperate.

A lively song of praise should not be turned into a funeral dirge! Some congregations sing so slowly, it seems they must be hurting! The correct meter should be maintained so that the song's mood is accurately given. The beginning of a song service demonstrates whether a congregation has life

and happiness to offer, or whether they sing out of a sense of duty but would rather not!

Visitors cannot be favorably impressed when song services begin while most of the congregation is out on the streets still on their way to church. Promptness speaks impressively about our attention to Christian discipline.

### Service Leader

Those leading out in the church service have a great impact on determining the extent of its influence. Advance thought should be given to making comments and giving introductions that are meaningful and accomplish their purpose with intelligence and dignity. Most leaders are capable of improving, and they would do well to increase their skills.

Speakers are obligated to make themselves heard. Adequate volume will enable those farthest away to hear. The service leader should speak slowly and clearly so that each of his words can be understood. Overused statements which repeat what is obvious are unnecessary. Attempts at humor should be appropriate and used sparingly.

Platitudes and cliches should be avoided. A "cliche" is a trite phrase or expression. Closely related, a "platitude" is a statement that is commonplace, dull and insipid. Following the reading of Scripture one often hears, "May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word." Because this phrase has been worn out, it is a cliche that is anemic and useless even though the words are true and spoken sincerely.

The word "bless" with its variations is worn out. Synonyms should be sought and substituted. Most people have heard the word for years but are unable to define it, anyway. Words should be used that communicate.

It takes effort to be a leader of a church service, and any congregation appreciates this. To be a leader is to have opportunity to present a good testimony of our determination to serve God as skillfully as possible, and the more

attention a good performance receives, the more God is honored.

### Prayer

It may seem needlessly insensitive and irreverent to comment on the segment of collective worship in which prayers are offered, but even here our witness can be enhanced. Our talks with God say much about our relationship with Him. Through our prayers others receive opinions about the depth of our commitment.

Often we scorn the practice of reading prayers, considering correctly that our expressions to God have more intimacy when spontaneous — coming from our own feelings instead of echoing the thoughts of some unknown author. This criticism is valid, but one wonders whether it is warranted.

A careful observer would note that prayers given in church services are remarkably alike. Congregants can anticipate their content, length, inflection and degree of urgency. Were we to admit it, there would probably be more variation in prayers that are read!

Reading prayers is not the better alternative to our standard ones. More feeling and fresh thinking might come if those being called on are forewarned. Eloquence or reverent tones in our voice are not the elements of effective prayer; sincerity is. The ability to employ "prayer tones" does not give the measure of our spiritual stature. The simpler the wording, the more touching the expression.

Prayer requests received from the audience should be eliminated from formal worship services; particularly, the after service. They represent a membership indulgence that causes more awkwardness and raises more questions while providing benefits that are usually more manufactured than real. Some churches would offer strong protests to dropping the prayer request segment because they are sure that it is the most inspirational and spiritually uplifting part of their worship. If such claims would be given honest, objective examination, few would stand.

Requests for prayer with their testimonies might be included in the Christian Education segment of church services, and certainly during prayer meeting/Bible study. For formal worship, special needs can be written in notes or mentioned to service leaders and pastors privately. When announced from the front better judgment is exercised in the kind of information shared, and the needs can be enunciated more clearly. Further, the person offering the prayer will have more time for review and can give the request some thought before the public prayer. Certainly the prayer ought to present the needs of the congregants, but the means to communicate them should reflect good planning.

### Announcements

Most churches use a weekly bulletin in which announcements appear, and most members of the audience can read. This makes it unnecessary to spend time reading each one. Where notices deserve emphasis, the added commentary

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**Giving is a meaningful part of our stewardship in complete accord with Christian discipleship.**

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should be enthusiastic and persuasive. There is no value in reading monotonous announcements.

Oral notifications should be stated clearly, containing all necessary details. Since most of these are for a particular segment of the congregation, care should be taken to prevent the slowdown of the momentum of the service.

### Offerings

The privilege to receive financial contributions is based upon the appropriate use of the gifts. It follows that offerings received should be accompanied by information concerning their use. This segment finds the membership sharing in a real way, and such values are lost when it is not known why the funds are being received.

It is a disservice to God, His church, and the worship service to announce and receive funds in a timid and apologetic manner. Giving is a meaningful part of our stewardship in complete accord with Christian discipleship. It brings substance to our religious expressions and claims, and it provides the best possible use of our resources.

### Special Music

Few segments of our worship bring as much attention, feeling, inspiration and commentary as the special music — both when done well or poorly. If given skillfully, the presentation is always too short. When the music is noticeably faulty, everyone is uncomfortable and awaits its merciful ending.

Musical numbers presented in church should be rehearsed so they can be offered as perfectly as possible. This does not mean that no mistakes should be tolerated, but the more practice there is invested, the more likelihood that the performer will receive the appreciation instead of the sympathy of the audience. Failure to prepare is a self-indulgence which does not deserve to be featured in divine worship.

Introductions given to special numbers are usually ineffective and unnecessary. They add nothing, use up valuable time and detract from the beauty of the music. Introductions are appropriate when background information helps to acquaint the audience with the song, or if there is reason to offer some special dedication. Most singers who insist on introducing their numbers demonstrate to the audience why they are musicians and not speakers!

### Momentum

There are two factors governed by human planning which determine the effective witness of the church service. The first is momentum, the speed by which the service moves along. It is incorrect to conclude that a slow moving service has dignity and sacredness.

*(Continued on page 24)*



to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

\*A kind businessman bought a cottage and a piece of ground for a garden for about \$3,000. He let it rent free to an elderly Christian man whom he respected. He thought only of being kind to the man and did not hope for any return. Fifteen years later the businessman was poor and the old Christian man died. The cottage and ground returned to the original buyer. The value of the neighborhood property had meanwhile been multiplied by ten. He had given away \$3,000; he received \$30,000. Jesus Christ promises us 10 times as great a return as that (Matthew 19:19).

Our work can be much more valuable than we thought as we reckoned on numbers alone.

The certainty of the resurrection assures us that our honest work for the Lord will not be futile. The resurrection gives our life and work a glorious future, so it is important now. Even apparent failure will be success at last. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:6).

*The work is solemn, therefore don't trifle.*

*The task is difficult, therefore don't relax.*

*The opportunity is brief, therefore don't delay.*

*The prize is glorious, therefore don't faint.*

D. M. Panton

## CHURCH SERVICES OFFER WITNESS!

(Continued from page 17)

Often efforts to be "proper" find the service leader waiting for performers to get to their seats before continuing with the next portion of the program. This directs attention to the return walk of the performers! It is better to have attention focused toward activity on the platform, even when there is movement to and from it.

Needless introductions and tedious commentary slow down

the pace of the services. Special numbers listed in the bulletin should need no introduction. The location of a Scripture reading should not take too much time. A slowly paced service will cause minds to wander and attention to be diverted.

A second factor affecting the witness of a church service is the state of preparedness on the part of the participants. Whoever leads should familiarize himself with the program so that his efforts contribute to and enhance its effectiveness. A leader should know what he is doing! Because this responsibility is so important, it is best for one or two men to serve. It enables them to develop skills in managing the program.

If we think correctly about the function of the worship service as a means to edify and extol our heavenly Father, our services will improve. Notions of enhancing our personal image; of maintaining tradition, no matter what its value; of insisting upon our privilege to have part simply because others do; of concluding that what we offer is good enough for God so it should be good enough for others — all are attitudes which seriously compromise the effectiveness of our worship where we should be struggling to offer our best.

Our church services will never be perfect, but that is no reason they cannot improve. While they ought not to appear to be so professionally produced that the Presence of God is hardly noticeable, there is no reason they should

be confusing and tiring. While a service leader or musician may make mistakes, there is no reason to consider these virtuous and worthy of repetition. Services should not be so structured that they disallow late change prompted by the Holy Spirit, but they should be designed to magnify the Creator instead of the impulsive creature!

The worship service is a form of witness to visitors, and these guests represent excellent potential for the growth of our church. If this possibility commands our attention when planning our services, our witness will be refined and made more effective. **IBA**

## RUNNERS WITH GOD'S MESSAGE

(Continued from page 3)

known to be good representatives of God's work, and give His word with zeal and dedication, interested people are going to heed what we say.

Our message is not always good news to every listener. Even as David did not want to hear that his son was dead, people do not always want to hear the warning regarding what a life of sin will bring. But God's Word is truth. It is good news for it tells the story of man's redemption, and gives him a hope in what is to come. It is instructive for it tells him how to live now. It is a warning message for it reveals the consequences of disobedience. But above all things, it is a realistic revelation from God that must be proclaimed. As God's runners, we should count it a privilege to carry the message and speed it along as fast as we can. **IBA**

**Mister Worry, who is he?**

**He finds no standing room in me.**

**He knocks upon my door sometimes**

**But, to him I always say,**

**There is no room for you in here**

**My Lord has come to stay.**

**His love shines into every darkest corner**

**My heart is filled with gladness.**

**I trust my Lord to meet my needs**

**To banish fear and sadness.**

**Come join me on the Glory Road**

**And let all worry cease**

**Let Jesus have your heart today**

**And to your soul, bring peace.**

— by Mildred I. Huott

Where is God? What does He look like? If He could be seen, would He look like a human? If so, would He be elderly? young? tall? muscular? tan-skinned? Would He look kind? business-like? stern?

Think about these questions. Answer them. Try them on your friends. A variety of answers will come, ranging from the cynical, to the simple, to the profound.

The Bible presents a progressive revelation of God. He has always been with humankind, but He has not always appeared in the same form. One could get the impression that God has changed through the centuries, and many think He has — and still does change. Some suggest that God has been evolving into greater “maturity” in a manner similar to the intellectual progress experienced by humanity.

The Bible’s description of God’s nature does away with any thought that God is changeable. “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

The Bible presents a developing picture of an unchanging God. This revelation of God shows Him in various forms. How can the Almighty reveal Himself differently if He is unchangeable?

We note the progressive revelation of God.

Adam heard the “sound of God” in the Garden of Eden following the man’s transgression. There was person-to-person conversation, and God made clothes for the embarrassed sinner.

After Cain was sentenced by God for murdering his brother, Cain “went out from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod” (Genesis 4:16). This expression gives the impression that it was Cain’s relocation which removed him from God’s presence.

# Does God Change?

When living near or with his parents he seemed to be with God on a person-to-person basis.

Genesis 18 describes a visit the Lord had with Abraham. “And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre” (verse 1). Verse 2 notes that three *men* stood by him. Verse 13 quotes the *Lord* speaking to Abraham. Verse 16 notes the *men* rose and looked toward Sodom. Verses 17 and 20 quote the *Lord*. Verse 22 says “the *men* turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the *Lord*.” Verses 23-33 report a conversation between Abraham and the *Lord* where Abraham pleads for the lives of the righteous in Sodom. Chapter 19:1 states that the other two men were angels.

It appears that the Lord and two angels appeared to Abraham as men, although Abraham had no apparent difficulty in recognizing the Lord. May we conclude that the Lord here is Jesus, or that the Lord God is in the form of man wherever He resides?

The answer to both questions is “No.”

This was a manifestation of God (in religious terminology, an epiphany), but later manifestations will disallow our concluding that God resides in the form in which Abraham saw Him. Indeed Jacob wrestled with such a manifestation and later declared that he saw God face to face (Genesis 32:24, 30). Jacob’s experiences seem to in-

volve the final Old Testament manifestation of God in human form.

Moses heard the voice of God from a burning bush (Exodus 3:4). Verse 2 states it was "the angel of the Lord (who) appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush." At Sinai the Lord descended to the mountain in fire, "and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly" (Exodus 19:18). The Lord appeared to Moses and Joshua in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud (Deuteronomy 31:15). While there was much conversation between God and Moses, there is no information that God ever appeared to this greatest of prophets in human form. Rather, the physical manifestations of God to Moses were in the form of fire and/or smoke.

The Lord appeared to Gideon (Judges 6:14), who reacted by acknowledging God's presence. On the other hand, most references refer to the appearance as "an angel of the Lord" (verses 11, 12, 20-22), apparently sent directly from God's presence.

To King Solomon God appeared in a dream by night on several occasions and conversed with him (I Kings 3:5; 9:2; II Chronicles 7:12-22).

God's appearances to the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel were bizarre (Isaiah 6:1-5; Ezekiel 1:26-28).

One observes that the physical manifestations of God grow in complexity. In earliest times He appeared in the form most readily recognizable and most easily related to. As man's acquaintance with the Creator evolved, manifestations of God became more subtle and sophisticated.

This is an intriguing truth, deserving explanation. Why did God change the demonstrations of His appearance? Why did they turn from the primitive to the complex?

It would be presumptuous to suggest that a human could produce the precise answer, but it must rest partly on humanity's developing comprehension of God as a person. Were God confined as

we are to a human form, the human mind would claim to grasp Him — to understand Him fully. Humanity's goal of equal acceptance of each other is virtuous. Were God always manifest as a human, people would more readily equate themselves with Him.

The developing complexity in the manifestations of God forces man to acknowledge the mystic nature of His spiritual Being. Man's intellectual growth has enabled him to solve numerous mysteries involving the function of his own physical body (though many questions remain unanswered). It

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**"The New Testament  
returns to a  
demonstration of God in  
human form in the  
person of Jesus."**

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would be a serious error to presume that man's increasing knowledge of himself simultaneously brings increased knowledge of the being and nature of God. None can get to know God better through learning about physical matter. He approaches greater acquaintance with God only by spiritual development.

Interestingly, the New Testament returns to a demonstration of God in human form in the person of Jesus. Is this a return to mankind's primitive relationship with God as in the time from Adam to Jacob?

Far from it!

The manifestation of God in Christ brought the greatest advancement in humanity's relationship with God. The first appearances of God in human form provided knowledge about God. The second appearance in human form presented by Jesus provided a means by which mankind may share in *the very Being of God!* "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Peter 1:4).

There could be no sharing in the

nature of God unless there had been significant previous revelation of His personality. This is the reason the information given in the Old Testament is so important. It is the developing revelation of a complex, cosmic God. While He can never be fully understood (because He has never been fully revealed), enough about Him can be known to enable the searching heart to live close to Him. The Old Testament tells us about Him, and Jesus cleared the way for us to experience Him and share His nature.

How is God unchangeable if His appearances have been in constant change?

God is unchanging in His attitude, personality, virtues, and goals. He speaks with absolute authority, and He never has need to change His mind. "The Splendor of Israel, he will never lie nor change his mind: he is not man, to change his mind" (I Samuel 15:29, Moffatt). Were God a changing personality subject to moodiness, change of position, fluctuating concern, He could never be known or fully relied upon. He always relates to man with the same, steady disposition.

The realization that the Bible is a progressive revelation of the unchanging God has great significance to the Christian. It provides imposing witness that our own comprehension of God must always grow.

When small children are taught about God, they relate Him to their parents. If both parents are religious, it is likely that there is little difference between the child's concept of God and that of his own father. As we develop mentally, we recognize that there are differences between our earthly parent and the One in heaven. We see our fathers err, discover their weaknesses, and note they are more and more like us.

We conclude correctly that God is greater than humans because of the many accounts of His greatness and power given in the Bible and testified to by others. Sorrowfully, it may be the sad experience of too

many that acquaintance with God has never grown much beyond realization that our heavenly and earthly parents are not similar. Has your acquaintance with God been growing?

Life in Christ is a dynamic, not merely a belief. It is not just a matter of conversation, but it has energy, direction and progress. Christianity is not a creed only, but it is mainly a lifestyle; not merely a way of thinking, but a manner of living. In receiving forgiveness of sins we must also accept the life of Christ as our example, emulating Him as perfectly as possible. It is being changed into the image of our Lord and moving from glory to glory (II Corinthians 3:18).

Readers of "Dear Abby" may remember a recent communication to her which reported a family who spent Sunday mornings tarrying at the breakfast table to discuss their personal feelings about matters, counselling with each other, supporting each other in worthwhile endeavors, etc. The picture of this routine reflected beautiful familial kinship of a rare quality. The problem: friends of the children wondered why the family members were not in church on Sunday, and an answer was requested which could be passed on by the children.

Abby complied with the request, suggesting that church attendance did not always identify the best Christians. It implied justification for the family's choice to substitute their worthwhile family togetherness for church fellowship.

The answer by this noted columnist reflects the spiritual languor of our times. The exchange in letters suggested satisfaction on the part of both parties that lack of attendance at collective worship may not be so consequential. Perhaps this attitude grows from the realization that not enough churches offer means by which acquaintance with God can grow. The climate producing such indifference toward worship detracts from the Christian's characteristic hunger to know God better.

In the face of God's complex  
*(Continued on page 24)*

# The Glory of the Cross

by Roy Z. Kemp

One of the marvels of Christianity is the power that God gives to His workers who carry on under great difficulties. The prophet Isaiah gives us the secret of renewing our strength and of overcoming our faintheartedness (Isaiah 40:31).

In Psalm 27:1, we are told that the Lord is the strength of our life.

We may glory in the cross of Christ because it is pre-eminent in the matter of time; it has survived the ages. Creeds and dogmas and philosophies have tried to undermine its foundation, but the cross of Christ still stands and shall continue to stand.

The cross of Christ is dependable, and the death of Christ still remains our hope of salvation. All life takes on a different hue when we regard the light of the cross.

The cross of Christ is the measure of man's worth to God. God does not dwell in the temples made with hands, but in man's heart. The church is looking for a better method of reaching God, but God is looking for better men. We are without a single plea for merit, except that we have been redeemed through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The death of Christ for our sins was not unusual. He came into this world for that very purpose. It was His mission to be our Saviour. He was not a martyr, the victim of unfortunate circumstances dying for a worthy cause. Nor did He lay down His life just to set a good example. The death of Jesus Christ was far more than these things. Jesus Himself said that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Who are the lost? The Bible tells us that we are the lost, that "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Each of us has a need that only Christ is able to fill. The greatest choice we can ever make is to accept Christ as our personal Saviour. Salvation is not just giving up something; rather, it is receiving Someone. Our lives constantly manifest what we truly think of Christ.

One becomes a Christian when one does the following:

- Hears and believes the Word of God (Romans 10:17),
- Believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 3:16),
- Repents of one's sins (Acts 2:38),
- Confesses Christ's name before men (Romans 10:9, 10),
- Is immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 10:16; Romans 6:3, 4),

and then continues to live for Christ the remainder of one's days, serving Him faithfully and with love (Revelation 2:10).

Christianity offers the solutions to all the problems that one faces in this life. To become a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ is to do the greatest act one is capable of accomplishing. It is the steps we take to receiving salvation and life eternal.

It has been stated that Christianity is not a voice in the wilderness, but a life in the world. It is not an exotic plant to be kept confined under glass for its protection, but is a hardy plant that can weather any and all storms of life, producing fruit in all seasons. Fidelity to duty, with love and enduring faith, is its root and branch and leaf.

We may cry out about the beauty of eating His bread with Him in His kingdom and wearing a white robe of righteousness, but this is a worthless hope and merely wasted breath unless we plow and

*(Continued on page 24)*

3. For one alternative explanation see *The Genesis Flood*.

4. For further study of these thermodynamic laws see the chapter entitled "Thermodynamics and Theology" in *Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science*, by Henry M. Morris. **◀BA▶**

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## DOES GOD CHANGE?

(Continued from page 16)

being, neither the writer nor the reader here knows much about God. What we have learned and what there is still to know are awesomely disproportionate!

We must develop an appetite and a thirst for more knowledge of and experience with God. These emotions are healthy. Their absence warns of illness!

God has shown us that through the experience of faith, trust, longing, and energetic searching, He can be found in greater and more glorious measure. It's the nature of our relationship to Him that only He can satisfy us while a healthy hunger for more remains. Because He is unchanging, there is an unaltered invitation to know Him as well as or better than did any of the patriarchs, prophets and apostles. Our faith is structured on their foundation, and it can grow.

We must be healed from languor, given an appetite to know God better, energized by His Spirit to move a bold move toward Him. Because He is unchangeable, He will always be there to receive us.

**◀BA▶**

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## THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

(Continued from page 16)

plant and work in His kingdom here and now!

When the Spirit of Christ rules our hearts and minds, our actions and reactions are completely changed. Through Christ man is able to forgive and forget the deep hurts that may come to him. He becomes a new creature in Christ when he arises from the waters of baptism; he becomes reconciled to God.

When we turn from God, we

become easy prey for false gods. We should never doubt the Lord's presence with us nor turn from Him. A loving and penitent heart is precious in the eyes of God, and the eyes of man can look upon nothing greater than the glory of the cross of Christ. **◀BA▶**

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### STATEMENT

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## HE SUFFERED FOR US

by Mrs. W. J. Berry

Oft we suffer base injustice,  
Beneath its cruel sting we smart;  
And we find no lasting comfort  
For our aching, broken heart.

We seek from all those about us  
Some soothing balm to ease our  
pain,  
We seek relief from all our  
heartaches,  
And seeking, find we seek in vain.

At length we come to Jesus,  
Our piteous cries in love He hears;  
He bids us come to His bosom,  
Tenderly He dries our tears.

And there with shame we remember  
How He was treated here;  
Many wrongs for us He suffered,  
No kind, helping hand was near.

Dear Lord, all alone and friendless,  
Thou didst endure this for me!  
Never was there such injustice —  
Can I not suffer this for Thee?

Ah yes! dear Lord, let me suffer,  
As long as Thou succor me;  
Only bless me, Lord, with patience;  
Draw me closer still to Thee!

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## THE REALITY OF GOD

Belief in God must be by faith, for our heavenly Father does not reveal Himself to people as He did in the days of the patriarchs or the apostles. We have the Bible and have proved its veracity as a history book and as a guide to good living, but there still remains the need to accept the reality of God without substantial, tangible encounters.

Our relationship with God is much like it was in the time of the birth of Samuel the prophet. It was said of that occasion, "The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision" (I Samuel 3:1).

God does have a way of giving a sense of direction in our lives, however, and when we are alert to these happenings, we can readily detect His leading, thus accepting Him as our Father in heaven.

Nebuchadnezzar was one of the most powerful monarchs in history. His power was absolute, his wealth was almost unlimited, and his glory was well known by everyone. He thought he was greater than any God, but was smart enough to recognize the God of heaven when God humbled him.

Nebuchadnezzar's reasoning was taken from him for a period of time, and he lived like an animal. When sanity returned, this is what he said, "And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:34).

This mighty man of the world recognized the intervention of God in his life. We, too, can see His leadership in our lives if we will look at life properly.

# The Advocate Responds

## to Your Questions

by Ray L. Straub

### THE BIBLE AND THANKSGIVING

The November, 1978, issue of the *Bible Advocate* published an editorial, "A Time to Express Thanksgiving." Similar articles have appeared in the magazine in previous years. Is it the position of the church to declare positively that we are to observe this time as the "Season of Thanksgiving"? If so, where is the Biblical support?

Even though the holiday may be national or religious, consider the members of the early church who renounced all national celebrations AND religious festivals such as Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, declaring them meaningless.

It has been suggested that many Pilgrims were Sabbathkeepers, but that still would not establish Thanksgiving as a holiday for the rest of the church. Any comment?

It is true that the early church was moving away from the observance of festivals which would reflect an attitude differing from our apparent wholehearted approval of Thanksgiving Day.

Perhaps a brief history of Thanksgiving Day as a holiday will be helpful. The first Thanksgiving was proclaimed by Governor Bradford of the Plymouth colony in 1621.

Thereafter, days for Thanksgiving were set aside on an irregular basis, usually following an outstanding achievement, such as George Washington's proclamation of a day on which to thank God for the new constitution.

Abraham Lincoln began the practice of proclaiming Thanksgiving each year on the fourth Thursday in November. It was not until 1941 that a joint resolution of the Congress established the fourth Thursday of every November be known as Thanksgiving Day, making it a national holiday.

Historically, it has always been a day when the people of this nation were called upon to give God thanks for benefits He sent during the previous year. This observance has not been borrowed from or identified with pagan religions. This distinguishes it from holidays like Christmas and Easter.

The feasts under the Levitical priesthood were more than national holidays.

They were part of a complex system of ordinances which foreshadowed the coming of Jesus and are Biblically classified as an inferior system of worship (Hebrews 10:1-9). It was appropriate for the early church to leave the inferior worship for the experience of full salvation through Christ.

Thanksgiving, on the other hand, is a part of the Christian's worship. It is our obligation to enter God's courts with thanksgiving. The emphasis on a single day of the year is focusing national attention on what is good. I find it difficult to condemn giving thanks to God whether motivated by our own joy, by a Christian friend, or by government proclamation.

The editorial referred to did not specifically state that Thanksgiving was an official church festival. Generally, the church's membership considers that giving thanks to God on Thanksgiving Day is appropriate. There is no official church decree to do so. Those who by reason of sincere conviction choose not to celebrate will not confront opposition.

The observance of Thanksgiving stands on its own merits. It is doubtful that the Pilgrims were Sabbatarian, but this would have no bearing on the issue anyway.

### KINDS OF TESTIMONIES

**Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 mention "testimonies." Is there any connection between these and the testimony that was put into the ark? Where is the ark today? Which testimonies are being referred to in Psalm 93:5 and 119:22? What is the Spirit of Prophecy in Revelation 19:10, and does this designate the true church of God?**

The word "testimony" as used in the Bible has several meanings. It identifies the law of God, written with His own finger: "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18).

The Ark of the Covenant was also known as the Ark of the Testimony and was infrequently referred to as the "testimony": "And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord,

that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony" (Leviticus 16:13).

The last known location of the Ark of the Covenant was in Solomon's temple.

In the Psalms, particularly the 119th, "testimony" means the same as "commandments," "judgments," "statutes" and "law."

The New Testament meaning of "testimony" is slightly different. It refers to a witness to facts from one who can speak about them from his own knowledge. John emphasizes that Jesus was sent by and from God, and His testimony reflects God and His Will with new and unique quality. He notes that Jesus is light (1:7; 8:12), He is the Word from heaven (3:31, 32), He is Truth (14:6) and bears witness to truth (18:37), and the Holy Spirit will continue His testimony (15:26; 1 John 5:6). Jesus' testimony refers to the significance and nature of His person.

The phrase "testimony of Jesus" is used in Revelation both to refer to the writings in the book itself, and as defined by John in his gospel and general letters. The revelation was given "by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1, 2). "I John . . . was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:9).

In chapter 19 John describes the marriage supper of the Lamb. He is overwhelmed and falls at the feet of the angel. John is requested not to worship the angel because the messenger is his "fellow servant, and of [his] brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." He advised, "Worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (verse 10).

This is a statement concerning the influence Jesus' testimony has on prophetic writings. The prophetic spirit gives witness to Jesus, and the testimony of Jesus is at the heart of a true prophecy.

There is nothing in the statement which offers special aid in identifying the true church of God aside from associating the angel with those who have received Jesus as Saviour and are numbered among His brethren.

by Ray L. Straub

# What is

**T**his world is the domain of Satanic powers. This realistic observation, though harsh, is the basis upon which the redemptive power of a loving God finds its superior authority. To water down the damaging atrocities of worldliness in favor of protecting the ego is to deny the glorious benefits of salvation and reconciliation to an absolutely righteous God.

Most Christians know they are obligated to oppose worldliness.

What is worldliness?

It is wise to resist temptation to define this term too simply. As this is being read, it may be useful to spend a few moments thinking about a definition that will be adequate, that comprehensively encompasses the full meaning of "worldliness."

Assuredly, it falls into the category of a problem. A person's ability to solve a problem is only as good as his ability to comprehend and define it. Definitions are not lacking, but accurate, specific ones are. This emphasizes the Christian obligation to have a good grasp of the meaning of "worldliness."

The Bible considers worldliness to be the unredeemed life, outside of Christ, dominated by sin. It is alienation from God and subjection to influences imposing oppression and depravity.

These definitions deserve explanation.

Worldliness may be comprehended in two facets by two terms which come from the Greek. There is *cosmos*, referring to the created world, and *aeon*, having more direct reference to this present age. More specifically, *cosmos* speaks of human living space, or the human situation affected by sin. *Aeon* suggests the evil, misery and death that hold sway in this present age. "Who gave himself for

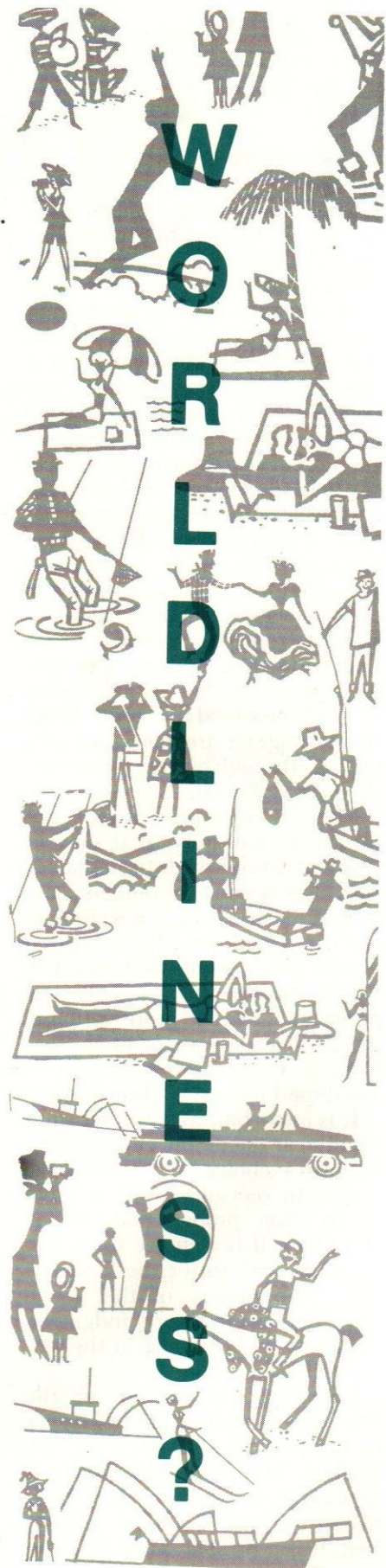
our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Galatians 1:4).

In Colossians 1:13, Paul speaks of a power of darkness from which the saints are delivered when translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). This is an age when the unsaved children of darkness and disobedience are both part of and victimized by the evil powers which have established themselves as adversaries of God and His family.

Satan is the god of this world (aeon). "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Corinthians 4:4). How sobering this statement is! Everyone is subject to some god. The god of this world deceives, afflicts, oppresses and dooms those in his domain while his worldly subjects suffer the illusion that they are happy and free. A blinded mind cannot perceive what is healthy and deprives itself of unspeakable glory. Such are the subjects of the god of this world.

How could a world, created by God, become the domain of God's enemy? This difficult question has stimulated the imaginations of many. Some would have us believe that sin entered the world and now rules principalities as a result of some miscalculation by God. Specifically, it is proposed that Satan was an archangel who, having determined to seek equality with God, was expelled from heavenly realms. Placed suddenly



into adversary roles, Satan's demonic powers and God's characteristic goodness went into competition, and they persist in these roles.

There is enough truth in this theology to make it intriguing. Whether fanciful or not, its existence is not needed to explain why the evil of this *aeon* turned out to be so burdensome. "For the creature (creation) was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature (creation) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:20, 21). This present *aeon* is victimized by sin because the Creator subjected it to such.

As Creator, God is victorious in every struggle. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:35, 37).

The *cosmos* represents the sinfulness in humanity, that part of God's creation which turned away and has become rebellious and hostile toward Him. It is depraved persons outside of Christ, headed for the judgment of condemnation.

The human, though weak and perishable, sins for gratification in the face of his recognition that God, as Creator, demands to be worshiped instead of the creature.

It is important to note that sin is an ethical condition entered into by man's choice. It results from failure to recognize God as God, giving Him proper thanksgiving and glory. It is a choice for which humanity will suffer the wrath of God. The display of this wrath does not await future judgment, but finds its beginning in the sinner's lifetime.

Rejecting the worship of the Almighty, God gives the rebel over to his own uncleanness and lust, sending him onto the road of depravity and rapidly increasing distance from the Author of salvation. It is a present on-going judg-

ment which finds its fruit in death and its end in annihilation.

The human worldly condition is the product of rebellion against God. It is found in the millions who seek to take command of themselves, attempting to fashion their own lifestyle and considering that they can do the work of God and thus be like Him.

The serpent's temptation of Eve offered this option. "For God doth know that in the day ye eat

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**"Worldliness is subjecting ourselves to the appetite for sin that exists within us."**

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thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). The possibility of enjoying god status attracted Eve and continues to deceive the masses of her children. When persons can stop their attempt to "play god" they improve their likelihood of turning to the real One.

Instead of finding the joyous life of right and good in the warmth of a relationship with the heavenly Father, the consequential holding to worldliness turns the glory of man's godlike image into death.

It is a fallacy of general Christian thought that the expression of worldliness is found only in the depravity of man's morals. The sensual atrocities listed in Romans 1:24-31 are not the exclusive exercise of self-managing rebels dominated by ungodly lust. Some worldly people are intensely religious!

Witness the wilfulness of the Jewish community for whom Paul expresses the burden, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:1-3).

Let the super righteous beware! The community of the pious is heavily infiltrated with those who carve out a theology and religion of their own design. It is a product of their own will instead of God's.

Before his conversion to Christ, Paul considered his religion to be God-centered, submissive, effective, and of superior quality. "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:6). When introduced to Jesus, his new King, Paul reflected a completely different perspective. He then counted his previous objects of devotion to be rubbish in contrast to the riches in Christ Jesus.

Rigid, closed-minded, overbearing proclamation of personally formed dogmas does not make a true prophet. It is often an expression of worldliness; though not sensual it is product of the flesh nonetheless.

Worldliness is not the collective deeds of young ladies who seek to beautify themselves through cosmetics, jewelry and dress, though that may be part of it. Worldliness is not engaging in recreation, flirting or laughing, though that also may be part of it. Worldliness is not the actions and attitudes that you, I or the church disapprove of, though that too may be part of it. The attachment of the word "worldly" onto some activity which offends us does not render the label accurate, no matter how strong and self-assured our own feelings.

Worldliness is subjecting ourselves to the appetite for sin that exists within us. It is failure to turn our lives over to righteous living, following repentance and forgiveness from God. It is persistence in self-management instead of allowing God to set our desires, standards and goals.

Paul beautifully summarizes the joy of one who has taken his leave from worldly influences, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

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