

The six great Doctrines of Hebrews 6

CHAPTER 6

THEREFORE leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES

JESUS is the author (beginner) of our eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9). He is the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last. He will give to him who is thirsty the fountain of the water of life—*eternal salvation*—freely (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

Jesus begins and ends every Christian's eternal salvation. But it is axiomatic that everything God begins spiritually, through human instruments, must start the smallest.

You were not separated from your mother's womb as a full-grown mature human being. It took anywhere from thirteen to twenty years for you to attain maximum growth in the physical sphere.

But the point is, you had to start somewhere. And that start was when your mother conceived. At that precise moment you were no bigger than

a pinpoint or the period at the end of this sentence.

And it is, figuratively, the same in the spiritual sphere. There was a time in the life of each true follower of Christ when he or she *began* to be a Christian. All start out as spiritual infants.

And if you are not yet a Christian, but do want to become one, you must begin as a babe in Christ—*not* as a full grown, mature Christian.

The First Principles. In the first grade a small child does not begin his study of mathematics by solving higher equations. He starts with $1 + 1 = 2$.

In like manner one must commence his Christian life by learning *the first principles* of the oracles of God—the first principles of the doctrine of Christ (Heb. 5:12; 6:1).

The newly begotten Christian must *first* be thoroughly grounded in the basics.

Every Christian, when first converted, is likened to one that uses milk, being unskillful in the word of righteousness because he is a *babe* in Christ (Heb. 5:13).

But what are the *first principles* of the doctrine of Christ? What is this "milk" of the word? What specific doctrines should you begin to understand even in "boot camp," that preliminary period just before you become a Christian (and during your early conversion period)? Where are they found in the Bible?

The following are listed in Hebrews 6:1-2.

- 1) Repentance from dead works
- 2) Faith toward God
- 3) The doctrine of baptisms
- 4) Laying on of hands
- 5) The resurrection of the dead
- 6) Eternal judgment

A summary explanation of each one of these fundamental doctrines is contained in the following pages.

"Repentance From Dead Works"

THE WAGES of sin is *death*," proclaimed the Apostle Paul. And every human being has contributed his or her share to the sins of this world. "For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," stated Paul to the Romans (Rom. 3:23).

We have all walked contrary to God's way of life in the past. We have performed the works of the flesh—we have fulfilled the desires and lusts of our minds and our bodies. We have walked according to the course set for mankind by Satan the devil.

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also *we all* had our conversation [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. 2:2-3).

Pretty plain! We have all performed works which have led only to eternal death. As Paul put it: "What

fruit had ye then in those things [sins] whereof ye are now ashamed? *for the end of those things is death*" (Rom. 6:21). He also wrote that we were "dead in *trespasses* and sins" (Eph. 2:1).

We were, so to speak, on a sort of spiritual "death row"—awaiting the execution of a justly deserved ultimate capital punishment. We earned this penalty by simply doing what comes naturally—sinning.

The death penalty for sins has to be paid. But God in His vast mercy has provided a way by which you

may avoid that extreme penalty.

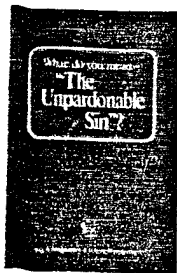
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God is not willing that any human being should have to pay that final penalty for sin (see I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9). He wishes that all would claim the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the remission of their personal sins.

This is the only means by which a person may avoid having to pay that terrible penalty. Jesus Christ became human flesh, lived a sinless life, and paid the death penalty on your behalf. He provided a way for you to enter into eternity!

But there is something you must do. You must accept that sacrifice on your behalf by demonstrating that you no longer wish to continue in that sinful way of life which qualified you for death in the first place. You demonstrate your acceptance of Christ's sacrifice by changing your way of living. This change of direction is called "repentance" in Bible terminology.

A SPIRITUAL "POINT OF NO RETURN"?

Can a person ever reach a "point of no return" in his relationship with God? Is there an unpardonable sin? The booklet, *What Is The Unpardonable Sin?* explains the Biblical answers to these questions. For your free copy, write to *The Plain Truth*, Pasadena, CA 91123. Or, if you live outside the United States, see back page for the address nearest you.



But what do we repent of? Sin.

The motions, actions or works which lead to death are simply defined as sin. Sin is the violation or transgression of any of God's great spiritual laws (I John 3:4).

To *repent* simply means to "change direction." We turn from the way of self-indulgence to the way of give. We stop serving the lusts and desires of our own flesh and begin to serve others. We turn from selfishness to selflessness.

When we demonstrate our willingness to change, God applies the sacrifice of Christ on our behalves. We are then free from the crushing guilt of sin. We are forgiven and our consciences are cleared.

Paul explained it this way:

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" (Heb. 9:14.)

How beautifully simple!

No amount of human works can bring about the forgiveness of sin. Even the great sacrificial laws of the Old Testament could not bring about forgiveness and a clear conscience. Those laws were only a type of what was to come. Paul explained that the Old Testament sacrificial system was "... a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that *could not make him that did the service perfect*, as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb. 9:9).

These works also were "dead" in that they could not produce eternal life. They could not forgive sin. They could not erase the record. They were unable to purge the conscience of the guilt of sin.

But they did picture or typify the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God—Jesus. As long as those under the Old Testament administration kept the sacrificial law, they were depicting the sacrifice of the Son of God.

Finally, when that great event actually occurred, it was no longer necessary to portray it in type. With the destruction of the second Temple in A.D. 70, the sacrificial system of ancient Israel also perished.

No amount of physical human

works can effect forgiveness of sin. There is no way we can "make up" for sin. Beads, indulgences, penance, fastings, or afflicting one's flesh in some other way will not erase the guilt of sin. You cannot punish yourself for sin, and thus avoid God's punishment!

Only a repentant spirit will bring about God's mercy. God looks to those who are of a meek and contrite spirit—those who tremble before the two-edged sword of His Word. God recognizes a broken spirit, a humble seeking for forgiveness and mercy.

God will honor the attitude of all who are willing to turn from works and deeds which are sinful and which result only in death. We are admonished through the writing of Matthew: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet [fit to show] for repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

True godly repentance is a gift from God. It is not something that can be "worked up" from within the human psyche. God instructs His ministers to be "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; *if God peradventure will give them repentance* to the acknowledging of the truth..." (II Tim. 2:25). Paul said "... the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4).

And in the book of Acts, we find that God has "... also to the Gentiles *granted* repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Those desiring a godly repentance must seek it from God.

True repentance represents a permanent change of direction. It is a commitment to a course from which there is no turning back. It is not a temporary sawdust-trail, tear-jerking emotional response. It is something much deeper and vastly more profound.

Repentance represents a total commitment—a point of no return. It places you on a course directly into eternal life. It represents a complete forsaking of the dead works of your former way of life. It is the first major step into eternity!

Is it any wonder then that God includes "repentance from dead works" as one of the basic and most fundamental of all Christian doctrines?

“Faith Toward God”

FAITH is a foundational and fundamental biblical doctrine. It is absolutely required for salvation. None may obtain eternal life without it.

But what *is* faith anyway? Is it just blind confidence? Or is it based on something much more substantial?

Perhaps an example would provide the best explanation.

How was the faith of Abraham expressed? He has been called the “father of the faithful.” His example should tell us what constitutes real faith.

God promised Abraham that he would become a “father of many nations” (Rom. 4:17). And yet (except for the illegitimate Ishmael) he was a childless 99 and his wife Sarah was well past the child-bearing age.

But Abraham did not look to the stark fact of Sarah’s previous menopause, nor to his own apparent impotence. He looked only to God’s promise to make him a father.

“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: *and being fully persuaded that, what he [God] had promised, he [God] was able also to perform*” (Rom. 4:19-21).

There you have it: a biblical definition of faith. It was expressed in slightly different words to Jewish Christians: “Now faith is the substance [assurance] of things hoped for, the evidence of things *not seen*” (Heb. 11:1). The fact that God had *promised* was all the evidence Abraham needed!

You do not need faith for something you already possess. Faith revolves around something “not seen”—something you do not yet have. Romans 8:24-25 proves the point. “For we are saved by hope: *but hope that is seen is not hope*: for

what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that [which] we see not, then do we with patience wait for it,” wrote the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle to the Gentiles was himself an example of living faith.

As a prisoner, Paul boarded a sailing ship bound for Italy. He warned the captain that the cargo and the passengers would be in jeopardy should they undertake the voyage. But, his warning went unheeded; and not long afterwards, three days of severely stormy weather took away all hope that any aboard would survive.

Although all the physical evidence—what they could see (the swirling tempest surrounding them)—indicated the contrary, Paul stood up and said: “. . . There shall be no loss of any man’s life among you. . . . For there stood by me this night the angel of God . . . saying, Fear not Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: *for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me*” (Acts 27:22-25).

Paul had “faith toward God” because *he believed God*. He had an unquestioning conviction that God would indeed do what He had promised.

The Patriarch Noah preceded Paul as an enduring example of “faith toward God.” The writer of Hebrews summarized Noah’s faith in Hebrews 11:7. “By faith Noah, *being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear*, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

Hebrews 11 is known in theological circles as “the faith chapter.” And well it should be because it is filled with “faith toward God” amply demonstrated in the lives of God’s patriarchs, prophets, kings, judges, commoners, and even one repentant prostitute.

One very negative example serves to illustrate this crux point: “Faith toward God” *involves simply believing what God says*.

Our first parents knew God existed; they knew He was their Creator. They saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears things we, in this twentieth century, are simply not privileged to hear or see.

God had told our first parents that they would surely die if they partook of the forbidden fruit. But, Adam and Eve did *not* believe God. Instead, they believed Satan. Adam and Eve had very little faith toward God, but they ironically seemed to possess a kind of perverted “faith” in the assurances of Satan the devil.

Now that we understand, by both positive and negative examples, just what faith is, we need to define its relationship to salvation.

Again, faith is absolutely required for eternal salvation. Not a single person will enter God’s family void of faith.

In summarizing his ministry for the Ephesian elders, Paul explained how he had testified to the Jewish people and the Grecians “. . . repentance toward God, *and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Acts 20:21).

In order to even start the salvation process, you must have faith in Christ’s blood—His atoning sacrifice for your sins.

Of course, you must also believe and know that God exists. “. . . He that cometh to God *must believe that he is . . .*” (Heb. 11:6). And you must believe that one reason God sent His Son Jesus Christ to this earth was to shed His blood in order to blot out your past sins (see John 3:16).

Paul put it this way: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation *through faith in his blood*, to declare his righteousness *for the remission of sins that are past*, through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25).

And so we must believe in Christ’s

sacrifice as an *historical event* that God applies to the repentant sinner, now, at this present time.

Remember Thomas, the doubting disciple? "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: *blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).

You have never seen Jesus Christ and neither have I. And yet our very salvation depends upon our *firm belief* that He was a historical person; that He was a member of the Godhead; that He suffered, bled and died because of our sins; and that He rose again to live forevermore.

Belief in Christ's blood—faith in His sacrifice for past sins—involves believing *what Christ said*. You cannot really believe in Jesus' sacrifice without believing His message—the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

On Jesus' first evangelistic tour,

He said: "... Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

(If you have not yet received our booklets *What Is the True Gospel?* and *Just What Do You Mean—the Kingdom of God?*, please write for your free copies immediately.)

Once a person has heard the true gospel of the Kingdom of God and has acted upon it by repenting, being baptized, and receiving God's Holy Spirit as a gift (see Acts 2:38), God imparts to that individual *the very faith of Jesus Christ*.

"For by grace are ye saved *through faith*; and that not of yourselves: *it [the faith] is the gift of God*," wrote the Apostle Paul (Eph. 2:8).

You cannot work up this saving faith toward God. It is His gift to you upon real conversion.

Notice Galatians 2:16, "... A man is not justified by the works of

the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. ..."

Grasp the fact that Paul does not say, "by a man's faith in Jesus Christ" (although that is the starting point); he says, "by the faith of Jesus Christ"—which means Christ's faith.

In summary, how may you possess "faith toward God"—this saving faith of Jesus Christ? First of all, you must repent of dead works (see the preceding article). Then you must be baptized as a symbol of *your faith* in Christ's precious blood to blot out your past sins, burying your old self in a watery grave (see the next article).

Then you will receive a portion of the very faith of Jesus Christ, which—if properly nourished—will eventually result in *your ultimate salvation*—eternal life in God's Kingdom.

"The Doctrine of Baptisms"

THE SIMPLE, unpretentious rite of baptism is meant to mark a miraculous change in you. It is to testify that you have embarked on a new, clean, right way of life that will end in complete satisfaction, unrestricted reward, total success and happiness unending. God wants you to realize this and take full advantage of His generous offer.

Most of Christendom understands in part that baptism is a fundamental doctrine of God's religion. But too few capture the overwhelming concept which its symbolism is meant to instill. Let's look back into the past, and come to understand more perfectly what God is revealing.

From the beginning God has wanted men to be clean—physically, mentally and spiritually. He designed an elaborate ritualistic system for His Old Testament Church to impress this grand lesson. He meant for you and me to find in the New Testament the brimming spiritual fulfillment which comes through Jesus the Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Paul wrote the book of Hebrews to Jewish Christians to help make this

plain. He shows how Old Testament ritual finds full spiritual expression in Christ. These Jewish people knew about the washings (baptisms) of the ritual (Heb. 9:10). They knew about the prescribed cleansing of clothes, people, priests (Ex. 19:10-14; Lev. 8:6).

But most people today have not understood the facts concerning the pre-Christian baptism of John. Recall that John the Baptizer was accepted by his community. This was not some new and unusual action. Pharisees and Sadducees would have had no dealings with anyone contradicting the traditions of the elders (Matt. 15:1-2). Why, they even rejected Jesus because they could not fathom the spiritual application which He made of Old Testament instruction.

But they did accept John's teaching about baptism. Sadducees and Pharisees—perhaps not yet having heard of Jesus—flocked to John, wanting to be baptized. Evidently the unrepentant ones wanted only to receive a mark of religious distinction. They wanted to advertise their "right-

eousness"—to prate and brag about their acceptance by this recognized, rustic, prophet of God (Matt. 3:1-7; Mark 1:4-7).

But John was doing God's Work. He was calling his countrymen to repentance—change. He wanted proof that they were doing something to change their miserable and evil lives. He culled out those who were not turning to God in heartrending contrition and obedience.

He would have no part in baptizing those who clung to their old evil ways—sins—dead works. His baptism was for the purpose of symbolizing spiritually clean people—those who had changed so much that they could take advantage of the Messiah's upcoming sacrifice for the remission—forgiveness—of their sins.

John was busily preaching and baptizing when Jesus came on the scene. Jesus set His seal of approval on John's baptism by undergoing the very same rite as the people who were sick of their sins and longed enough for forgiveness that they "brought forth fruit" proved by changed, righteous, obedient-to-God lives. Jesus

said His baptism "... fulfill[ed] all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

Later, after His death and resurrection, He expressly commanded His disciples to follow this very same procedure when they found people who would really accept, believe and do what He taught. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:16).

Baptism is the symbolic door to righteousness. You must go through that door if you are going to enter into eternal life. There is no other way.

Ritualistic washing can clean pots, pans, clothes and skin. But water can do nothing to cleanse the mind of man—it cannot reach him spiritually.

But John's baptism added more color to the picture of God's plan of salvation. It pointed to the Jewish need to improve in keeping God's eternal law. It insisted that they should accept the government of that law. John recognized their mental approach to life must be in accord with God's direction.

People must develop the discipline and volition to live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). John knew that even more than this would be required if people were going to finally enter into the Kingdom of God. He said: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he [Jesus] that cometh after me... shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11).

Baptism with the Holy Spirit is the ultimate baptism toward which we press. This is the highest form of baptism.

The only way that sin—which is the result of distorted mental action—can be remitted, scrubbed out, paid for, is through death (Rom. 6:23). If we were left to pay for our own sins, death would descend upon us and there could be no hope for the future. Only black oblivion! But God is merciful.

Even while we were yet in our sins Christ died for us. He paid the entire debt which encumbers us. We are free when we accept His payment in our stead and so can live (Rom. 5:8-9).

But that is not to say we just use

the sacrifice of Christ and blithely pursue our own way. A complete change is demanded when such a great price has been paid so that we can live—for we would have died without this payment.

Since Christ has been willing to die for us, then we must be willing to die for Him. When we are baptized we picture our willingness to participate in death, just as He did, in order that goodness, godliness (god-likeness), will prevail in our lives (Rom. 6:3). We will imitate the way He lived. He didn't break the law of God in one little point (Matt. 5:18-20). Neither should we!

He died horribly, ignominiously in order that people who recognize their shortcomings could be washed clean and given a new life—a changed, repentant, spiritual way of living.

Baptism pictures the burial of our old ways. A willingness to let our old ways go down into the grave to moulder away to nothing—the putrescence of our own ways covered and eaten up by death. Read Romans 6:4-6 with these thoughts in mind:

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

We, because we are sinners, die in baptism from a spiritual point of view. We no longer allow the inordinate desires of our fleshly, sensual existence to dictate. Christ became sin so we could live righteously—without sin—without breaking the law (II Cor. 5:21).

You and I are to be spiritually crucified with Christ. Then His mind—spirit—enters us. We live as Christ would live. He gave Himself for us to that purpose (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:6-7). The Christian is dead to the old ways of the natural man (Rom. 6:11-12). He no longer conforms to the way in which people naturally respond to life. His mind is renewed. He proves what God wants and does it (Rom. 12:2).

This way is entirely different. The

spiritual immersion which accompanies water baptism cleanses the man's mind. Materialistic, egotistical, vain, worldly, carnal, sensual stimuli no longer prevail. All ways that are contrary to the spirit are now abhorrent.

That spiritual immersion—baptism—is promised to all repentant people. On the day the New Testament Christian Church was founded, conscience-stricken converts implored the apostles to tell them what they needed to do to get right with God. Peter gave them the authoritative, simple answer: "Repent, and be baptized... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

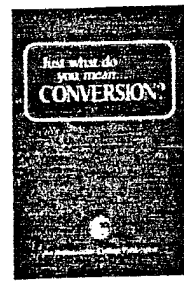
Those people, and all truly baptized Christians since, were baptized (immersed) into one body and have all been infused with the Holy Spirit—the holy mind of Christ.

To have that spiritual mind means that the filth of naturalness is washed out. The man now thinks, acts and does what God wants him to. He is a begotten spiritual son of God. One day he will be born into the very fam-

CONVERSION

Sudden experience... or lifelong process?

How do you define the word *conversion*? An adoption of religious belief? A "born-again" experience? Contrary to popular belief, the Bible teaches that there is more to conversion than a singular event, a one-time change. In the booklet *Just What Do You Mean—Conversion?* Herbert Armstrong supplies valuable insights on the subject. Request your free copy by writing to one of the addresses at the end of this publication.



ily of God to be with the Father and the Son forever.

Baptism brings together, in symbolic grandeur, three wonderful gifts from God: 1) the precious redeeming blood of Christ, 2) the water of regeneration, and 3) the Holy Spirit.

Baptism pictures the complete covering of a dead body, placing it in a watery grave. But as we have seen, much more is pictured in this illustration.

Even as the old, dead body of the convert is entombed in baptism, it is literally washed and cleansed. This complete immersion and washing of the exterior symbolizes the internal—mental—moral—washing and regeneration of the mind. A man is what his mind thinks.

The baptized Christian comes up out of his watery grave with an altogether different mind—a different way of thinking about life and the way to solve its problems. It is as if he, like Christ, had been resurrected. The restrictions of the flesh no longer predominate and encumber.

New values exist. A new life is begun. The old life—the old way—the old man—is left dead in the grave. Spiritual values take precedence. Every effort is made to satisfy God.

Not many people understand how God has intended, from the beginning, that all men should be baptized. You now know about this glorious fundamental truth of the Christian religion.

We have a free booklet entitled *All About Water Baptism*. The very next thing you should do—to please God and help yourself—is to send for it. The booklet answers such questions as: Is water baptism essential to salvation? What about the “thief on the cross”? Was he saved without it? What is the proper form, or mode—sprinkling, pouring or immersion? Should babies and children be baptized? Suppose you were baptized by a minister you have since lost confidence in. Should you be baptized over again?

Even if you are already baptized, there is probably much more that you need to know and do if you truly desire to serve God as He says.

“Laying on of Hands”

THIS doctrine is of critical importance to Christianity because it shows that God works and deals with mankind through fallible, imperfect human beings He chooses and sets apart for His purpose.

From the books of Moses to the book of Revelation, we find the laying-on-of-hands ceremony used in a wide variety of circumstances.

It was performed as an official ceremony, generally by an individual ordained or commissioned by God.

The ceremony centered around God's servant praying aloud as he placed his hands on the recipient of his petitions. It was a formal request to God, usually for a specific blessing, gift or authority as in ordination. Usually a simple, short ceremony, but filled with meaning.

Let's notice some of the interesting and varied ways in which men of God have used the laying on of hands.

Ordination. One of the earliest recorded biblical examples of this doctrine is found in Exodus 29 during an ordination ceremony. And strangely enough, the hands were laid on animals by the persons being ordained. Here is how it happened.

In Exodus 28:1 God commanded Moses to set apart Aaron and his four sons to be priests.

In Exodus 29:10 we read: “Then

bring the young bull to the Tabernacle, and Aaron and his sons shall *lay their hands* upon its head; and you shall kill it before the Lord, at the entrance of the Tabernacle” (*The Living Bible*). Verses 15-20 state that they were to do likewise with the two rams.

Why did they do this? Aaron and his sons were commanded to lay their hands on the animals' heads to symbolize their sins, their guilt being transferred to the animals which then suffered the penalty of sin Aaron and his sons should have received—*death*.

Of course, this all had symbolic meaning since only Christ's blood really atoned for sin.

The laying on of hands in this example symbolized the cleansing and purifying of the priests through the transfer of their sins to the animals.

We will soon see that the laying on of hands often symbolizes a transfer, transmittal or granting of special gifts, blessings or authority—elements that are literally priceless. Things that are *only* God's to give.

“Then bring the Levites to the door of the Tabernacle as all the people watch. There the leaders of the tribes shall *lay their hands* upon them, and Aaron, with a gesture of offering, shall present them to the Lord as a gift from the entire nation

of Israel. The Levites will represent all the people in serving the Lord. . . . In this way you will dedicate the Levites from among the rest of the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine. After you have sanctified them and presented them in this way, they shall go in and out of the Tabernacle to do their work” (Numbers 8:9-11, 14-15; *The Living Bible*).

Of course, the leaders' hands had no magical or mystical qualities. They merely symbolized and formally emphasized that *God*, not man, gave them authority and set them apart for a particular job. God commissioned them and issued them authority and jurisdiction to do His work.

This again demonstrates one of the great lessons of the laying on of hands—that God works through man—even in ordaining His own servants.

The Worldwide Church of God practices this doctrine today in ordaining qualified men to be deacons and ministers (and qualified women to be deaconesses).

Notice the New Testament example of ordaining deacons in Acts 6. The twelve apostles had chosen seven men to be deacons, “Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they *laid their hands on them*” (verse 6).

Acts 13:2-3 records the ordi-

nations of Barnabas and Paul.

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost [Spirit] said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

Again, God's will was carried out by His ministers praying and laying hands on the ones He had chosen. This was another example of God's issuing authority through His already ordained and chosen human servants.

Receiving the Holy Spirit. Christ gave the ministers of His Church the authority to baptize those who have truly repented of their sins. Along with the physical act of baptism is promised the Holy Spirit—*through the laying on of hands.*

Millions have supposedly been baptized, but very few have had hands laid on them for the receiving of the Holy Spirit after baptism.

Notice the example in Acts 8. Philip went to the city of Samaria to preach the gospel. Many believed and were baptized. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the gospel had been preached at Samaria, they sent Peter and John, "Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (verses 15-17).

Notice, they had been baptized days or even weeks before and had not received the Holy Spirit. God had withheld it until Peter and John had laid hands on them. God respected the order and authority He vested in His ministers. He granted His Spirit when they laid hands on them. (Write for our free reprints "How You Can Be Imbued With the Power of God" and "You Need God's Holy Spirit.")

An interesting sidelight to Acts 8 is the story of Simon the sorcerer.

He too was baptized in Samaria when the others were. After he saw that the others received the Holy Spirit when Peter and John laid hands on them and prayed, he desperately wanted the power to do the same.

"And when Simon saw that through laying on the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered

them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost [Spirit]" (verses 18-19).

The point is, Simon recognized that the apostles really did have God-given authority—authority which he saw demonstrated through the laying on of hands.

Healing. Christ set the example in healing. Luke 4:40 states, "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them."

Mark 6:4-5 relates another example. When Christ came to His own community. He found such little faith that He remarked: "... A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own

God is . . . dealing with mankind today through a physical group of human beings, a Church doing His Work.

kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he *laid his hands* upon a few sick folk, and healed them."

In Acts 28:8 we find that Paul also laid his hands on Publius' father to heal him.

Concerning His true ministers Christ stated: "... They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18). While many professing Christians know nothing of God's promise to heal, others make a public mockery and display of what they think is the healing power of God.

James 5:14 is a command from God to those who are sick: "Is there any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church: and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." No minister's hands are special or holy. No olive oil has any mysterious power. It is God Himself who heals through

His Holy Spirit; but He has prescribed a physical act to show our faith and trust in Him and to show our acceptance of the authority He has placed with His servants.

The book of Genesis contains a very moving example of the laying on of hands when Jacob blessed his two grandsons. Jacob was an old man and knew his time was short. He asked his son Joseph to bring the two boys to him.

"Israel [Jacob] was half blind with age, so that he could hardly see. So Joseph brought the boys close to him and he kissed and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, 'I never thought I would see you again, but now God has let me see your children too.'

"Joseph took the boys by the hand, bowed deeply to him, and led the boys to their grandfather's knees—Ephraim at Israel's left hand and Manasseh at his right. But Israel crossed his arms as he stretched them out to *lay his hands* upon the boys' heads, so that his right hand was upon the head of Ephraim, the younger boy, and his left hand was upon the head of Manasseh, the older. He did this purposely.

"Then he blessed Joseph with this blessing: 'May God, the God of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, the God who has shepherded me all my life, wonderfully bless these boys. He is the Angel who has kept me from all harm. May these boys be an honor to my name and to the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they become a mighty nation' (Gen. 48:10-16, *The Living Bible*).

Jacob went on to bless the boys individually, handing down the blessings promised to Abraham. The laying on of hands was symbolic of this transferral by God's authority.

The laying on of hands ceremony is very relevant to this society—to you and me! God is alive and actively dealing with mankind today through a physical group of human beings, a Church doing His Work. And He has provided in this day, as the Bible records He always has, spiritual guides, ministers, to represent Him, to oversee His Church. And He has given them a certain amount of jurisdiction to carry out their jobs.

The laying on of hands is the outward ceremony used in the delegation and use of that authority. God respects it and we should too!

"Resurrection of the Dead"

What is the real hope of the true Christian? Will he spend eternity lounging in idleness and ease? Or will the resurrected, newborn Christian spend eternity in happy, but productive, activity—faithfully serving his Creator?

Most professing Christians have a rather foggy idea of what future life in the Kingdom of God will be like. They know very little about biblical teaching concerning the "resurrection of the dead"—yet this is one of the basic doctrines of the Bible (Heb. 6:2).

But do you realize you can know what it will be like in the next life?

The Prophet Isaiah wrote: "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (Isa. 64:4).

But the Apostle Paul explained that a Christian can comprehend what God has prepared for those that love Him. "But God hath revealed them unto us [true believers] by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:9, 10). Many scriptures speak of this "mystery" (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3, 5, 9; Rev. 10:7).

Satan has deceived the whole world on this all-important subject of the resurrection of the dead (Rev. 12:9). Many scriptures reveal that the whole world is in darkness, ignorance and superstition.

The plain Bible teaching on the subject of the resurrection(s) has been submerged in darkness for many centuries. There are no Bible commentaries or dictionaries to which you can go to get the truth on this subject.

Invariably, you are given a noxious mixture of truth and error—light and darkness.

But it is high time for professing Christians to go directly to the Word of God to learn the real, unadulterated truth.

How deceived has the world become on this vital subject of the resurrections?

A common belief is expressed in the 1972 edition of *The World Book Encyclopedia*: "Most Christians believe that on the *last day* of the world *all the dead* will come to life. They call the day, Judgment Day, because God will judge everyone" ("Resurrection," XVI, p. 245).

Some believe that at death their "souls" go immediately to heaven, purgatory, limbo or hell.

"The Westminster Shorter Catechism (question xxxvii.) states the doctrine that the *bodies of the dead* rest in their *graves* till the *resurrection*, but that their *souls* do immediately pass into glory [heaven]. This was the view of the Reformers" ("Death," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1911, p. 382).

According to this teaching the "body" must rest in the grave till the "soul" can be reunited with it at the resurrection.

If the righteous are already in heavenly bliss, is it logical to think that they would be made to return to this earth to be reunited with their "bodies"?

[Editor's note: For an in-depth look into the false concepts of heaven, hell and the immortal soul, write for these free publications: "What Is Man?" *What Is the Reward of the Saved?* and *Is There a Real Hell Fire?*

There are several references in the Old Testament to the resurrection, but only the Prophet Daniel begins to hint that there might be more than one resurrection.

Daniel wrote: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to *everlasting life*, and some to *shame and everlasting contempt* [or abhorrence]" (Dan. 12:2).

And in the New Testament, Jesus Christ said: "... The hour is coming, in the which *all that are in the graves*

shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done *good*, unto the *resurrection of life* [eternal]; and they that have done *evil*, unto the *resurrection of damnation* [judgment]" (John 5:28, 29).

The Apostle Paul, when he was speaking before Felix, the governor of Judea, said that he had "hope toward God" of a resurrection, in which, affirmed Paul, the Jews also believed. He plainly told Felix "that there shall be a *resurrection* of the dead, both of the *just* and *unjust*" (Acts 24:15).

In none of the previous passages is the time factor specified. However, other New Testament Scriptures do clarify it.

Paul wrote at length regarding the resurrection(s) in I Corinthians 15.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive. But every man in his own *order*: Christ the firstfruits; afterward *they that are Christ's* at his [second] coming. Then cometh *the end*..." (verses 22-24).

Now if one turns to the twentieth chapter of Revelation, he can see what is meant by "the end." Paul was referring to the end of the one-thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints on this earth. It will not be until sometime *after* the thousand years are over that the *second resurrection* occurs (see Rev. 20:7-12).

Jesus Christ is depicted in Revelation 19:11-21 as coming on "a white horse" and then "he shall [in the future] rule them [the nations] with a rod of iron" (verse 15).

The resurrected saints (joined by the living saints) will be caught up to meet Christ in the air at His second coming, and they as kings and priests will "reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

To these saints Christ promises: "He that overcometh... to him will I give *power over the nations*: and he shall rule them [under Christ] with a rod of iron..." (Rev. 2:26, 27).

But when and how will these glori-

fied, then-made-immortal saints rule with Christ? And for how long?

The Apostle John was inspired to give the answer: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded . . . and they lived and reigned [ruled] with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

John, in vision, saw those who had been beheaded now resurrected (at Christ's triumphal second coming) and given governing positions or "judgment."

Paul gives more details of this glorious resurrection of the saints. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. . . . For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thes. 4:14-17).

Note that it does not say the saints will go to "heaven" to meet Christ, but that He will come from "heaven" to the atmosphere of this earth, and the saints will rise to meet Him "in the air."

Now notice a prophecy back in Zechariah which shows where Christ and the saints will go—after this rendezvous in the air:

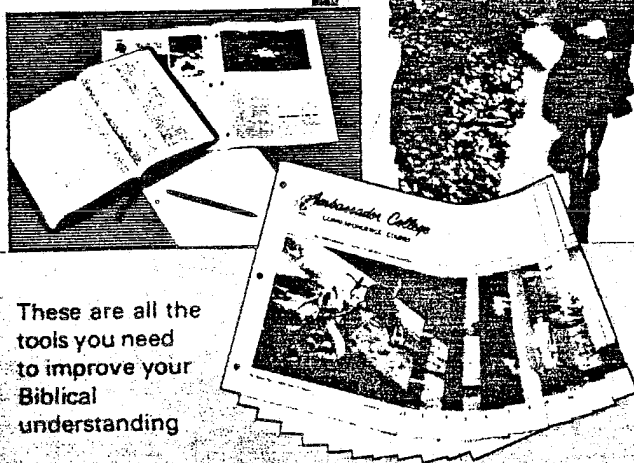
"And his feet [the Lord's—verse 1] shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives . . ." (Zech. 14:4).

At this time will Christ be alone? ". . . And the Lord my God [wrote Zechariah] shall come, and all the saints with thee" (verse 5). But where will Christ go? Back to heaven with the saints? "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (verse 9).

It should not amaze us to find that Christ will return to stand on the Mount of Olives. Nearly two thousand years ago, His angels told the disciples that Christ would return to this earth just as He left it—and He had been standing talking with His disciples atop Mount Olivet just before this promise was given (Acts 1:4-12).

THE WORDS
GOD IS THE
FOUNDATION
OF KNOWLEDGE

GET
WISDOM
GET
UNDERSTANDING
Prov. 4:5



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The Apostle Paul also spoke of Christ's coming at the "last trump"—the time when He will gather His saints unto Himself. "Now this I say, brethren, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*; neither does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and *this mortal must put on immortality*" (I Cor. 15:50-53).

These and other scriptures show that it is only the righteous who are resurrected at Christ's second coming.

John shows that those who had been martyred will be raised to life and to a position of rulership during the thousand-year rule of Christ. But the unjust will not be resurrected until the *end* of this period: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This [referring to those martyred—verse 4] is the *first resurrection*. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first resurrection*: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:5, 6).

Then, after the thousand years are expired, Satan goes out to stir up more trouble on this earth. And it is still some time later before the Great White Throne Judgment takes place—at which time the others who are still dead (years after the millennium has ended) are made to "*stand before God*" in the *second resurrection*—when they have their *first chance*.

What is your guarantee that you will be resurrected when Christ returns to this earth? How can you make sure you will be in the first resurrection to immortality?

It is "they that are *Christ's* at his coming" who will be in the first resurrection (I Cor. 15:23).

But who are "Christ's"? Paul said: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

It is only those who are filled and

led by the Spirit of God who will be in the first resurrection. "For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the [begotten] *sons of God*" (verse 14).

God's Spirit in us is like a *seed* that is developing into godly character.

Paul continues: "But *if the Spirit* of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also *quicken* [make alive] your *mortal* bodies by [the power of] his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (verse 11).

There it is! If we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in us when we *die*, then we will be resurrected through the power of that same Spirit—at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul then explains that we are

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earnestly waiting for that time when we shall be born as spiritual beings into the family of God. Remember, Christ said: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

Paul explained this soon-coming new birth: "For the earnest expectation of the creature [man] waiteth for the *manifestation of the sons of God*" (Rom. 8:19). That is what the true Christian waits for—earnestly longing for the time when he will be *born* into the family of God—as a divine, glorified son of God.

He continues: "... Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption [sonship], to wit [in other words], the *redemption of our body*" (verse 23).

What did he mean by "the redemption of our body"? Paul begins to explain in the book of Philip-
pians.

By way of background he men-

tions that he gave up *everything* in order to serve Christ and became willing to suffer "the loss of all things" (Phil. 3:7, 8). Why?

"That I may know him, and the *power of his resurrection*... If by any means I might attain unto the *resurrection of the dead*" (verses 10, 11).

He then went on to explain that "our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven..." (verse 20).

And it is from there—from heaven—that we "look for the Saviour." "Who [meaning Christ] shall *change our vile body*, that it may be *fashioned like unto his glorious body*, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (verses 20, 21).

This redemption of the body—this *change* from mortal flesh to a spiritual body—is the only hope held out to the Christian.

The resurrected, glorified, immortalized saints will live in eternal happiness for ever and ever: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain..." (Rev. 21:4).

Each of these sons of God, then born into the very God family, will "*inherit all things*; and I will be his God, and he shall be *my son*" (verse 7).

Will they ever have to suffer any more evil trials? "And there shall be no more curse... and his servants shall *serve him*" (Rev. 22:3).

What will they do throughout eternity? Just sit back and bask in idleness, ease and luxury, lapping up never-ending rivers of pleasures?

No, they will be *busy*. "... And they shall *reign* [rule or govern] for ever and ever" (verse 5). And remember, "his servants shall *serve him*"—throughout all eternity (verse 3). Then will come to pass the inspired words of Hebrews 2:8: "Thou hast put *all things* under his [man's] feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him."

We should strive to be in the "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6). It is spoken of as "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). Those who rise in that resurrection will be wonderfully blessed of God!

"Eternal Judgment"

ETERNAL judgment! It scares some.

Eternal judgment? It makes others laugh.

To the religious, the foreboding threat of "eternal judgment" portends a fearful apprehension of a majestic throne upon which sits a stern judge condescendingly looking down upon a quaking skeleton of a person who is barely able to keep his knees from knocking against one another.

To those "modern sophisticates" not given to religious "superstition," the archaic threat of "eternal judgment" is scornfully looked upon as an ancient remnant out of man's distant past, a useless appendage, a shriveled-up relic of a bygone age.

Yet in clearly listing "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" in Hebrews 6:1-2, the Apostle Paul concludes these absolutely foundational principles of God's Word with the phrase "eternal judgment."

"Eternal judgment" in the Space Age? Sneers of ridicule—or perhaps chills of fright! "Eternal judgment" seems to do everything to the modern mind except portray what it really means.

Disregarding for a moment the fine distinctions between the Hebrew words translated "eternal" (*olam, ad*) and the Greek word (*aionios*), let's for a moment consider what the English word "eternal" means. How can we express it? A line that has no ends, the progression of time forever?

How can the human mind ever conceive of anything without beginning and without end? Let your mind wander in space or in time—then in both. Consider the earth, the solar system, the sun, our Milky Way galaxy (in which the earth is but tucked away in one small corner), the galaxies within our local galactic structure, and then the universe of galaxies on beyond—all engrossed in endless eons of time.

But, the physical is finite, no mat-

ter how long, no matter how large. What God offers is eternal, beyond the physical—incredibly beyond, incomprehensibly beyond! Physical events and time spheres no longer have meaning. When eternity is considered, a million years spent on each planet in the entirety of the universe becomes but a moment.

Nothing in the physical creation even approximates eternity. Nothing physical is eternal; nothing physical will ever be eternal. Eternity by its very nature, by the enormous vastness inherent in the word itself, transcends the physical. *This* is what God offers us! Eternity. Beyond the physical.

The human mind can *almost* comprehend the meaning of eternity. This is remarkable by itself. We can begin to conceptualize eternity. We can think of that line with no beginning and no end; we can think of the unending vastness of time that occurred before our birth and will go on after our death.

We can consider eternity, but we cannot comprehend it. Whenever we try, we become frustrated. Our brains balk, our gray matter turns into soup. We can understand just enough to understand that we can never understand.

That's the uniqueness of the human mind—almost but not quite able to comprehend. It's there—eternity is there—but just out of our reach, just beyond our grasp.

Is this coincidental? Isn't it strange that what our Creator holds out to us as the ultimate goal of human life—eternity—is something we are almost able to comprehend, but yet with awesomeness of mystery still surrounding it?

Even assuming the entirety of the universe is as old as cosmologists tell us—some 10 to 15 billion years old—the totality of this time (as incomprehensibly endless as it seems compared to our short 70-odd year life spans) is but a few fleeting seconds in the endless vastness of eternity. It is

far less than one small grain of sand compared to the multiple billions of tons of sand on all the beaches surrounding all the oceans in the entire world.

Eternity as a concept defines the boundary reaches of the human mind; almost, in a manner of speaking, the interface between the physical and the spiritual. Because nothing physical is eternal. The physical by very definition is subject to change and decay (see II Cor. 4:18).

To those of us who are extremely busy every day of our lives (whether commuting to work, putting in a hard day at the office, getting our exercise, coming home at night, having dinner, playing with the children, perhaps going out to a party or a movie and coming home to bed—a real packed day in a very busy week), a year, 365 days, is an awfully long time.

And yet the reality of eternity is always there. It never leaves us; it is just overshadowed by what may seem to be the more pressing needs of the moment: How much do eggs cost now? Will I have enough gasoline next Sunday? Will I be promoted on my job? What movie (or cinema) shall we see this weekend? When are the in-laws coming to visit? How are the children doing in school?

Yet, all the while, the absolute reality of the eternity of time that will follow your death is ever-present and ever-real. If you don't feel its pressure, you are deluding yourself.

But we are not left without hope. The Creator God—the God who created us, who designed our human minds able to *almost* comprehend eternity, has given us the knowledge—knowledge that has had to be revealed—of what eternity can mean to human beings.

As Paul described in this culminating doctrine of God's Church—eternal judgment—God in His Word takes us beyond, takes us to reality, takes us to sanity, takes us to eternity.

To those steeped in the "heaven-hell Churchianity" so long offered as the biblical model, "judgment" means a decision reached after carefully considering every sin that you have ever committed from the first time you ever hit your baby brother or talked back to your parents until your last, wheezing gasp as an old man or woman about to expire.

How many sins do you think you have committed in your life? How long would it take someone to read a detailed account of every one of them?

Let's assume the average person sins about once a day, and since God says a sin is a sin, we'll include all the "little" sins as well as the horrendous ones. Consequently, in the average lifetime, the average person might sin roughly 25,000 times. (Granted, some of these sins would take longer explanations, covering three to four pages of written material to describe the exact situation; other of these sins might just take one to two lines, explaining why you "had" to utter that unfortunate word in that unforeseen circumstance.)

Now, *facetiously* assuming that in the future God would have to consider the lives of, let us say, ten billion human beings, and giving God the benefit of the doubt that He could go through all the intricate details of every single sin in the fleeting instant of one second, it would still take God roughly (and this is, of course, extremely rough) 100 million years to fully analyze the totality of everybody's sins. And, of course, God couldn't make a "judgment" until He did such—or so we might be led to believe.

Isn't it strange that when we hear the word "judgment" we automatically feel bad? We have a negative, depressing mood overwhelm us. Why does the word "judgment" evoke such a reaction? Is this what God intended His Word to portray? Is this what Paul meant in Hebrews 6:2, when he spoke of eternal judgment?

No it isn't!

But, thank God, our God is the real God! And the "judgment" taught by this world's religion is as fallacious as it is foolish.

When we read of "judgment" in the Bible, we should experience

waves of elation and joy, great excitement, enthusiasm and expectation concerning the fantastic events awaiting us in the future.

To give what must be a very weak analogy: Think of the graduation day after four years of high school or college. That's the day when, after thousands of hours of hard work and classes, homework, periods of nervous exhaustion, tension and concern—finally, after all that, a person has made it! He has completed the course; he has achieved the goal. Following each graduation, every individual has won some new place. For example, many high school students have been accepted at the colleges of their choice; many college students in the medical, dental, law, or professional or graduate schools of their choice.

There are generally few failures; although some each year do fail. But graduation for the vast majority is a very happy time—a time of confidence, achievement, success and joy.

So it will be with God's judgment. Only God's "graduation day" will be from far more than a few years of study; it will be from a lifetime—and the rewards will be far greater than any diploma or promotion, because from God's graduation the rewards will be *eternal*.

The "judgment" is really a decision—a decision that your Creator, your personal Father in heaven, the very God who gives you breath and life, the Being that hears your prayers and loves you more than any father loved any son, makes for your benefit.

The judgment is when God decides or informs you of His decision of what, where, and how you will be spending eternity. And for the vast majority, this will surely be the greatest moment in their entire lives—incomprehensibly greater than everything they have done before!

The marriage supper in Revelation 19:9 and the breathtaking new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 can only begin to hint at the magnificent reality that God has planned for all human beings.

As God the Father has structured all spiritual and physical reality, there are many areas of responsibili-

ty in the future that are needed to be filled by individual human beings. This is why Christ said in John 14:2, "In my father's house are many mansions. . . ." The universe is a big place, and eternity is a long time. God has a lot to do (even though we may not know much about it now—see Hebrews 2:8-9) and He has created us to become sons to help Him administer all reality forever.

How does God decide what individual responsibility or position (or whatever God chooses to call it) each of us will have in the future? He knows and loves us personally, and will choose the best possible situation for every one of us. We will surely each have our own specific areas of responsibility, our own personal likes and dislikes—we will *not* be like statues in a garden, or candles in a monastery, set up merely to adorn or make God feel better. We will be real personalities doing real jobs, individually and personally.

Our Father, your Father, knows you personally. He knows the type of work, recreation and situations that you enjoy the most. He has designed reality to give you everything that you have always wanted.

But you have a responsibility also. You have to qualify. You have to attain the requirements for "graduation"—and, as you do attain these requirements, God will determine how well you have done and give you your reward in direct proportion to how successful you have been. As Christ said in Matthew 16:27, referring to the time of His spectacular return to earth: ". . . And then he [Christ] shall reward every man according to his works."

How long does it take God to "judge" an individual? Does He quickly come to a decision in a few minutes, upon being given the "pluses" and "minuses" of your entire life? Or is judgment a *process*?

I Peter 4:17 states that "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God. . . ." In fact, judgment and development of the people of God today must take place in order that God may, during this age, develop such a group to assist Him in "judging," in ruling, in developing, in encouraging the vast multitudes of people to be taught in the millennium following the return of Christ.

And what of the multitudes of untold billions who have long since died and who have forever been forgotten—from those who died in the Noachian Flood or perished from the Black Death to those who were vaporized in the atomic-bomb blast over Hiroshima? Are these people lost and forgotten? Is there a "judgment" reserved for them?

Remarkably and incredibly, the biblical "plan of salvation"—which is a religious-sounding term indicating the process by which the Eternal Creator works with the human beings He created to bring them into the God family—will eventually be made available to everyone.

That means *everyone* who has ever lived, from a fifth-century, newborn baby that died after two weeks of a labored life in some backward province in China, to old men who have lived beyond 100 years of age in the Caucasus of Central Russia.

All who have not been called of God in this life will eventually have that opportunity as fully and completely as anyone has ever had the chance—all will have their chance, their first chance, in the future. (Write for our free article "Is This the Only Day of Salvation?")

But what of us who are participating in this worldwide Work of God in one way or another? Many of us will not be in future groups that will be called of God. God only gives one chance to every individual; but that chance must be a real chance.

When a person knows and knows that he knows that there is a God in heaven, that that God inspired the Bible and has opened that person's way to be baptized and receive God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and be put into God's Church—then, in all probability, he has had his chance.

But we have both an opportunity and a responsibility: an opportunity to be called of God now in this age, to help do His work of witnessing to and warning the world, and an awesome responsibility to commit ourselves and our lives to God *in toto* now.

When Peter stated that judgment must begin at the house of God, he was directing his comments to those whom God was calling.

How do you know if God is calling you? You cannot know from any analysis of your blood. Examining

your brain waves won't help, nor will an electrocardiogram.

There are ways of knowing, however. Are you moved deeply when you read your Bible? Do you really begin to see the plan of God as outlined from Genesis to Revelation? Are you fascinated and excited by spiritual concepts you see expounded and explained?

And what about your own personal life? Do you see yourself as God sees you? Do you feel, on one hand, excited and enthralled at the prospects for the future, at the reason why God created you; and, at the same time, do you see yourself as a worthless worm, a disobedient fleshly being who desperately needs to be forgiven of his sins by his Saviour?

Finally, do you yearn for the opportunity to associate and fellowship with people who have similar feelings to your own who are themselves thoroughly captivated by the opportunity to participate in this worldwide Work of God?

God in this end time, as the return of Jesus Christ soon approaches, as the need to extend and establish His Work over the entirety of the world increases, has raised up His Church. There are now hundreds of consecrated and ordained ministers throughout the world (and especially

in the United States, England, Canada and other English speaking nations) whose sole function is to work with, encourage, help and to serve those people whom God is calling.

If you have any questions that you would like answered regarding the Bible, God's plan of salvation, God's true Church, or your personal life, please do not hesitate to make use of these ministers whom God has provided for you. If you want to meet people who have similar views to yours—others whom God has placed in His Church—if *God is calling you*, or if you simply want some spiritual help and advice, *please write to us* and we will immediately inform you of those in God's ministry. Or if you would prefer faster service, please dial this toll-free number in the continental United States: 1-800-423-4444. (Readers in California, Alaska, and Hawaii may call 213-577-5225 collect.)

You may be very surprised to learn that God's ministers are available within or near your hometown. Again, if you want to meet a minister of God, write to us. (Worldwide mailing addresses are on the back page of this reprint.) If God is calling you, it is *your responsibility*. For "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God."

If You'd Like to Know More

Many hundreds have written asking if we have representatives in their local areas to counsel with them personally and to answer their questions.

The answer is yes, we do.

The Worldwide Church of God stations personal representatives (most are ordained ministers) in the United States and British Commonwealth and many other areas of the world. These local ministers will visit you, if invited, directly in your own home.

So if you have spiritual matters to discuss or questions to ask about biblical topics such as repentance, baptism, etc., please feel free to write us and request a private appointment. Worldwide mailing addresses and phone numbers are as follows:

• United States: P.O. Box 111, Pasadena, California 91123 (or simply dial this toll-free number in the continental

U.S.: 1-800-423-4444. In California, Alaska and Hawaii call 213-577-5225 collect).

- United Kingdom, Eire, Europe and Middle East P.O. Box 111, St. Albans, Herts., England AL2 2EG (or dial this number in U.K.: Radlett [092 76] 2670).
- New Zealand and Pacific Isles: P.O. Box 2709, Auckland 1, New Zealand (or dial Auckland 686-114—reverse the charges).
- Australia: P.O. Box 202, Burleigh Heads, Queensland 4220 (or dial this number: 075-35-4233—reverse the charges).
- Canada: P.O. Box 44, Station A, Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2M2
- South Africa: P.O. Box 1060, Johannesburg 2000 (or dial this number: 011-216406)