

Good News Unlimited

October, 1984

Solo Christo—Sola Scriptura—Sola Fida—Sola Gratia

**How
Should
Christians
Give?**



Editorial

When Paul stopped at Miletus while sailing from Greece to Jerusalem, he called a board meeting of the nearby Ephesian church (Acts 20:17-35). The elders came to hear Paul's words of encouragement and exhortation, and to bid him a final farewell. It was a tender scene as the church leaders accompanied their founder to a sad goodbye at his ship — and the emotion was intensified by Paul's certainty that he would never see them again (vv 22, 23, 25, 38).

The final point of Paul's farewell speech is his affirmation that he has provided for himself financially, that he has given to the poor, and that the elders at Ephesus should do likewise. He concludes with the assurance that this principle is in line with the words of Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (v 35).

This is one of the few times that a saying of Jesus is reported which does not appear in the Gospels. Yet, it reminds us of another statement which was recorded: "Give, and it will be given to you. . . . For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Lk 6:38).

I recall one of my seminary professors telling a story of a conversation he overheard between two students. It was the end of the quarter and one student was trying to give away a valuable textbook that he felt he would not need any longer. The one on the receiving end was somewhat embarrassed at the other's generosity, and urged him, "No, don't give it to me. Let me pay for it. I don't feel it's right for me to take it for nothing."

After the discussion continued for some minutes, the professor stepped in. Placing his hand on the shoulder of the reluctant recipient, he said, "Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' take the book and let him get the greater blessing!"

There was an element of humor in his statement, but also an element of seriousness. The student who so selflessly shared his textbook was indeed manifesting the spirit of Christ — and it would be a shame to prevent him from doing so.

I once had an office clerk who would come into my office just before secretary's day and circle in bold red pen the date on my calendar! Of course I was happy to oblige with a gift, but I was disappointed that the spontaneity had been taken away. I felt that I was no longer giving out of my own wish to do so, and receiving the joy that accompanies such self-giving, but instead I was compelled to perform. I had been robbed of the blessing and joy I could have received.

Much too often the Christian church has abused the saying of Jesus regarding the blessing the giver receives. The pressure has destroyed the pleasure.

At Good News Unlimited we want everyone to receive their rightful blessings. Thus we cannot use the fundraising techniques that are sometimes employed. Only as we give spontaneously, from the heart, out of love for God and concern for the gospel, only then will the words of Jesus become true for us.

There may be blessings in receiving. But there are greater blessings in giving. Let's not rob each other the joy that results from selfless sharing from a heart touched by the message of the cross.

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The Foolish Wise Man

by Desmond Ford

Years ago there was a man who loved diamonds. His house resembled a castle rather than a mansion. It was surrounded with a lofty wall, one which no one could climb without giving alarm. His treasure was kept in a safe in the wall of his bedroom, so that it could not be reached without first waking the owner. The safe was so constructed that it could not be forced without discharging four guns and setting off an alarm in every room. His bedroom was like a prisoner's cell. It had but one small window, and the massive bolt and lock were made of the stoutest iron. In addition to these precautions, a case containing twelve loaded revolvers stood by the side of his bed.

Did this man really possess his diamonds, or did his diamonds possess him?

The Grab for Gold

Do you remember how everything King Midas touched turned to gold? What wouldn't you give for that, for the ability to touch and turn to gold anything you wished? King Midas touched his daughter and to his surprise she turned to gold. He didn't expect that. She not only turned to gold, she ceased to breathe. He then touched his food and it turned to gold, now he would cease to eat. He touched his drink, and it became a little golden sea. Perhaps turning things to gold is not all it's cracked up to be.

There is an Arabian story of a ruler who at the sack of his city, was imprisoned in his treasure chambers. He starved to death among bars of gold and sparkling gems. The story is a parable of life. Many starve to death spiritually, as they pursue the super dollar.

When Cortez came to Mexico he was asked by the Aztecs what commodities or drugs he wanted. He was promised an abundant supply. But Cortez was not interested in drugs and responded by saying that he and his Spaniards had a disease of the heart which nothing but gold could cure, and he had received word that Mexico had a bountiful supply. Under the pretense of a friendly conference, he made Montezuma, the Aztec ruler, his prisoner, and ordered him to pay tribute to the king of Spain. Immense sums were paid to Cortez. But his demand was insatiable. The Aztecs revolted. Cortez displayed amazing generalship, but millions of the natives were sacrificed to the disease of covetousness.

The Foolish Wise Man

Jesus told a story warning us about this disease. Covetousness seems so respectable, but it becomes a disreputable cheat. Here is our Lord's warning:

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?"

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there will I store

all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"

"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:13-21)

The hero of this story was what all of us would like to be. He was rich, prosperous, and successful. All men thought he was very wise indeed, but God called him a fool! We are told the point of the story very clearly. It is a warning against covetousness.

"Did this man really possess his diamonds, or did his diamonds possess him?"

It has been said that genius is a tumor on an ordinary faculty. Covetousness is like that — it is a tumor that grows on the natural desire to care for real physical needs.

Jesus and Riches

Jesus did not indiscriminately condemn wealth. It is true that he challenged the rich young ruler to sell all and to follow him. That was an individual prescription and should not be made into a universal rule. He did not require poverty as indispensable for discipleship. Some of his first followers had comfortable houses. He did not call them to ascetic poverty. Jesus came eating and drinking. One of Jesus' followers was a well-to-do centurion who built a synagogue for his Jewish friends. Then there was the home at Bethany where Jesus often stayed. That home was a home of some substance. The soldiers at the cross evidently thought the robe of Jesus was worth owning. So we must say, as George Adams Smith said years ago, a certain degree of prosperity and comfort is necessary for the free exercise of religious faculties.

But what a devastating warning against excessive love of riches is found in the story of the greedy farmer as told by Jesus. We do well to note his "take heed." Jesus is saying that covetousness is a fatal sin.

From Scripture we learn that Baalam, Achan, Gehazi, Judas, Demas and a multitude of others lost their way through covetousness. Covetousness robs life of its best while promising to give something better. Covetousness makes us fret continually at the workings of Providence. We keep demanding more and more. We become dissatisfied with our homes and with our surroundings. The heart becomes hardened, and the benevolent affections are destroyed. Our covetousness gradually crystalizes into habit and principle. It narrows and pinches the whole being, it grows the stronger by indulgence. The more it has, the more it wants.

The Source of Crime

Covetousness is responsible for crime. Sociologists tell us that the desire for more ultimately ruins the fabric of society. A strong desire to get confuses the judgment as to the proper means of getting, and

gradually becomes unscrupulous in its use of means.

Much of the known crime of the world, some of it the most atrocious and unnatural, springs directly from covetousness. Whence comes the reckless stock speculation and gambling which agitate the markets and unsettle trade? Whence the breaches of trust and the forgeries which startle us by their frequency and enormity? Whence the robberies, burglaries, and murders which have affrighted every age and still fill our sleeping hours with danger. The answer is plain — from the desire to get. Such a desire in time becomes over-mastering, it balks at nothing.

The Only Source of Happiness

When Jesus spoke about happiness in the Sermon on the Mount, he said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. (Mt 5:3-9)

Note that his blessings are pronounced according to what persons are not according to what persons have.

"A certain degree of prosperity and comfort is necessary for the free exercise of religious faculties."

As we look at the man in our Lord's story, we have already noticed that he was wise, he knew how to fill his barns. His investment was a good one, for land cannot be consumed by fire or removed by foe. He understood his business, he was industrious, he was careful, and he was frugal. He knew how to save. He was highly respected and influential, yet he was a fool. He was a bad calculator, he undertook to solve the problem of life and he proved a wretched bungler in the use of figures. He omitted the greatest factor in life. He forgot God. If God is forgotten in life, life will not work out. This is the deceptiveness of covetousness, God is forgotten. He was not rich towards heaven. He left God out of his calculations. That was his mistake.

Do you remember the story of the shipwrecked mariner on an inhospitable island perishing with famine? One day a box was suddenly swept to shore and he rushed eagerly to loosen its fastenings. But he fell back in fainting disappointment and consternation, for the box was full of gems and pearls. It was filled with riches that could not sustain his life.

Will this life of ours with its undying hunger be appeased with indigestible jewels? Will it be merry then? Opulent men grow old just like other people. Some die before they grow old.

The Wise Man's Folly

The folly of this man appears in the fact that he completely ignored his responsibility to God in the

matter of his possessions. He takes all the credit for his prosperity. He gives no praise to God. The idea that any portion of the increase of his fields belongs to God seems never to have entered his mind. Does this man stand alone in that oversight? Are we not all too prone to take to our souls the credit for the prosperity which we have acquired?

The rich fool came by his wealth quite honestly. The parable doesn't say that he added field to field by oppression or that he devoured widow's houses by fraud. Nor did he cheat the hireling of his wages. He wasn't even a miser. He said to himself, "Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry." No, he was not a miser, nor was he shortsighted. But he was an egotist. "Things" were his jealous god. His soliloquy as translated in some versions, occupies just 61 words, but the word "I" occurs six times in that brief monologue. "My" or "thine" addressed to himself, six times. He has no thought for God.

"My fruits", "my grain", he calls them. But in what sense were they his? Could he command the sap in the tree, could he command the fertility of the soil? Was he responsible for the sunrise and the sunset? What about the faithfulness of the returning seasons, was that because of his merit? How would he have managed if the rain had been withheld by heaven? Even the Scripture says, "the ground brought forth plentifully." All he could do, as George Buttrick tells us, was "to take nature's tides at the flood." He called all these things of his "mine." That's why God called him a fool. He forgot that other men, too, had enriched him. He didn't plow, reap, and build barns single-handedly.

"How much did he leave," asked one man of a friend as they talked of a millionaire whose death had been announced in the morning paper. "All that he had," was the solemn reply. When the moment of death comes we have to let go of all our riches.

A wealthy agriculturist took a friend to show him his property. They stood on a slight summit and he pointed to the east and said, "All that is mine." And then he pointed to the west and said, "All that is mine." And then he pointed to the north and said, "All that is mine." He turned to the south and said, "As far as your eye can see, all that is mine."

His friend looked at him and then pointed upwards and said, "How much do you have up that way?"

"Man cannot live without things, but he who lives for things alone is not a man but a beast."

Stewards of His Things

What did Jesus mean by being rich toward God? Jesus meant this: we are stewards of the Almighty. It is God who gives us our ability to get wealth. To forget our stewardship is crass folly. We shouldn't be nervous when people remind us of our obligations with our wealth. In the recorded things of Jesus about one verse in every six talks about money or possessions. About half of his parables do the same.

The Bible is just full of warnings against being absorbed with things. Man cannot live without things, but he who lives for things alone is not a man but a

beast. Things cannot satisfy the heart. One can toss a hundred thousand worlds into the sun and leave room for more. We can put into our hearts all this world has to offer and there would still be a great vacuum.

Possessions don't do what we think they do. Nothing is as good in the hand as it is in the head. Nothing is ever as satisfying upon possession as it appeared in our imagination. All the goods in the western world have not brought peace.

One Oriental writer said this, "You would call your thousand material devices labor-saving machinery, yet you are forever busy. With the multiplying of your machinery you grow increasingly fatigued, anxious, nervous, and dissatisfied. Whatever you have you want more, wherever you are, you want to go somewhere else. You have a machine to dig the raw

"Our Lord Jesus exchanged all heaven for a cow-shed and a cross. As we behold that, what shall we withhold from him?"

material for you, a machine to manufacture it, a machine to transport it, a machine to sweep and dust, one to carry messages, one to write, one to talk, one to sing, one to play at the theater, one to vote, one to sew, and a hundred others to do a hundred other things for you, and still you are the most nervously busy people in the world. Your devices are neither time-saving nor soul-saving machinery. They are so many sharp spurs which urge you on to invent more machinery and do more business." Now that is hard to refute, is it not?

Now What?

What shall we say then to these things? How shall we save ourselves from this trap of covetousness? How shall we avoid being like the foolish wise man? God's people of old gave up to one-third of their income for religious purposes. We live in a more privileged era, and every Christian should have as his dearest desire to give all he can to foster the gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture says: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). Our Lord Jesus exchanged all heaven for a cow-shed and a cross. As we behold that, what shall we withhold from him?

*As I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And poor contempt on all my pride.*

Giving is the antidote to selfishness and covetousness. Only those who practice regular, systematic giving to the cause of the gospel will be safe and saved at last. May God guide us as we reflect on our responsibility to give. May we become like him in our giving. □

Desmond Ford is the founder of Good News Unlimited and is heard daily across the USA on his quarter-hour inspirational radio program.

Questions and Answers

Q. Could you please explain to me why Jesus rose from the dead on the third day?

A. The third day is the biblical day for decisive divine intervention in the history of salvation. It was traditionally the day of deliverance, of reversal, of victory in spite of a bad situation.

On the third day Abraham tried to sacrifice his son, Isaac, an act which would have destroyed the fulfillment of the promise of God (Gen 12). However, it was on the third day that God provided a substitute (Gen 22:4ff). The brothers of Joseph were freed from prison on the third day (Gen 42:18). The great Sinaitic theophany, took place on the third day (Ex 19:11, 16). The fugitive David heard news of the event that led to his kingship on the third day (2 Sam 1:2). Hezekiah was delivered from his sickness on the third day (2 Kings 20:5). Esther began working for the vindication of Israel on the third day (Esther 5:1). Jonah's prayer was answered after three days and nights (Jon 1:17; 2:10).

On the third day Jesus intervened in the plight of the wedding at Cana, and brought forth abundant and excellent wine (Jn 2:1). The disciples' hopes were restored on the third day when they walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:21).

The resurrection of Jesus on the third day should be interpreted in the light of this Old Testament tradition. This little expression, "the third day" says more about the nature of the event than it does about its timing — though Christ undoubtedly did rise on the third day after his death (inclusive reckoning).

— Noel Mason

Q. Do you really believe that the tomb of Jesus was empty?

A. I think that Christianity with its belief in a resurrected Christ would not have lasted more than a few hours if it wasn't.

— Noel Mason

Q. Is the "wrath of God" in Romans 1 and 2 just an impersonal and inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe?

A. C.H. Dodd certainly thought so (see *Romans*, p. 23). However, his view has not won universal assent (see C.K. Barrett, *Romans*, p. 33; R.G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God*, pp. 28ff). Alan Richardson said of Dodd's view that we can rationalize the idea of God's wrath in that way, if we like, but it would be a mistake to think that the New Testament writers did so (*Introduction to New Testament Theology*, p. 76).

While there is something to be said for Dodd's view, I think that Paul's conception of the wrath of God includes the personal element. The Bible is the story of God's wrath and mercy. His wrath is not a fickle, irrational emotion, but his aversion to and judgment of sin. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament prophets show any reluctance in using this human language to describe God's passionate hatred of sin.

There is something radically wrong with a Christian who doesn't experience some sort of righteous indignation when confronted with a shamefully evil act. Could any Christian read the book *The Murderers at Bullenhuser Damm: The SS Doctor and the Children* by

Gunther Schwarberg and not feel something akin to wrath? (The book is the story of twenty Jewish children who were used as guinea pigs by the infamous Heissmeyer.) I think that wrath is quite an appropriate response to evil. We don't need to feel embarrassed on God's behalf.

— Noel Mason

Q. Do you think that there is life on other planets?

A. Most astronomers and astrophysicists believe that there is life on other planets. One writer believes that "the number of planets in the universe capable of sustaining life . . . is enormous, perhaps as many as 10²²." This figure, of course is speculative for who has enough knowledge of the universe to derive a law of probability? One theologian, Krister Stendahl, has said, "It seems always great to me when God's world gets a little bigger and when I get a somewhat more true view of my place and my smallness in that universe. The growing awareness of cosmic cohabitation is enormously important for me, and it fits well into a growing knowledge of God's world."

—Noel Mason

GNU NEEDS YOUR HELP

A message to our regular readers

Good News Unlimited magazine continues to reach more and more people. In the last half year subscriptions have risen by an average of 2½% monthly. Many readers testify that Good News Unlimited is making a contribution to their Christianity. Each week we receive letters from a wide variety of individuals. Some are farmers. Others include business and professional men, pastors, teachers, builders and labourers. All say that they are encouraged stimulated by the grace centred articles in **GNU**.

We believe that God is using **GNU**; that it is indeed a ministry; that it is helping to advance the Kingdom of Heaven.

GNU is a non profit corporation. It is financed entirely by gifts from readers. In the past the staff here have been blessed many times through the consistent and generous support of many subscribers. It occurs to us that there may be more readers who, have been blessed by the magazine, would like to participate in its ministry by becoming financial supporters. A gift of \$25.00 entitles you to receive a complimentary copy of our cassette Tape of the Month. These cassettes include Gospel messages of practical importance for Christian living.

When next you prayerfully contemplate which Christian ministries you will give to, may we ask you to consider Good News Unlimited? We need your partnership. A self addressed envelope is included in this issue. Cheques should be directed to **Good News Unlimited**. Thank you.

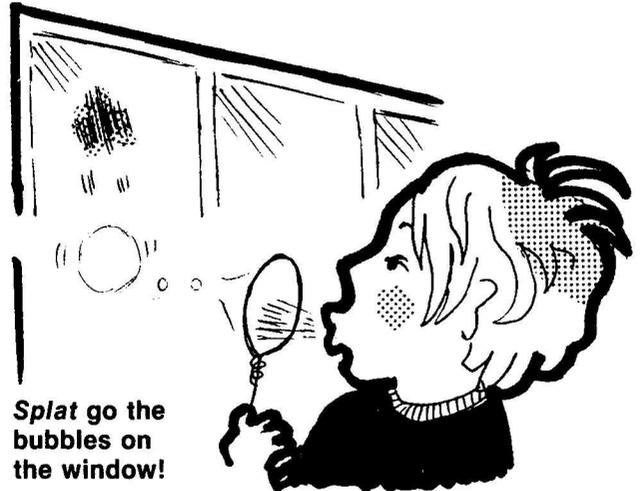


A SHOCKING STORY

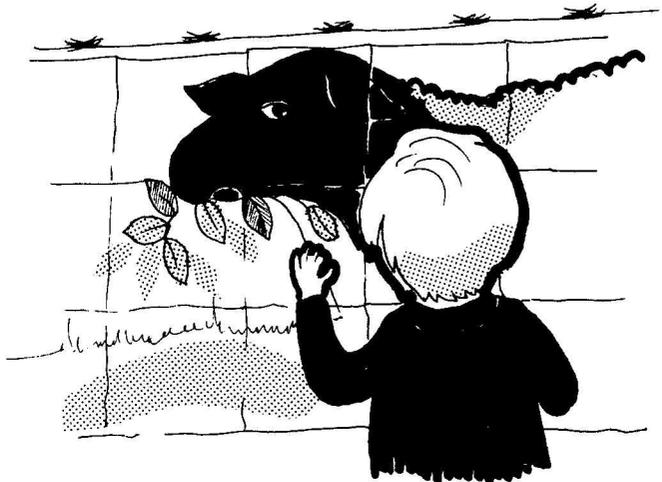
Romans 5:6

Gillian Ford

Some of you will remember Brentan from the interview I did with him about Daniel and the lion's den. He is now four years old. At the time I am writing his mommy is sick with a really mean virus and I am looking after him. Today we've made gingerbread men with raisin eyes and coconut hair. They turned out as hard as dog biscuits! We've blown bubbles through copper wire and messed up the windows with detergent. We've tramped on the jumpoline, if you can work out what that means. And this evening we tramped up the hill and fed the lamb with the black face. We baaed all the way around the fence with him. We searched for a noisy frog who teased us into looking for him, and then hid. What a happy day we had!



Splat go the bubbles on the window!



Georgia gives Brentan a sheepish look

Brentan samples Aunty Gill's gingerbread man with difficulty!



2

But I learned today that Brentan is a bit like Jonah. Mind you, he has a much kinder heart. Brentan says "no" a lot, and likes to run in the wrong direction. But while you may think that's a bit naughty, I have to tell you that there are people who always say "yes" and go in the direction they are told who are really **very** naughty. I will explain to you what I mean.

Some folks once wanted to conduct an experiment to find out how far people would go in taking orders. They hired a building and set up some fancy-looking equipment with lots of buttons and dials and wires. There were seats on both sides of it, separated by a sheet of glass in the middle. Then actors were brought in and told to sit behind the glass. Here are the instructions they were given.

"We are going to bring in some people off the street and they will not know you are actors. They will just think you are ordinary people like themselves. We will give them instructions to give you some questions to answer. We will tell them that what they are going to do to you if you get a wrong answer will help you to learn. They will be told to press buttons which will give you electric shocks, starting with mild ones that supposedly only hurt a bit, but going on later to severe shocks that will give you terrible pain."

Of course the actors didn't like the sound of that one bit. How relieved they were to find out that there really wouldn't be any shocks. There would be no pain because there were no wires connected. The actors just had to **act** as though they had received an electric shock (which is a very painful burning feeling). They would **look** as though they were in terrible pain. The people who were pressing the buttons would **think** the actors were in agony. But in fact they would feel nothing.

Think of them sitting behind all that machinery practicing receiving shocks. They had to pull their faces into contortions, cry out and scream, just as though it was really happening. They did it until they got past the place where they didn't make each other laugh anymore. You can imagine they thought it was a real joke.

It wasn't a joke. The actors sat down and got ready. The people came in off the streets and were told what to do. An instructor stood behind them and told them how to give shocks for wrong answers. This, he told them, would help the people behind the glass learn better!!

They began to ask questions. The actors began to give wrong answers, and now the shocks had to be given. It started off with mild "shocks." The actors made little jumps and quivers. But as they made more wrong





Answers, they were given progressively worse "shocks." If you had been there knowing exactly what was happening, you would have had to hide behind the machinery to stop laughing, because the actors were so good. They screamed and writhed and wrinkled their faces in pain. They shouted for mercy. One of them pretended he was having a heart-attack.

All this time the people in front of the glass thought it was for real. Some of them began feeling bad about what they were doing and turned around to question the instructor. But he just said, "You cannot stop. You must go on." So they did for the most part. Do you know, boys and girls, nearly all of them just carried on giving what seemed to be excruciating pain to the actors? Only a very few stood up and said, "I won't be a part of this cruelty," and left.

This is not just a story. It really happened. It is a very sad fact of life that many people will do what they are told by people who appear to have power. They'll say, "It wasn't me! I was told to do it. **They** made me!" instead of thinking to themselves, "What I am doing is just not right. I can't let somebody else tell me to do bad things and just do it!" Millions of Jews have died in Russia and Germany because a network of people just did what Stalin and Hitler told them. But don't think it's just the Russians, and the Germans, or even the Irish who like to fight. It's the whole world. Those things happen in every country on a smaller scale from time to time. In fact they happen in every playground

and in most families. The problem is our human heart.

Why are we so weak? Why are we often cruel and selfish? Why do we often have to fight inside ourselves to be nice? Why doesn't goodness come naturally? For all of us have pushed buttons that cause pain to other people who don't deserve to suffer. There's the little boy who finds he is not getting enough attention so he aims a well-placed kick at his father's ankle. He will probably get quite a shock himself because I suspect daddy might paddle his tail. A girl at school irritates her playmates by throwing acorns at them. They get very tired of it and find some ice and put it roughly down her back. Phew, what a shock!

Those are little shocks, but people give each other bigger ones all the time. Every time we say cruel things and do nasty things, we are giving electric shocks. But the most shocking thing is that we don't seem to care about the pain we give to other people, only about our own. You see, we are very weak, and we are very unlike God. When we think about that, it's as though the sun goes into an eclipse with the moon and all is shadow and darkness in our hearts. Are we so bad that there is no hope for us?

Hope? There's lots of it. Bring out the fireworks, set up the party tables, start singing, because that is what Jesus is all about. The Bible says that "while we were still weak, Jesus died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). He didn't just die for the good people (there really aren't any). He died for the weak. And

that includes you, however weak you are.

Think back to the experiment we talked about at the beginning. What if those shocks were for real? What if the instructor removed the barriers between the actors and the other people who pushed the buttons to give the shocks? Do you think the actors would go up to the others and throw their arms around them and say, "Thanks so much for helping me to learn — I really appreciate it?" Hardly! You can imagine the actors grabbing the others and tying them down and giving them lots of shocks. We all like revenge.

It may be different now, but I can remember that not long ago if you had a television antenna, it would have a wire attached to it called an ground. The ground had a very important job. You see, lightning can easily strike an antenna because it is made of metal and it sticks way up in the air on top of the roof. The ground would take the power of lightning away from the antenna down into the ground where it could do no harm. Otherwise a fire could easily be started.

Jesus was something like a ground. We

tied him to a machine called the cross and gave him terrible shocks that eventually killed him. In fact, he took all the electric shocks of all the pain and heartache of all time. You would think that when he rose again, he would have got into a huff and left the earth for good, never to come back. But no.

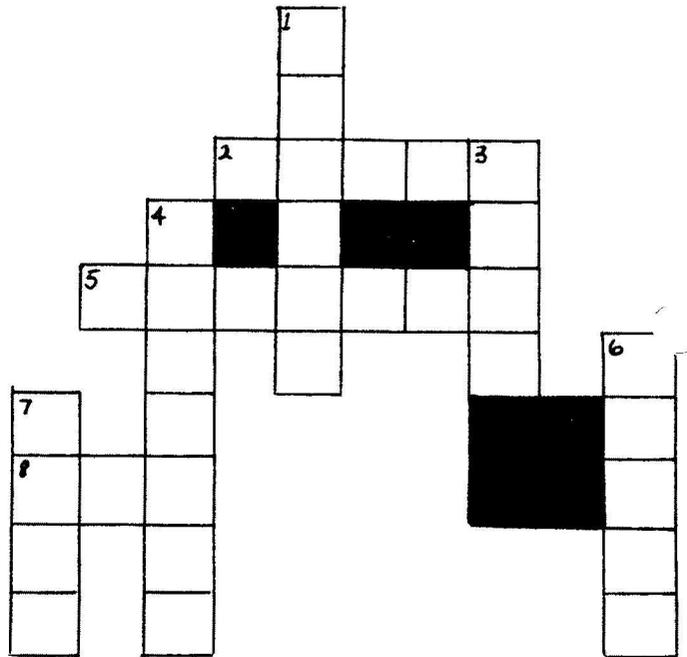
He took our place as sinners. When the lightning of God's anger against sin hit him and killed him, the force of it was grounded in Jesus — it was somehow taken away from us. It was our fault that Jesus died, and yet he took the consequences instead of us. Now God looks at us as though we had been on that cross and paid for our sins, and he acts towards us as though we were Jesus.

That's how God saves us. It should make us love him, and help us to be kind to other people. Yes, it should stop us giving shocks. It should help us think about how we treat other people. I wonder what you and I would have done if we were asked to give the shocks in the experiment. I hope we would refuse.

FIND THE VERSE

Look up the chapter in your Bible. Now find the verse. Write the number of the verse on the crossword. Use the RSV.

1. **DOWN** Galatians 2. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
2. **ACROSS** Psalm 37. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.
3. **DOWN** Galatians 6. Let us not grow weary of doing good.
4. **DOWN** Psalm 50. . . .and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.
5. **ACROSS** John 14. I will ask the father and he will give you another Counsellor.
6. **DOWN** Proverbs 2. — guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his saints.
7. **DOWN** Psalm 40. Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust.
8. **ACROSS** Psalm 27. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

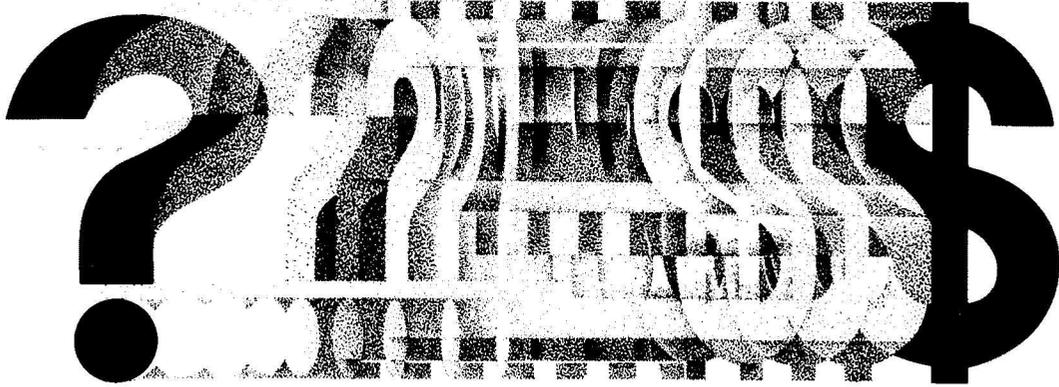


Answers — don't peek!!

1. Twenty	4. Fifteen
2. Seven	3. Nine
3. Eight	7. Four
4. Sixteen	8. One

SHOULD CHRISTIANS TITHE?

A Biblical Study



Calvin W. Edwards

One of the questions that we have been asked most frequently at Good News Unlimited (GNU) relates to tithing. Should Christians tithe? To whom should the tithe be paid? Is it okay to pay tithe to an organization other than a church? What about a secular, charitable organization? Should it be used only for the payment of ministers' salaries?

At GNU we have sometimes been accused of "taking tithe." Of course this strikes us as being a little humorous because it implies that the accuser has a monopoly on tithe and that persons may not choose for themselves where their contributions should go. We have typically replied, "No, we haven't taken tithe, but we have accepted it."

I'm sure there are different points of view on this matter, but curiously, in my study I could find no significant difference of opinion among scholars on this subject — objections come from churchpersons who seem to have a strong vested interest in their point of view!

The Term "Tithe"

In both Testaments the word "tithe" means "one tenth part," or as a verb, "to pay one tenth part." The word itself does not have the connotations that we ascribe to it today as regards support of the work of the church. It is a neutral word that originally belongs in the vocabulary of arithmetic, not theology or ethics.

Tithe in the Old Testament

Tithing was a widespread and ancient custom. References to it have been found in religions and cultures other than Israel. But the Jewish system was carefully adapted to their religious convictions and needs.

There are about two dozen references to tithe in the Old Testament and anyone can read them all in a few

minutes with the aid of a concordance. A careful study of these passages suggests that there were differing approaches to tithing at various times and places. This is not at all surprising; we would expect God to keep up with the times! After all, the system of church and missionary funding is vastly different today from what it was say, a thousand years ago.

The earliest references to tithing are found in Genesis. Chapter 14 tells a fascinating story. Five subject kings rebelled against Kedorlaomer and his three allied kings. The rebellion was successful until Abraham gathered together 318 mercenaries and in a surprise attack regained the booty and captives.

Abraham set free all the people he had brought back, and returned the goods — but before he did so, he gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the king of Salem and the "priest of God Most High" (vv 8-24; this later part of the story is retold in Heb 7:1-3).

Clearly, this is not a "regular" tithe. It was a turning over of one tenth of the booty retrieved to the priest-king. Its purpose is not specified. There is no indication that this custom was legislated or observed generally.

Jacob too seems to have followed a practice similar to his grandfather, Abraham. While traveling from Beersheba to Haran he stopped one night to rest. The Lord appeared to him in a dream standing at the top of a ladder which stretched from earth to heaven. He promised blessings on Jacob just as he had earlier to Abraham (Gen 28:10-22, cf 12:1-3). Jacob made a vow dedicating himself to the Lord and promising him one tenth of all that he received from God (v 22).

The thing that stands out about these early illustrations of tithing is that they are in no way codified — they are not a part of Old Testament law. Neither is the manner of payment specified, nor the use to which the tithe would be put. There is no indication that this was a general practice of the patriarchal era.

Later, when the set of laws governing Israel was given by God to Moses, and then to the people at Sinai, there was no reference to tithing at all (Ex 20:1-23:33). In fact, the word "tithe" does not appear anywhere in Exodus even though the tabernacle, sacrifices, and priestly system are outlined there.

However, by the time Deuteronomy was written there are more extensive references to tithing. Two tithes are mentioned.

"Giving should flow forth from joy. It should be generous, even to the point of sacrifice. It should be tailored to individual abilities."

The first tithe is referred to in Deuteronomy 12:4-19 and 14:22-27. Here Israel is instructed to set aside one tenth of its agricultural produce, plus the firstborn of their herds and flocks. They are to take this to the dwelling place of God (the sanctuary) and eat it. If this is too far distant, they should sell the produce and take the money to the sanctuary and buy produce and eat it in the presence of the Lord with rejoicing. The passage concludes with a reminder not to forget the Levites in the towns who "have no allotment or inheritance of their own" (14:27). These were persons from the tribe of Levi who were to supervise the ceremonies at the Israelite sanctuaries, and hence who had no private means of support.

The "second" tithe is referred to in Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and 26:12-15. This tithe is for charitable purposes and is collected every third year. It is to be stored in the town, and to be used by the Levites, aliens, orphans, and widows. There were blessings promised on the people and their land for carrying out this duty. While some think that this is an additional tithe to be paid every third year, it seems more likely that this is in fact the same tithe as the first one, but that it is put to a different use every third year. Whatever the case, this tithe acknowledges God's ownership of the land and its fruits, and is intended to provide for those who have no means of self-support.

When the priestly system was more elaborately established, there is more specific religious legislation regarding tithe. Numbers 18:20-32 and Leviticus 27:30-33 represent this next view of tithe. The Lord says, "I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting" (Num 18:21, 24). The Levites were in turn to present one tenth of what they received to the priesthood (vv 25-29). The tithe is to go exclusively to the Levites, and then indirectly to the priests. There is no mention of using tithe for charitable purposes or for a family religious celebration at the sanctuary.

According to Leviticus and 2 Chronicles the tithe was to include both agricultural products and livestock (Lev 27:30, 32; 2 Chron 31:5-12), though most references would seem to exclude animals from the tithing

principle. As time went by the tithe program was highly organized and storehouses were built at the sanctuary to hold the produce. (See also Nehemiah 10:37-39, 12:44, 13:5, 12.)

In late Judaism, in accord with the tendency to regard the entire law as binding, three tithes were operating: one for the Levites, one to be consumed by the family of the offerer, and one for the relief of the poor. (See H.H. Guthrie, Jr., "Tithe," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, pp. 654-655.)

The Benefits of Tithing

There is no evidence of widespread tithing in the patriarchal age but as the temple system grew, tithing became a more sophisticated system, and indeed an important part of the Israelite economy.

Its key value was that it provided for persons who otherwise would not have adequate provision for their daily needs. The Levites, who were dedicated to maintaining the sacrificial system even away from Jerusalem; the priests in the temple at Jerusalem; the widows, the fatherless, and the aliens — such were those who benefited from this system. But one of the tithes was also used in a family celebration to the Lord.

Built into the whole system was a recognition of the fact that God was owner of all and could therefore command as he pleased just what should be done with one's possessions. Thus both divine sovereignty and one's obligation to the needy were acknowledged.

Many churches today recommend a tithing system; some try to enforce it by disciplining or withholding from church office those who refrain. The system, even as advocated today, has the strong advantages of biblical precedent, simplicity, consistency, and discipline.

Tithe in the New Testament

Tithe is only mentioned three times in the New Testament: in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector the Pharisee states that he tithes on all that he gets (Lk 18:12); in the historical argument used by the writer of Hebrews, the greatness of Melchizedek is illustrated by stating that even Abraham paid him tithe (7:4-10); and in the fourth of Jesus' seven woes pronounced upon the Pharisees in Matthew 23, he states, "You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" (v 23, cf Lk 11:41).

In all the writings of Paul, John, Peter and James there is no mention of tithe. Nowhere is there any indication that the Old Testament system of tithing was to be continued in the Christian church. You have probably noticed that the stirring stewardship sermons we hear from time to time are usually based on Old Testament texts, particularly Malachi 3:8-11. That is simply because there is no text in the New Testament on which to build such a sermon. Jesus does assure the Pharisees that they should have tithed, but this cannot be interpreted as an instruction to the Christian church.

There is no evidence that the old system of the theocratic state of Israel was accepted by the early Christian church as its model for the support of the ministry. There were no more Levites or priests, and there were no more tithes either. While the church clearly had a great concern for the poor and needy in the community (and even hundreds of miles away), their needs were no longer met by filling a storehouse with tithes.

This is not to say that persons should not tithe; it is only to point out that it is not the system that was fundamental to the economics of the early church. A new system, which Garry Friesen has called "grace giving," was promoted by the apostles (see *Decision Making and the Will of God*, pp. 367-375).

Grace Giving

Probably the first Christian fund-raising letter was written by none other than the Apostle Paul. You can read it in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. He is trying to raise support in the church at Corinth for some impoverished saints elsewhere (8:4, 13-15; 9:1). Curiously, I doubt that GNU supporters would appreciate it if we were to use some of the tactics that Paul felt free to employ! These two chapters give us the clearest view of the New Testament position on giving. Several principles emerge.

These principles are summarized in 9:7, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Giving should be individualized — each person must make his or her own plans. Giving should be the result of a decision one makes "in his heart." Giving should be spontaneous. Giving should not be compelled as the old Jewish tithe was.

"Tithing tends to limit people's giving. It operates as a kind of upper limit over which there is no need to contribute. Probably many of us should contribute more than one tenth of our income."

But how much should one give? Are there any guidelines here? Yes, indeed. Speaking of the Macedonian churches, Paul says, "... their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (8:2-4). Giving should flow forth from joy. It should be generous, even to the point of sacrifice. It should be tailored to individual abilities (see also 8:11). Giving should be "according to what one has, not according to what one does not have" (8:12). That is, it should be proportionate to one's resources.

There is no hint here or anywhere else in the New Testament that the Christian church is to be financed

by an across-the-board contribution of ten percent of Christians' income. The principle is clear: Christians are to give according to their means — generously. Friesen points out that increasing prosperity should not only increase the amount given to the Lord, but also the percentage. He says, "Many Americans should think in terms of 15, 20, 40, or 60 percent of their income" (Ibid., p. 368).

I find such percentages hard to imagine, but Friesen follows up with the story of a wealthy young man who was in a church he pastored. In the past he had given little, but after having the principles of grace giving explained, the young man said he would like to give 40% of his income to the Lord. The pastor gulped, but suggested he try it as an experiment for a month. At the end of the month the pastor went to him and asked how it had turned out. The young man replied that he had gained a great deal of satisfaction from his generous giving, but that he felt the percentage was not right. "In light of the way God has been prospering me, I think that this month 60% would be more appropriate," he declared!

Unlike the Old Testament system of tithing which was more like a compulsory taxation for the theocratic state, the New Testament bases its philosophy of giving on the principle of grace. Buried in the middle of this long appeal by Paul is the theological affirmation which seems to undergird the whole argument: "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (8:9). At the end of the appeal Paul again refers to "the surpassing grace God has given you" and exclaims, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (9:14, 15). It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Paul sees generous, sacrificial, proportionate giving as a logical and necessary response to the grace we have received in Christ. We should give, just as God has given.

I have focused on the principles of Christian giving as illustrated in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Those who wish to study this topic further may wish to consult the following texts: Luke 6:38, 21:1-4, Acts 11:29-30, 20:35; 1 Corinthians 9:11, 14, 16:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; Galatians 6:6-10; Philippians 4:10-19; 1 Timothy 5:8, 17-18; and 1 John 3:17.

The Problem with Tithing

Writers have pointed out several problems with tithing. I want to refer briefly to two. One, in ancient times incomes were almost certainly not as disparate as they are today. I know some people give to GNU who net only \$400 per month — God bless them. There are others who probably net well over \$5,000 per month. After a tithe the first person has \$360 to live on, the second, \$4,500. That's a huge differential, and it's not a hypothetical case. One has sacrificed incredibly, the other probably not at all. From a commonsense point of view, tithing doesn't seem to work in a modern age where income varies enormously.

Two, tithing tends to limit people's giving. It operates

as a kind of upper limit over which there is no need to contribute. As I have pointed out above, probably many of us should contribute more than one tenth of our income. The British scholar, F.F. Bruce wisely states, "Each Christian must come to a conscientious decision on this subject before God, and not be content to submit to the dogmatic statements of others; and it will be surprising if grace does not impel him to give a larger proportion than ever the law demanded... A Christian's giving should be regular...He should not ask, 'What am I required to give?' but 'How much can I give?' and then 'How much more can I give?' " (*Answers to Questions*, pp. 243-244.)

"I personally would not support any ministry that does not make available to donors a reasonably detailed, audited financial statement."

To Whom Should We Give?

Space limitations prohibit an extensive discussion of this question. Let me summarize: our first responsibility is to our own families. Beyond this we should move out to our local church, to gospel proclamation outside the church through Christian ministries (reaching both the saved and the unsaved), to the relief of needy believers, and finally to the support of unbelievers who are in need.

I admire the courage and honesty of Dr. James Dobson who recently stated in a fund-raising letter (July, 1984), "I do not want anyone to support Focus on the Family until all obligations to the local church have been met. The church is the *first* line of defense for families, and it must remain strong and viable. Our effort is secondary to that great institution." At GNU we have gone on record as saying the same thing on a number of occasions.

The church should not automatically claim a tenth of everyone's income. But if it is doing its job it should be able to expect the first slice of what its members return to the Lord.

Finally, a word about the type of organizations to support other than one's local church. Three quick guidelines. One, support those ministries that proclaim the gospel, and operate in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Read their literature, review carefully their statement of faith. Ask some probing questions and make sure you get answers.

Two, ensure that funds are spent wisely and according to the purpose they were given. I personally would not support any ministry that does not make available to donors a reasonably detailed, audited financial statement.

Three, support ministries that you have been particularly blessed by, or you believe in very strongly. Pick the ones you want to support and commit yourself to them. Don't allow yourself to become game for the emotional pleas that clutter our mailboxes every week.

Plan an amount to give, decide which ministries should receive from you, then give regularly. You can do more for the work of the Lord by giving generously and predictably to a few high-quality ministries than by sending off a dollar or two in fifty different directions. Remember that the overhead to process a donation of \$200 is exactly the same as to process a \$2 contribution. The Lord loves every gift, and all ministries appreciate (in fact, depend upon) numerous fairly small contributions; but slicing the pie too small is not an efficient way of serving the Lord.

There is a whole book devoted to the topic of to whom one should give, and how to find out information about the fiscal practices of Christian organizations: Edward J. Hales and J. Alan Youngren, *Your Money/Their Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981). I highly recommend this publication.

Conclusion

Tithing was an ancient practice used in many parts of early civilization. The Jewish people, under guidance and direction from God, utilized this system with an ever increasing degree of complexity. By the time of Christ, faithful Jews were probably paying three tithes. In many respects it was more like a taxation, particularly in that it was not voluntary, and because it was used to support the needy in much the same way as welfare programs do today. It seems that the livestock portion of the Israelite's "income" was exempt from tithe. The system was particularly adapted to the needs of an agricultural community and could not be implemented literally today.

The principle of tithing is certainly legitimate, and many implement it successfully today. It should not be frowned upon.

"Giving should be planned, systematic, rationally conceived, and motivated by a conscience enlightened by the cross."

But there is no New Testament mandate to enforce or even recommend tithing. Rather, the grace of Jesus Christ impels us to respond spontaneously, generously, sacrificially. Christian giving should not be simply according to whim and fancy. It should be planned, systematic, rationally conceived, and motivated by a conscience enlightened by the cross. It has been said that the Lord measures, not by what we give, but by what is left over after we have given. A mere tenth may not be adequate. Some will give more, others less. Giving will be individual and proportionate to the way the Lord has provided.

There is joy and reward for those who graciously respond to God's unspeakable gift — not just in heart and mouth, but also in financial support of the kingdom of God.

At least that's the way I see it, perhaps you can too. □

LEARNING TO BE CONTENT

JEREMIAH BURROUGHS

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Philippians 4:11.

Paul needed to learn contentment. He did not come by it without having been taught lessons in the school of Christ. Here are some of the lessons that Christ teaches in order to bring his saints to contentment.

1. The lesson of self denial

It is a hard lesson. You know, when a child is first taught, he complains by saying, "This is hard". Whoever has not learned the lesson of the cross has not learned his ABC in Christianity. That is the first lesson that Christ teaches any soul, self denial, which brings down and softens a man's heart. When you strike something soft it makes no noise, but if you strike a hard thing it makes a noise. So with the hearts of men that are full of themselves and hardened with self love, if they receive a stroke they make a noise. But a self-denying Christian yields to God's hand and makes no noise.

In the lesson of self denial the Christian learns that he deserves nothing from God. He says to himself, "I deserve nothing therefore why should I be impatient if I do not get what I desire?" If we had deserved anything, we might be troubled, as in the case of a man who had deserved well of the state and yet did not receive from it a suitable reward. He was troubled greatly, yet if he was conscious that he deserved nothing he might have been content with a rebuff.

The Christian also learns that he is so vile that he cannot of himself receive any good thing. He is not only an empty vessel, he is a corrupt one, that would spoil anything coming into it. He is a pitcher filled with poison and is therefore worse than nothing. If he perished there would be no loss but God would raise up someone else to serve him in a different way.

Christ teaches the soul to say, "Lord I am nothing, I can receive nothing, I can make use of nothing, I am worse than nothing and if I come to nothing I will be no loss at all and therefore is it such a great thing for me to be cut short here?" A man who is little in his own eyes will count every affliction as little and every mercy as great.

2. The lesson of the vanity of the creature.

There is nothing in the creature that is suitable for a gracious heart to feed upon for its good and happiness. Many think that when they are troubled and have not got contentment it is because they have but little in the world, and if they had more they would be content. O poor deluded man! It is not because you have not enough of it but because it is not the thing proportionate to the soul that God has given you. All creatures in the world say that contentment is not in us. Riches say, "Contentment is not in me". Pleasure says, "Contentment is not in me". If you look for contentment in the creature you will fail. No, contentment is higher.

3. The lesson of the one thing necessary.

Jesus said to Martha, "Martha, you care about many things. But there is one thing necessary." The Christian would be glad if God should give him a fine house and income, and clothes. These are comfortable things but they are not the necessary things. It is not necessary that he should live a pleasurable life in this world but it is absolutely necessary that he should have his sins forgiven and his part in Jesus Christ.

4. The lesson of the soul's relationship to the world.

When a man is home, when things are not according to his desire, he will find fault and will not be content. But when he is travelling he will put up with some inconvenience that he would not stand at his own house. When sailors are at sea they do not care what clothes they have, though they are pitched and tarred. They think of when they shall come home: then they shall have their fine silk stockings and suits. They are contented while they are away with the thought that it will be different when they shall come home. Thus it should be with us in this world, for the truth is we are but seafaring men, tossed up and sown on the waves of the sea of this world. Here we are travelling. Our home is where our Lord is, in another world. So let us not be troubled when we see that other men have wealth – but we have not. We are going away to another country. We are only lodging here for a night.

6. The lesson of the knowledge of one's own heart.

We will never get any skill in the mystery of contentment unless we study the book of our own heart. A man who knows his own heart will soon find out where the root of his discontent lies. He will discover that it lies in the corruption of the heart itself. When we are strangers to our own hearts, we are powerfully discontented and do not know how to quiet ourselves because we do not know wherein the disquiet lies. When a man has a watch and understands the use of every wheel and pin, if it goes amiss he will soon find out the cause of it. But when someone has no skill in a watch, if it goes amiss he does not know what is the matter. So indeed our hearts are as a watch and there are many wheels and windings and turnings there, and we should labour to know our hearts well, that when they are out of tune we may know what is the matter.

7. The lesson of the dreadful evil of being left to one's own desires.

The greatest misery of all is for God to give you up to your lusts and desires. Said Bernard, "O let me not have such a misery as that. For to give me what I would have; to give me my heart's desires is one of the most hideous judgements in the world. When the soul comes to understand that to be given up to one's desires is to be under the judgement of God: this quiets him and contents him though outward afflictions may be upon him.

Perhaps one of a man's children has a toothache while his neighbour has the plague and all his children have died of it. Now, shall he be discontented that his child has a toothache when his neighbours' children are dead? Think this. Lord, you have not given me the plague of a hard heart.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) was Gospel preacher to two of the greatest congregations in England. Stepney and Cripplegate. He belongs to the front rank of English Puritan preachers.

*This article has been adapted from his book, **The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.** Banner of Truth Trust 1979 pp 86-117.*

Letters

Remarkable Messages

Sirs:

This week's broadcasts on KMAY, Riverside, on the subject of "The Seven Trumpets" is by far the most revealing understanding of the 8th and 9th chapters of Revelation I've ever had the privilege of hearing or reading.

I shall be most grateful to receive cassette #410 containing the broadcasts of this week. Please accept the enclosed contribution for the broadcast of these remarkable messages.

Mrs. Marvin E. Childers
Riverside, California

Relieving Prison Stress

Sirs:

I am an inmate in a women's prison here in Hawaii. I enjoy your program. I would appreciate a free copy of the tape on stress please. Thank you very much.

Haveli Poquette
Kailua, Hawaii

Making Sense of Revelation

Sirs:

I just discovered you on WCTN - AM 95, at 11:00 a.m. last Thursday. I thank God for you and for the anointing that you have to preach the book of Revelation. I have often said that I wish those who have no anointing to preach the book of Revelation would leave it alone and preach what they do know.

I had stopped listening to all "prophecy teachers" because the Lord had shown me they were wrong. And the reason they were wrong is because they were not "comparing spiritual things (words) with spiritual things," (and God's word is spirit and life) but they were comparing spiritual things (God's word) with natural or carnal things.

I am working with our budget to find a way to begin to help support your radio ministry for our area (WCTN). I would like to help support your ministry if God will supply.

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Please put me on your mailing list and send me your monthly magazine. Also, would you please send me the cassette entitled "How Long, O Lord?"

Carla G. Adams
Bethesda, Maryland

Listener Encouraged

Sirs:

Please send me a copy of "How To Survive Personal Tragedy."

I heard your program for the first time on KFIA yesterday, and was touched by it. I have been struggling with obeying the Lord, and not doing too well - I give up too easily. Listening to your program encouraged me to keep striving for the Lord.

God bless you and your ministry.

Linda Wheeler
Yuba City, California

Standing Tall

Sirs:

Thanks for your timely and inspiring magazine. We appreciate the personal sacrifice and dedication of each one of you. We too know the cost of "standing tall," and we are encouraged to see this in others. Please accept our subscription to your monthly tapes.

Our prayers are with your very needed ministry.

Helen & Ron McCartney
Waterford, Pennsylvania

Appreciation

Sirs:

I wish to thank you for your most inspiring Christ-centered monthly publication. I have always awaited and enjoyed with heartfelt gladness and Christian fellowship all that I have had the fortune and grace to obtain from you. I pray that you will continue with steadfast steps and fixed and steady gaze upon your compelling course that spirals its way toward heaven.

S.D. Jacobsen
Lincoln, Nebraska

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