



Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 12, Number 5

June 2003

*"I will pour out
My Spirit
on all flesh"*

- 3 PERSONAL FROM JOHN W. RITENBAUGH
*The Offerings of Leviticus (Part Four):
The Peace Offering*
- 7 A READY ANSWER:
Faith to Face Our Trials
—Pat Higgins
- 9 PROPHECY WATCH:
Peter's Trumpets Message—On Pentecost
—Charles Whitaker
- 19 WORLD WATCH
—David C. Grabbe
- 20 BIBLE STUDY
The Parable of the Two Debtors
—Martin G. Collins

About Our Cover



Throughout the Bible water is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, AD 31, the first outpouring of God's Spirit occurred in Jerusalem. Using Joel's prophecy as his proof, Peter assures us that it is only a matter of time until God pours this "living water" out on all men everywhere.
Creatas

Forerunner Magazine

Editor-in-Chief
JOHN W. RITENBAUGH

Managing Editor
RICHARD T. RITENBAUGH

Associate Editor
MARTIN G. COLLINS

Contributing Writers
TED E. BOWLING, JOHN F. BULHAROWSKI, MARK DESOMER, MIKE FORD, RONNY H. GRAHAM,
WILLIAM GRAY, PAT HIGGINS, BILL KEESEE, ROD KEESEE, WARREN LEE, DAVID F. MAAS,
HOWARD E. MARCHBANKS, BRYAN NELSON, JOHN PLUNKETT, JOHN REID,
MARK SCHINDLER, SHERLY J. TOGANS, JR., CHARLES WHITAKER, BRIAN WULF

News Editor
DAVID C. GRABBE

Graphics and Layout Editor
KRISTEN M. COLLINS

Contact Church of the Great God

PO Box 471846
Charlotte, NC 28247-1846
U.S.A.

Box 30188
Saanich Centre Postal Outlet
Victoria, BC V8X 5E1
CANADA

(800) 878-8220 / (803) 802-7075
(803) 802-7811 fax

<http://www.cgg.org> or <http://www.sabbath.org>
or <http://www.worldwatchdaily.org> or <http://www.bibletools.org>

Forerunner is published ten times a year as a free educational and religious service in the public interest. Articles, illustrations, and photographs will not be returned unless specifically requested, and if used, become the property of the Church of the Great God. Comments, suggestions, requests, and changes of address should be sent to the address listed at left.

This free publication is made possible through the voluntary tithes and offerings of its subscribers and members of the Church of the Great God. All American and Canadian donations are tax-deductible.

© Copyright 2003
Church of the Great God
All Rights Reserved
Printed in the U.S.A.

The Offerings of Leviticus

Part Four: The Peace Offering

Of all the offerings, the sin and trespass offerings are the best known and understood because of their clear association with Christ's crucifixion for the sins of the world. At the other end of the spectrum, the peace offering is the least understood because its symbolism, while easy to grasp, is perhaps the most difficult to experience in actual practice. It is introduced in Leviticus 3:1-5:

When his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire to the LORD. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; and Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is on the wood that is on the fire, as an

offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.

Biblical commentators have given this offering a variety of titles. "Peace," "fellowship," "praise," and "thanksgiving" are the most common. However, the *Keil-Delitzsch Commentary* states that the most correct is "saving offering" (vol. 1, p. 298). Each title shows a somewhat different aspect of the teaching contained in it. Verse 5 informs us that this too is a sweet-savor offering, indicating that no sin is involved in it, and thus it is most *satisfying* to God. The word "satisfying" is important to understanding this offering.

Verse 5 also shows us an aspect of the ritual that teaches us about this offering's purpose. It is burnt upon, that is, on top of, the burnt sacrifice, which in turn had the meal offering on top of it. They were not necessarily layered like a sandwich and then all burned at the same time. However, the daily burnt offering was always made first, and it was followed by the meal offering and the peace offering on the same fire (*Keil-Delitzsch*, vol. 1, p. 300).

The peace offering, then, had to be offered after the other two were already burning. How long after is lost to history, but it could not have been a long time if the same fire was used.

Peaceful Communion

Leviticus 7:11-18, 29-32 provides more information regarding the specific distribution of the various parts of this animal sacrifice:

This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to the LORD: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of finely blended flour mixed with oil. Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering. And from it he shall offer one cake from each offering as a heave offering to the LORD. It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering. The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any of it until morning. But if the sacrifice of this offering is a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his sacrifice; but on next day the remainder of it also may be eaten; the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day must be burned with fire. And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, nor shall it be imputed to him; whoever offers it shall be an abomination, and the person who eats of it shall bear guilt.

. . . He who offers the sacrifice of his peace offering to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offering. His own hands shall bring the offerings made by fire to the LORD. The fat with the breast he shall bring, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'. Also the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a heave offering from the sacrifices of your peace offerings.

We need to understand the order followed here: The offerer brought his offering to the altar, laid his hand on it, and slew it. The priest sprinkled the blood upon the altar and around

it. The animal was then cut up, and God's portion—almost entirely fat, besides the two kidneys—was placed on top of the already burning burnt and meal offerings.

Then the priest received the breast and right shoulder for himself and his children, and the offerer received the remainder of the animal to eat. However, it had to be eaten within one day if it was a thank offering or within two days if it was a vow or voluntary offering. If any remained on the third day, it had to be burned. In this process, the major teaching of the peace offering is revealed.

Recall that the burning on the altar of the sweet-savor offerings pictures God consuming a meal and being satisfied. Likewise, the priest receiving his portion shows him being satisfied, and the offerer with his portion is also satisfied. "Filled," "gratified," "contented," "accepted," "convinced," "supplied," "persuaded," "pleased," and "assured" all capture the intent of the symbolism.

In addition, since all parties—God, priest, and man—share the same meal and satisfaction, it shows all in peaceful communion or fellowship. Because it was placed in sequence on top of the other two offerings, the peace offering is directly connected to them, and thus it depicts the *effect* of perfect devotion to God and man: peaceful satisfaction and fellowship, the fruit of devotedly keeping the two great commandments of the law.

In this sacrifice Christ symbolically plays all three parts: He is the offering, sacrificing His life in service; He is the priest, serving mankind at the altar as Mediator; and He is the offerer, bringing His sacrifice to the altar. The altar, the place of meeting for all three, represents sacrificial services and devotion to God that give Him satisfaction and result in our acceptance.

The peace offering shows man, as Christ, accepted, fed, strengthened, and satisfied by sacrifice, teaching that sacrifice is indeed the essence, the heart and core, the essential element, of love whether to God or man. More specifically, it shows us that sacrifice plays a major role in acceptance before God, spiritual feeding and therefore spiritual strength, and spiritual satisfaction. Devoted people sacrifice for those they love. Thus, sacrifice indicates devotion to God (burnt offering) and devotion in service to man (meal offering).

The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered
—Leviticus 7:15

A Sense of Satisfaction

Everyone desires to feel a sense of satisfaction, that all is well. This is largely what we all strive for in life. But how are we trying to achieve it? If we grasp the general instruction contained within the sacrifices, we ought to be able to understand how spiritually damaging self-centeredness and striving for the wrong goals in life are. Self-centeredness produces the opposite fruit of self-sacrifice.

Self-centeredness does not feed and strengthen a sense of satisfaction and contentment. It destroys through spiritual malnutrition, producing a hunger or craving for more of what never satisfies. John simply and practically lays down this principle in I John 3:16-24:

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.

In verse 16, John teaches that we can know love by observing the way Jesus lived His life. He sacrificed His life for us by laying it down each day, as well as in death, setting us an example to follow in our relations with the brethren. In verse 17, he provides a practical illustration of a way we can lay down our life in love. Then, in verse 18, he encourages us not merely to agree with truth but to take action to meet a brother's need.

Verse 19 begins to show the effect of de-

voted sacrifice to this way of life. The persuasive power of knowing we are doing the right things inspires assurance, confidence, and satisfaction; we feel a positive sense that we are right with God. He then explains that, when these are not produced—but instead we feel guilt and condemnation because we know we are not doing well, and our concern for not being perfect overwhelms us—we need to go to God for forgiveness because He will forgive.

Verse 21 is a subtle encouragement to repent, to turn from our self-centeredness so we can be at peace with God and within ourselves. Verse 22 discloses the positive effect of laying down our lives in sacrifice for our brethren by devotedly keeping the commandments: answered prayers. Living by faith and displaying it through a life of sacrificial love is the theme of verse 23, and finally, in verse 24, he reveals another positive effect: to know absolutely that He lives in us and we in Him. Our lives revolve around faith in this knowledge.

The question at this point is still, "How are we trying to find satisfaction in life?" We could reword it, "How are we trying to find love, joy, and peace?" The Parable of the Prodigal Son touches on this issue:

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:13-17)

Like the young man, we yearn for a feeling of well-being, peace, security, fun, and happiness. Also like him, we pursue after them, attempting to produce them in virtually every way but the Father's way. We, like him, experience the same empty, hollow, something-is-missing feelings.

For if our heart
condemns us, God
is greater than
our heart, and
knows all things.
—I John 3:20

Some may remember a popular song of a few decades ago sung by Margaret Whiting titled “Is That All There Is?” The lyrics dealt with this very subject. The singer recounts having tried so many supposedly exciting and fulfilling things in life yet having found no lasting satisfaction in any of them. Following each experience, she concludes by asking the question, “Is that all there is?” The song clearly expresses that such a life is not truly fulfilling.

What is missing from such a life is the true purpose of life combined with the effort of fulfilling it by living the required way. These

three offerings in Leviticus 1-3 broadly define God’s way of life: doing all things within the context of His purpose in love. As we have seen, I John 5:3 defines love as keeping the commandments, and the essence of love is sacrificial giving.

Though without the Spirit of God, some people (psychologists, for instance) have figured out much of this. The part they have not determined through observing humanity is the true purpose of life because God has not revealed it to them. They have, however, found that the essence of love is sacrifice and that doing the right things produces a sense of well-being.

For this is the
love of God,
that we keep His
commandments.
—I John 5:3

Give of Your Best

How does God react to those who should know better but live before Him a poor-quality life? Malachi 1:6-10 pictures God’s reaction—He is not pleased:

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’ You offer defiled food on My altar. But you say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the LORD is contemptible.’ And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts. “But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts. “Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,” says the LORD of hosts.

Here God indicts the people of Malachi’s day for offering inferior, sometimes even deformed animals on His altar! The spiritual parallel concerns the offering of our lives in service to Him and fellowman. Are we, out of love for God and His people, giving the best we have to offer in life’s circumstances? Solomon admonishes in Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or

device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” A Protestant hymn, “Give of Your Best to the Master,” expresses this requirement well. Though God accepts us because of Jesus Christ, He expects us to give the very best we can in return.

Luke 22:15-16 specifically concerns Jesus’ Passover offering, but we need to consider its effects in light of the peace offering rather than the sin offering: “Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’” First, God is satisfied because man is in communion with Him through Christ, the offering. Second, man is satisfied because he knows he is accepted by God and in fellowship with Him. Third, the priest is satisfied because, as the common friend of formerly estranged parties, He is happy to see them in fellowship. No wonder Christ desired this particular Passover! It produced the very purpose for which He came.

The medium that brings this all about is sacrifice. It is not just Christ’s sacrifice on the stake, for it just culminated a whole series of sacrifices that began in heaven when He sacrificed His glory as God, became a man, and subjected Himself to the Father’s will perfectly. Christ’s stated desire here is looking forward to God and mankind being in fellowship with each other in His Kingdom—the ultimate effect of giving the best of ourselves to God following Jesus’ example.

Recall the thought expressed in I John 3:20: “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.” This is
(continued on page 15)

A son honors
his father, and a
servant his master.
If then I am the
Father, where is
My honor?
—Malachi 1:6

Faith to Face Our Trials

Does it seem as if life is becoming just one trial after another? For those who believe that the time is short, this should come as no surprise—it is final-exam time. For those who do not believe time is short, then our personal time is short. None of us knows the deadline God has assigned to our lives—some die suddenly in their thirties, forties and fifties, but we do know that with each passing day we get closer to our end. Because God is faithful and not slack concerning His promise of finishing the good work He has begun in us, trials are a necessary part of the Christian life.

Still, it can be overwhelming. How do we combat discouragement? How do we endure to the end? God has given us the fundamental understanding we need to face our trials successfully and endure in I John 4:17: “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”

On its face, it does not seem to be much of an answer. That is because to understand the power of this verse, we need to bring together other scriptures—the “here a little,

there a little” principle. The explanation begins with an incredible yet generally overlooked scripture.

God’s Perfect Love

This amazing scripture is in John 17. This chapter is the last prayer of Jesus Christ just before His arrest that Passover night. He begins by praying for Himself, then for His disciples. Verse 20 begins a section in which He includes all future believers, “those who will believe in Me through their [the disciples’] word.”

At this point, consider for a moment how much God must love Jesus Christ. After all, they have been working together side-by-side for literally countless years—all eternity—in perfect harmony.

Relatively few couples are blessed with outstanding marriages that last fifty years or more. After so long, the depth of their relationship must be close and intimate. If that happens between two human beings in fifty years, what would it be like after a few billion? It would be intimate beyond our comprehension. Such is the depth of God’s love for Christ—far beyond our comprehension.

Now notice verse 23, especially the two requests made by Christ in the last half of the verse: “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” Jesus is asking God to reveal two things to the world: that God sent Him and that God loves us as much as He loves Jesus Christ.

Understanding the full impact of this verse hinges on a little, two-letter word “as.” One definition is “to the same extent or degree; equally.” Equally implies no more, no less. This definition makes Jesus’ request staggering in its implications! It means we can truthfully say that there is not a being in the universe—including Jesus Christ—whom God loves more than us. Each individual whom God has called can say the same thing. God loves us all at the same incredible, beyond-our-comprehension level.

This statement also shows Christ’s unbelievable love for us. He has been with God forever, yet the Son feels no animosity that our Father loves us just as much, unlike the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In fact, in His prayer Christ is

*“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”
—I John 4:17*

asking God to broadcast this fact to the world! Christ is preeminent in position and responsibility—but not in the Father’s love. As the perfect Parent, He does not love any one child more than the others.

To underscore this equality of love, notice how other Bible translations handle the word “as.” They use words like “even as,” “just as,” “in the same way,” “with the same love as,” “as much as,” and “just as much as.” All emphasize the equality of the Father’s love.

On the authority of Jesus Christ, the same Jesus who has been with God forever, we know the Father loves us as much as He loves Jesus—no more, no less. If we consider how much He must love Christ after spending billions of years working together in perfect harmony, that is *exactly* how much He loves us. The true depth of that love is definitely beyond our comprehension. It takes faith to believe this simple statement of fact.

“Shall He Find Faith?”

The Bible shows that trusting in that love, believing how special we are to God, and how much He loves us will be crucial to our salvation—to our enduring to the end. In Luke 18:8, pay special attention to the time frame: “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

This sobering scripture aims directly at anyone who is left standing, so to speak, at His coming. Christ looked down through the millennia, and saw us—looked into our hearts—and wondered, “Where is the faith?”

What faith is Jesus talking about? It cannot be in His existence because even the demons believe that. Demons also have a great deal of respect for God’s power and sovereignty. What the demons do not believe in is God’s love and all that springs from it. For instance, how could Satan have rebelled if he really believed in God’s love for him? Perhaps the original iniquity found in Satan, the start of all trouble, was his

lack of faith in God’s love for him—“for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). That faithlessness led to pride and vanity and ultimately to rebellion.

When Christ returns, will He find a people who believe how much God loves them and therefore will trust in Him no matter what the physical evidence looks like? That is the faith Christ is talking about in verse 8.

In the preceding verses, Christ contrasts the unjust judge, who could not care less, to the true God, who could not care or love more. The underlying subject of the parable is God’s faithfulness and love, and Jesus gave it to encourage our faith in the Father’s love.

Then, in verse 8, Christ says, “I tell you that [the Father] will avenge [the elect] speedily,” followed immediately by, “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” A definition for *nevertheless* is “in spite of that.” God will act speedily in His great love for us, yet in spite of that fact, people in the end time will still have difficulty believing in the depth of His love.

Our salvation depends on believing how special we are to God—how much He loves us. Jesus says in verse 1, “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” Along with prayer, this parable teaches us about not losing heart—enduring to the end. Knowing how much God loves us can give us the courage and hope we need to face and endure what is ahead.

Lamentations 3:21-23 (RSV) tells us what we have to remember and believe if we are to have the right kind of hope: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.”

Enduring to the End

The Bible shows us the damage caused when God’s people do not believe

how special we are to Him. Jesus says in Matthew 24:12, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” How do we keep our love from going cold? We must go to the source to replenish it. Where is that source? Where does real love come from? The answer is found in I John 4:19: “We love Him because He first loved us.”

Not long ago, the church had leaders and members who no longer believed how special we are and how much God loves those He has called. They wanted to become like the other churches. When that kind of faith is lacking, we cut ourselves off from the only true source of love. The result is automatic: What love we have begins to grow cold.

As members began to see the church crumble around them, they began walking by sight and no longer believed in the elect’s special status with God. What happened to those people? Most have simply disappeared—they did not endure to the end or believe how much God loved them. That is how important it is to believe in the depth of God’s love for us.

The next verse, Matthew 24:13, reinforces this thought: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” Jesus sets up a contrast. Verse 12 describes people without faith in God’s love for us growing cold and not enduring. In verse 13, “but” suggests that those with faith in His love will endure and be saved.

What happened over the past decade or so is nothing compared to what is ahead for some of us. The time of Jacob’s trouble will be terrible. Many will face famine, pestilence, and persecution. Friends and family may turn on us. Church members will die. When all this happens, there may be no physical evidence to see how much God loves us. How will we endure those times? We will, but only if we absolutely believe in how special we are to God, how much He loves us. That is the faith we will need to endure any trial.

Our Day of Judgment

With all this as a backdrop, notice I John 4:8: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Every thought, every word, every act of God is an expression of love. God is sovereign, and He has the right to do whatever He wants. This would be tyranny except for one simple fact: Everything God does, whether seemingly arbitrary or not, is motivated by love. Even our trials are supreme acts of love as Hebrews 12:5-11 and Job’s experience show.

Herbert W. Armstrong once said about Job: “Job was one of the hardest men for God to ever bring down to repentance that has ever lived on the face of this earth.” As terrible as the trial was, Job needed it for salvation. Psalm 84:11 says that God will withhold no good thing from us. To withhold that trial from Job would have been withholding a good thing, making God guilty of hating Job (Proverbs 13:24).

Only God is wise enough to allow us to go through a desperately needed trial while simultaneously using it to accomplish His other purposes as well. In the worsening times ahead, God will not use some of us as cannon fodder for His purposes, though He has the right to do it—He made us. Because of His love for us, He will allow us to face trials because we need them to perfect us. After all, “*all things* work together for good” to those called (Romans 8:28).

How will we survive spiritually if we are among those God chooses to be persecuted, possibly tortured, and killed? Only because we believe that God loves no one more than us, and for this reason, we will *know* that what we are enduring is for our good and will bring about His purpose.

As children, we were disciplined by our parents. As it happened, how often did we thank them for the love they were showing us? As parents, we have disciplined our children. How many times have they ever said, “Thank you”? Most likely, the answer to both is “Never!”

Do we discipline our children out of love or hate? Love, of course. Then why do they not say, “Thank you”? At the moment it is happening, they cannot see—they do not believe—how much we love them. It is a hallmark of youth or immaturity to be blind to the big picture, to see only what is directly in front of them. Hopefully, in times of trial, we are not children in a spiritual sense.

The apostle John describes love in I John 4:10 [Contemporary English Version (CEV)]: “Real love is not our love for God, but his love for us. God sent his Son to be the sacrifice by which our sins are forgiven.”

He writes in verse 16: “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” John wants us to understand how much God loves us and to believe how special we are to God—our faith in how much He loves us. The fact that God is love is repeated from verse 8 to emphasize how complete God’s love is toward us. The verse ends with the fruit of this kind of love—unity.

This leads directly into I John 4:17 (God’s Word version): “God’s love has reached its goal in us. So we look ahead with confidence to the day of judgment. While we are in this world, we are exactly like him with regard to love.”

If we have this faith in God’s love for us mentioned in verse 16, its purpose is to give us the confidence, courage, and hope we need as we face our trials in our day of judgment, which is now (I Peter 4:17), whatever and whenever they may be. By exercising this faith, we will be exactly like Christ.

Christ had absolute faith in God’s love for Him, and He used that faith to triumph in His trials and endure. We must use the exact same faith in following the example He set for us.

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.”

While I John 4:17 gives us the master key—faith in the depth of God’s love

for us—to unlock the understanding we need to face our trials successfully and endure, the story does not end there. John continues in verse 18: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

If understanding how much God loves us and believing in it are so important, how can we tell where we stand in the strength of that belief? Verse 18 begins to answer that question. Fear and worry signal that we are not yet perfect in our belief in how much God loves us. If we believe that the God of infinite power and wisdom loves no one in the universe more than us, what do we have to fear or worry about?

What good parent does not use all the resources available to ensure the well being of his or her children? We are in the minute-by-minute care of the great God (Matthew 10:29-31). “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Similarly, Isaiah 43:13 (CEV) records an important promise from God: “I am God now and forever. No one can snatch you from me or stand in my way.”

Nothing outside of us can stand in His way of accomplishing His purpose to save except ourselves (John 6:39-40; 10:28; Philippians 1:6). As difficult as Job was, God knew exactly what trial was necessary—in his case, a quite painful one—to get the right result. He knows the buttons to push and the pressures to apply to set each of us straight. Job 36:15 (Today’s English Version) tells us, “But God teaches men through suffering and uses distress to open their eyes.”

A second sign of our lack of faith in His love is how we respond to trials. If we believe in how much He loves us, then we know the trial is for our good. Because of His love, we should know that a trial is not just an arbitrary act without rhyme or reason. Because He is God, it cannot be an accidental circumstance happening without His awareness or concern. It

(continued on page 18)

Peter's Trumpets Message

Joel begins his second chapter by speaking of the Day of the Lord, and he ends it by speaking of the Millennium. God's people look forward to both occasions through the Day of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles, respectively.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. . . .

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (Joel 2:1-2, 28-32)

Joel is certainly speaking of the events immediately before the Millennium, the "blood and fire" of the day of God's wrath, followed by the widespread availability of His Holy Spirit as the Millennium starts. Why, then, does Peter relate Joel's words to Pentecost? As he says, "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). Inebriation had nothing to do with it, the apostle asserts, as he begins his extended quotation of Joel 2:28-32, cited above.

Peter's comments are a "first" in several respects. They appear near the start of his very first sermon, of which there would be many more. They come in the very first sermon in the newly founded church of God, and there would be many, many more of these as well. In fact, they represent the very first time Old Testament scripture is quoted in a sermon by any apostle—ever.

For all that, however, this "first" is puzzling! What did Peter see in Joel's apocalyptic prophecy that made him think of Pentecost? Admittedly, Pentecost's "divided tongues, as of fire" (Acts 2:3) may have brought Joel's description of fire and smoke to his mind. And, yes, about fifty days earlier the sun had darkened, on the Passover afternoon of Christ's death. However, had the moon turned into blood then or on the day Peter preached? Where was the "blood and fire and pillars of smoke" of which Joel speaks? Perhaps most importantly, did God pour His Spirit "on all flesh" on Pentecost, AD 31? Why did God inspire Peter to quote Joel in this context?

The Pentecost Miracle

To understand why Peter connected the events on that Pentecost with Joel's prophecy, we will need to notice two things about the miracle of Pentecost: its *nature* and its *participants*.

The Miracle's Nature: *The miracle temporally "healed" the ailment God imposed at Babel.* There, God divided the languages of mankind, inflicting on it an impediment to communication (see Genesis 11:1-9). Suddenly, relationships became much more difficult to establish and maintain. Mankind scattered.

Communication is a two-way street, involving a *source* and a *receiver*. These are what we call the speaker and the hearer, respectively. By changing speaker and hearer, the miracle brought source and receiver together, where normally they would remain distant. The disciples spoke languages in which they were untutored. Members of their audience heard the disciples "speak in his own language" (Acts 2:6). Communication took place.

As miracles go, this is a "strange" one. It did not involve healing the blind, deaf, or lame *en masse*; it did not involve the wholesale casting out of demons. Compared to the plagues God sent on Egypt or to Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead, the Pentecost miracle was not dramatic. Nevertheless, we will see that it was significant.

Message—on Pentecost

The Miracle's Participants: *The miracle involved Jewish speakers of a substandard dialect and Gentile hearers from around the world.* The disciples were Galileans. By virtue of the distance separating them from Jerusalem, Galileans spoke a different dialect of Aramaic than that spoken in Jerusalem. Like many dialects, theirs was what linguists call a “shibboleth,” a term they get from Judges 12:6. A shibboleth is a speech pattern that identifies the speaker’s background. In the disciples’ case, it marked them to be what the Jerusalem leadership considered uneducated and low class. As an analogy, one could compare the Galilean dialect to “cockney” English—also a shibboleth. The dons of Oxbridge look down on those who are “unfortunate” enough to speak cockney. That is how the effete Jewish elite in Jerusalem reacted to the Galilean dialect. Everyone who heard the disciples knew they were from Galilee. Their audience was dumbfounded that these untutored fellows could fluently speak other languages:

Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2:7-11)

Notice that they mention “Jews *and* proselytes.” The cosmopolitan audience was not composed merely of Jews who had traveled from abroad for the holy day, but also of *Gentiles* converted to Judaism—that is, proselytes. Unlike typical Jews today, pre-Diaspora Jews (before AD 70) were dedicated missionaries. Christ Himself refers to their evangelistic zeal: “You travel land and sea to win one proselyte” (Matthew 23:15). Over the years, the Jews—like evangelicals today—had carried their religion ev-

erywhere. Paul preached the gospel in synagogue after synagogue throughout the Roman Empire. There were synagogues in the Parthian Empire as well; Peter, when he served God in Babylon, certainly frequented them. Judaism had reached the Far East by Christ’s time and perhaps the distant West as well.

Pentecost’s was a miracle of *language*. It showed Peter what Pentecost was all about: God had enabled communication between Himself and mankind. He had made it possible to build a relationship between God and man and between man and man. Even if human civilization had reached the end of its rope—suffering the judgment of God, as Joel apocalyptically describes it—“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Most importantly, Peter understood that this new level of communication *included* the Gentiles. This is why Joel’s words struck home to him on the Day of Pentecost. He knew that the word “whoever” included the Gentiles scattered about in the audience. He preached good news to them: They now had access to God’s salvation.

Notice Peter’s concluding comments to his sermon that day. In answer to the peoples’ query, “What are we to do?” the apostle replies:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:38-39)

Gentiles, those “who are afar off,” could be “among the remnant whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:32).

Servants to the Gentiles

Joel 2:28-31 offers *hope* to the Gentiles. Joel was not alone in writing of that hope. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the coming of a “Servant” who will raise up the remnant of Israel and serve “as a light to the Gentiles . . . to the ends of the earth.”

And now the LORD says, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength), indeed He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:5-6)

The reference to Christ as God's Servant here is reminiscent of Acts 2:18 (and Joel 2:29), where God says He will pour out His Spirit "on My menservants and on My maidservants." Those in God's New Testament church act as God's servants, under Christ, the Head of the church, to preach the gospel "in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Only about

thirty verses later, in Matthew 24:45-51, Jesus again makes use of the servant metaphor, this time in the Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants. The working servant is rewarded at Christ's return, but the evil one, convinced that "My master is delaying His coming," finds himself "cut . . . in two."

Christ's Ministry of Light

Centuries after Isaiah wrote those his words of hope, another of God's servants speaks of Christ as a light to the Gentiles. Simeon, recognizing the infant Jesus as God's Anointed, exclaims:

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32)

"All the Inhabita

Luke's catalog of nations in Acts 2 begs comparison with the list appearing in Jeremiah 25:11-31. This list of nations, mostly Gentiles ones, is one of the longest in God's Word. In verses 11-12, God says that a number of nations, including Judah "shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it shall come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon." At the expiration of the seventy years, Babylon fell and Cyrus released a number of nations from captivity.

Beginning with verse 15, God commissions Jeremiah to do some preaching—and a whole lot of traveling.

[T]hus says the LORD God of Israel to me: "Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them." Then I took the cup from the LORD's hand, and made all the nations drink, to whom the LORD had sent me; Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and its princes, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and

a curse, as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his princes, and all his people; all the mixed multitude, all the kings of the land of Uz, all the kings of the land of the Philistines (namely, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod); Edom, Moab, and the people of Ammon; all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastlands which are across the sea; Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who are in the farthest corners; all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed multitude who dwell in the desert; all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes; all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another; and all the kingdoms of the world which are on the face of the earth. Also the king of Sheshach [that is, Babylon] shall drink after them. "Therefore you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Drink, be drunk, and vomit! Fall and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you."' And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them,

Christ would eventually serve as a light to the Gentiles. While Simeon does not quote Isaiah directly, he was certainly familiar with Isaiah 49 as well as Isaiah 8 and 9.

In these two early chapters of Isaiah, the prophet also shows Christ as a light to the Gentiles. Lurking in them is the rhetoric of Joel—the darkness, the shadow of death, yet afterward, just as in Joel, hope shines through.

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. . . . Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom and anguish; and they will be driven into darkness. Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee

of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. (Isaiah 8:20, 22–9:1-2)

Isaiah wrote *after* the fall of Israel to Assyria. The Assyrians' attack on the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, in the northern part of Israel, came in two waves. The first "distress" resulted in the deportation of some Israelites. The second oppression was much heavier, resulting in the deportation of virtually everyone. Then, the Assyrians imported *Gentile* peoples to the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, the area of Galilee. Their descendents—the Samaritans—heavily populated Galilee in Christ's day.

Christ was reared in Galilee, where small enclaves of Jews lived among many Gentiles. Matthew, writing of the start of Christ's ministry, writes:

nts of the Earth"

'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "You shall certainly drink! For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by My name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth," says the LORD of hosts.' Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say to them, "The LORD will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will roar mightily against His fold. He will give a shout, as those who tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise will come to the ends of the earth—for the LORD has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh. He will give those who are wicked to the sword," says the LORD.

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth."

Like Noah in his day, Jeremiah traveled the world as God's witness. He delivered a "Joel 2"

message, one of "clouds and thick darkness" (verse 2). He warned of "disaster . . . from nation to nation"—widespread failure of the international system that would result in war for "all the inhabitants of the earth."

The typical fulfillment of these words took place in the years and decades just after Jeremiah uttered them, in the axial period of history. A series of worldwide wars, continuing intermittently for centuries, destroyed every kingdom of early antiquity. (The word *all* appears in the text cited above no less than 20 times.) Few modern historians appreciate the displacement of peoples and destruction of culture that took place in those axial years.

The final fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy will take place during the coming day of God's wrath. We speak of that on the Feast of Trumpets.

Jeremiah 25 ends with no message of hope for the Gentiles. Yet, as Isaiah 9 and 49, as well as a number of other passages, indicate, the Gentiles do have hope. That hope took a gigantic leap forward on Pentecost, AD 31. From that time forward, "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Now when Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:12-17)

It was in the *Gentile* area of Galilee—not in Jewish Jerusalem to the south—where Christ *began* His ministry of light. In Romans 11:11, Paul asserts that "salvation has come to the Gentiles." Peter, in citing Joel in his first sermon, understands the Gentiles to be *spiritually* "in the region and shadow of death," in deep darkness, with clouds obscuring their vision of God's salvation. He relates Joel to Pentecost because, on that day, God spread apart those clouds to allow the light of His salvation to reach the Gentiles, dispelling their gloom. What happened in Acts 2 gave the Gentiles the *hope* that they could build a relationship with the God of salvation. The hope of the Gentiles becomes the theme of the book of Acts, as seen, for example,

- in the preaching by Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8);
- in the work by Peter with Cornelius and his family (Acts 10); and
- in Paul's ministry to the Gentiles in every city he visited. God called Paul "to bear My name before Gentiles" (Acts 9:15). Chapters 11 through 28 of Acts relates how Paul did that.

Christ: the Hope of the Gentiles

As the passages in Isaiah (and elsewhere) indicate, God did not "remember" the Gentiles by way of afterthought. He planned to offer them salvation early on. How early? Genesis 12 records the call of Abraham (then Abram), and the first of God's many promises to him. God tells the patriarch,

Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

God remembers the Gentiles when He calls Abraham, promising that *every* nation, "all the families of the earth," will be blessed in the blessings of Abraham. Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13), carries the thought to its conclusion when he asserts that the line demarcating Jew and Gentile disappears in Christ: "[T]here is neither Jew nor Greek; . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29).

It is no accident that the events of Pentecost, AD 31, introduce the book of Acts. God uses the linguistic miracle to indicate the broad-based *hope* the Gentiles now have in Christ. God had enabled a hitherto closed communication channel between God and man—as well as between man and man. The gulfs separating God and mankind—and man and man—were now bridgeable. "On earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), of which the heavenly host had sung, was now attainable. God displayed His ability to reverse the effects of Babel.

Communication between God and mankind. Paul, writing to the Ephesian church, makes it clear that the hope promised in the Old Testament to the Gentiles came *with* Christ. The result is that they can become members of God's household—His Family.

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. . . . Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners,

(continued on page 18)

(continued from page 6)

vitally important to us because we of all people are subject to intense feelings of self-condemnation and guilt from knowing that we are not living up to God's standard. We truly care about what God thinks of us because we know more than most about Him.

Our faith is not to be blind and unthinking but based on truth. Our application of faith in light of this verse necessitates a fascinating balance between two extremes that arise from our more precise knowledge of God's way. Both extremes are wrong. The first extreme, already noted, is that we live life in constant guilt and fear that God's hammer will fall and smash us to smithereens at any moment due to our imperfections.

The second is a laissez-faire, God-is-very-merciful-and-tolerant, He-understands-my-weaknesses attitude. In this extreme, sins are accepted as part of the normal course of life, and no determined effort is made to overcome them. Some have given in to a particular sin, exclaiming, "God understands my needs." God also understands rebellion.

But whatever happened to Jesus' strong admonition, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" or "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off" (Matthew 5:29-30)?

Certainly, He does not mean this literally, but it illustrates the serious determination, vigor, and strength we are to employ in overcoming sin. Those who minimize sin come close to trampling the Son of God underfoot and putting His sacrifice to an open shame (see Hebrews 6:6; 10:29).

How good is the sacrifice of such a person's life? He is guilty of practicing sin. John writes, "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). Later, in Revelation 22:15, he adds, "But outside [the New Jerusalem] are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Such people will not be in God's Kingdom.

Their consciences have adjusted in a similar way to the situation in Malachi 1. Sin, a defiled life, is acceptable, and their attitude seems to be that God will just have to be satisfied with children who will not strive to overcome. This is dangerous business indeed because God says only those who overcome will inherit all things (Revelation 21:7). Is God satisfied with such a situation? Does He not desire a better offering from His children for their welfare and His glory? If He is not content, the fellowship is either already broken or is breaking down.

If your right eye
causes you to sin,
pluck it out... If
your right hand
causes you to sin,
cut it off...
—Matthew 5:29-30

Acceptable to God?

Our concern, however, is for those who *are* striving to overcome but still failing from time to time—those who *know* they are not living up to the standard and struggle with a guilty conscience and feel their fellowship with God is cut off because of occasional sin. The majority of us probably fall into this category.

When we commit the occasional sin, are we no longer acceptable to God? Is our fellowship truly cut off? While it is true that sin separates us from Him, do we remain unsatisfied because we feel there is no communion? Once again, God's grace rescues us from what would otherwise be an impossible situation.

Amidst the first-century church's rather passionate discussions over the applicability of certain portions of the law, Peter says in Acts 15:10-11: "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." Peter is acknowledging

this very situation, except his reference is to the Old Covenant. He recognizes that, if we try to be as holy as God is holy in this life through obedience alone, we put ourselves into an impossible situation. It is this fact, in part, that Israel's experiences under the Old Covenant were designed to reveal.

Undoubtedly, most Pharisees were sincere in their misguided devotion to God. Paul writes in Romans 10:2 that Israel has "a zeal for God but not according to knowledge," that is, true knowledge. In their efforts to be pure, they added law upon law to try to keep from sinning—and perhaps even add a measure of absolution—but they made matters only more difficult with each new law.

The answer to this confounding situation lies in a change of our natures arising from repentance, receipt of God's Holy Spirit, and—perhaps above all—access to God through Jesus Christ. Through these come fellowship and experience with Them throughout the remainder of life and access to God's merciful grace when

For I bear
them witness that
they have a
zeal for God,
but not according
to knowledge.
—Romans 10:2

we fall short. There can be no doubt we are saved by grace through faith. Our depression and extreme self-condemnation reveals a lack of faith in God's willingness to forgive upon repentance. Though works are required of us, we cannot earn our way into the Kingdom through them because they will forever fall short in providing payment for sin.

Paul confirms, however, that love requires works: "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2). Notice that Paul says Christ has given Himself for us and that the offering he refers to is a sweet savor. Paul's reference, therefore, is not that Christ gave Himself for us as a sin offering but as one not involving sin: He was a burnt, meal, and peace offering. He gave Himself for us in the manner in which He lived His life.

Even as Christ's sin offering is for us, and we find acceptance before God, satisfaction, and peace when we understand and believe that our sins are forgiven, so also is His life, as He lived it, for us. It is as though when God looks at us, He sees Christ! This is an incredibly wondrous aspect of His grace and part of the doctrine of our being "in Christ," that is, part of the spiritual body of which He is the Head.

I Corinthians 12:12 says, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." Ephesians 1:21-23 repeats this concept:

[The Father has raised Christ] far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Even though the human body consists of many parts, it is also an integrated whole. So also is Christ, and thus God "sees" Christ as an integrated whole.

Paul uses this same idea in a somewhat different context in Galatians 3:16, 28-29:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

It is clear, especially in verse 29, that, concerning the promises, the entire church with all its integrated parts is perceived as being Christ. This is the source of much of our spiritual strength. It shows us, as "cells" of Christ's body, spiritually nurtured by the food of the altar while in communion with our spiritual Father and His Son, our Savior. This is the food that comes down from heaven (John 6:33, 41, 50-51, 58).

It is from certain knowledge of these spiritual truths that we are moved to take advantage of our acceptance into Their presence. The fruit of this is our confidence and boldness so that we do not unnecessarily condemn ourselves. As mentioned earlier, there is a tension between the two extremes of excessive guilt and feelings of worthlessness in contrast to the casual, careless, irresponsible, "God will just have to take me as I am" disregard of our responsibility to glorify God in all we think, say, and do.

This is why John says, "God is greater than our heart." He is ever willing to accept us as Christ—even though we personally bring Him blemished offerings in our life's experiences—as long as our attitude has not turned to trampling the sacrifice of His Son underfoot and treating it as a common thing.

We will never enter into God's acceptance and fellowship based on any work of offering we sacrifice to Him. The only thing He will accept is the unblemished offering of Christ's life, and because it accompanies or precedes us into His presence, we are accepted, have communion with Him, and are fed.

For as the body
is one and has
many members,
but all the members
of that one body,
being many,
are one body,
so also in Christ.

—I Corinthians 12:12

The Priest's Children

Another aspect of this offering is important for us to consider more closely: The priest's children are also specifically named to receive of the peace offering. Notice Leviticus 7:31-32: "And the

priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'. Also the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a heave offering from the sacrifices of your peace offerings."

Compare this with Numbers 18:9-11:

This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

Whom do the priest's children symbolically represent? This is important because they were also to eat directly of the offering and be satisfied. We have already seen that Christ is symbolically portrayed in several guises, as offerer, offering, and priest. Remember also that Christ is one with the church. We are parts of His body; we are "in Him."

The Old Testament also characterizes the church in several symbolic guises. For example, all of Israel represents the church as the children of God in pilgrimage to its inheritance. At other times, it is specifically represented as those who have made a covenant with God. Here, the priest's children—or at other times, the entire tribe of Levi—symbolize the church in another specific mode: in service to God. In being permitted to partake of the sacrifices, the priest's children stand for the church in communion with God. God shows through this that he who offered an animal in order to feast with God could not do so without also feasting with God's priests and their children.

In this, we have a small window into I John 4:20: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" It also ties into I John 3:17: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

The two great commandments are absolutely, inextricably linked, and for them to produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness represented by the peace offering, we must keep them in tandem in real time. Today, all who really have communion with God must share that communion with His priest, Christ, and His

"children," the rest of the church, the offerer's brethren.

Notice a practical application of this recorded in Acts 2:41-46:

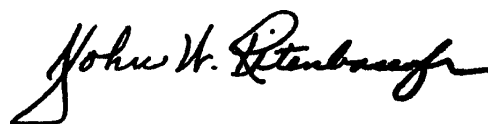
Those who gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord, in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

It is easy to see the church's oneness in this practical circumstance. What we do to share in and contribute to this unity is something each of us needs to explore. The possibilities are almost endless, if we keep our eyes and ears open and think of practical applications among those we fellowship with. This is a way to produce peace, and is it not our responsibility to be both peacemakers and our brother's keeper?

The overall lesson we should learn from the peace offering is that it represents the effect, the consequence, of devotion given directly to God and devotion to God given in service to man. This effect is commonly called "peace" and, in an overall sense, pictures all in harmony.

We must remember, though, that "peace," as used in terms of this offering, does not convey mere tranquility. This is why commentators cannot arrive at a consistent name for it. The word connotes a great deal more. Like *shalom*, it implies abundance in every area of life, even prosperity and good health. It also suggests thankfulness for blessings received and deliverance from difficulty. Is it any wonder that most researchers feel it was the offering most commonly made? We should make this offering every day—on our knees giving thanks, praise, and blessing to God for His abundant mercy and providence.

In Christian love,



If someone says,
"I love God,"
and hates his
brother, he is a
liar; for he who
does not love his
brother whom he
has seen, how can
he love God whom
he has not seen?

John 3:17

(continued from page 14)

but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. . . (Ephesians 2:11-13, 19)

Communication between man and man. Pentecost also teaches us about the power God gives us to bridge the gap between human beings. Individuals led by God's Spirit become related to each other by the fact that they "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Paul summarizes the relationship near the end of Romans. Notice, incidentally, that Paul refers here to Christ as a servant:

Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name." And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!" And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!" And again, Isaiah says: "There

shall be a root of Jesse; and He shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope." (Romans 15:7-12)

Christ *will* eventually "reign over the Gentiles." At that time, He will finish the work He started at Pentecost, complete the work that Pentecost merely presages. The prophet Zephaniah prophesies that God will eventually reverse the linguistically divisive effect of Babel: "I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord" (Zephaniah 3:9).

Note the plural: peoples. To "all the families of the earth," God will open the channel of communication by which they, as Joel and Peter agree, may "call on the name of the LORD." Then, they will be, as at that time of Pentecost, AD 31, "with one accord" (see Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12).

Paul concludes in Romans 15:13: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." The miracle of that Pentecost day gives "whoever calls on the name of the LORD"—Gentile and Israelite alike—"joy and peace" because of the hope all share through God's Spirit.

—Charles F. Whitaker

READY ANSWER ➤

Faith to Face Our Trials

(continued from page 9)

definitely cannot be an act just to make our lives more difficult. These might be the thoughts of a child while receiving a spanking, but they should not be ours.

A third way to measure the strength of our faith is to list the things that would make our lives better yet seem to be out of reach. For some, it is money; others, a job; and still others, a mate. Psalm 84:11 is a verse we can use to get the right perspective: "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

If we are walking uprightly, our lack of a desired thing is in itself a good indication that at this time it is not good for us, no matter what we

might think to the contrary. Otherwise, this verse cannot be true. Getting what we want rather than what we need can be spiritually lethal (Revelation 3:17).

A final way to measure our faith is to examine if we ever feel we love ourselves more than God does. A person with this attitude begins to take things into his own hands because he cannot trust God to do it—he does not believe how good God is and how much He loves him. To doubt the depth of God's love for us is to deny God and the very essence of who He is—love.

This describes Satan's attitude, one that could be considered insanity. Human nature, which mimics Satan's

spirit (Ephesians 2:2) is suicidal, wanting to sin even though it knows the result is death. Thus, because human nature contains this spirit of self-destruction, God *always* loves us more than we love ourselves.

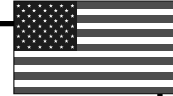
It is vital that we build our faith in God's love for us and realize just how special we are to Him. He loves no one else in the universe more. I John 4:17 promises that perfecting our faith in God's love for us gives us the power we need to face our trials, our day of judgment, boldly. In doing so, we will be imitating the faith Jesus Christ exercised in facing His trials, showing absolute faith in God's love for us.

—Pat Higgins

New Infectious Diseases

The nation's top scientists say that environmental, economic, social, and scientific changes have helped to trigger an unprecedented explosion of more than 35 new infectious diseases since the early 1970s. The U.S. death rate from infectious disease, which dropped in the first part of the 20th century and then stabilized, is now double what it was in 1980. The Institute of Medicine reports that every hour 1,500 people worldwide die of an infectious disease, and more than half of those are children under 5. Many of the infectious diseases that now seem common—food-borne *E. coli*, waterborne *Cryptosporidium*, airborne Legionnaire's disease, blood-borne hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted AIDS—first surfaced in roughly the past 30 years. "This period from the 1970s is without precedent in the history of the annals of medicine," says Dr. Paul Epstein, associate director of Harvard Medical School. A panel of top U.S. researchers attributed the surge in new diseases to specific factors in the world and the way we live: microbial adaptation and change; human susceptibility to infection; changing ecosystems; human demographics and behavior; economic development and land use; international travel and commerce; technology and industry; breakdown of public health measures; and war and famine.

U.S. Debt



Kevin DeMeritt, president of Lear Financial, reports that the current combined debt of all U.S. households, businesses, and governments has reached an unthinkable \$31 trillion dollars. America's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is only \$10.5 trillion, making total indebtedness 295% of GDP. In comparison, just before the Great Depression, the percentage of debt to GDP was 264%, 31 points lower than it is today. This trend of indebtedness is everywhere:

- \$ The U.S. is the world's largest debtor nation.
- \$ Since 1995, debt has been growing at 8-10% per year, twice as fast as economic growth.
- \$ Government debt (federal, state, and local) amounts to \$5 trillion, of which the federal portion is \$3.5 trillion.
- \$ Household debt is estimated at \$8.2 trillion.
- \$ The percentage of loans in foreclosure has risen to a record 1.18% from 1.15 %.
- \$ Bankruptcies in 2003 will likely set a record for the third straight year.
- \$ U.S. pension funds are under-funded by upwards of \$300 billion.

War's New Face

Middle East scholar Daniel Pipes sees the rules of conflict being rewritten by the West to facilitate more precise and "humane" wars. These include:

- *Who is the enemy:* War used to be aimed against a whole country. Now, the authorities painstakingly distinguish between the government and the people. The former is the enemy; the latter, potentially friendly. This leads to such examples as U.S. planes simultaneously carrying bombs to destroy the regime and food to relieve the populace.
- *Who will win:* The outcome of war used to be the overriding question. Now, when it is West vs. non-West, the wide gulf in economics, technology, materiel, training, and organization virtually assures a Western victory. With this assumed, attention focuses on matters such as the *duration of hostilities* and the *number of casualties*.

• *Casualties:* Once, each side sought to inflict as many casualties as possible on the enemy. Now, Western armies strive to minimize the other sides' losses. In response, non-Western rulers sometimes inflict casualties on their own civilian populations by placing them in danger, while the invading army tries to avoid killing and hurting them.

• *Plunder:* As recently as 1918, victory in war meant begging the loser. Starting with the Marshall Plan after World War II, the U.S. established the precedent of paying for the rehabilitation of its former enemies.

• *Rooting for the other side:* Nationality once defined loyalties—no longer. Now significant numbers of Westerners oppose the war goals of their own governments. These sentiments contributed significantly to the French loss in Algeria and the U.S. loss in Vietnam. In the latest war against Iraq, some Americans and Britons wanted the coalition to lose. Contrarily, plenty of Iraqis desired a coalition victory.

Immigrants in the MILITARY

About 37,400 foreign nationals serve in the U.S. military, according to the Department of Defense. Many non-citizens turn to the military for a stable job and access to education. Serving in the military is also a quicker way for green card holders to obtain U.S. citizenship, and legislation being decided upon in Congress may speed it up even more. Last July, as a thank-you gesture to those fighting the war against terrorism, President Bush waived the normal three-year waiting period for soldiers who want to become citizens.

America's Black Economy

Author Eric Schlosser writes in *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market* that marijuana, pornography, and illegal labor have created a hidden market in the U.S. which now accounts for as much as 10% of the American economy. As a cash crop, marijuana is believed to have surpassed corn, and hardcore pornography revenue equals Hollywood's domestic box office takings. The total number of illegal immigrants is estimated at about 8 million, and about a million of them are employed and being paid in cash. Although the official American economy has been suffering a downturn, the shadow economy is enjoying unprecedented levels of success, much as Prohibition fuelled illegal markets in the 1930s.

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

The setting of the Parable of the Two Debtors is the house of Simon, a Pharisee, who had invited Jesus to eat with him. To show respect for Jesus, a woman stops in uninvited, but Simon calls her a sinner, one notoriously wicked, a prostitute (Luke 7:36-39). These three real people are reflected in the three fictitious characters of Jesus' parable (verses 41-42): a creditor, a debtor who owes 500 denarii, and another who owes 50.

The forgiving creditor represents Jesus Christ. The professedly righteous man owing 50 denarii represents Simon. The person in debt for 500 denarii represents the woman sinner. This Bible Study will analyze the attitudes of the two debtors and the three questions around which the parable revolves: "Which of them will love Him the more?" "Do you see this woman?" "Who is this who even forgives sins?"



1. What was Simon the Pharisee's attitude? Luke 7:36-50; Proverbs 26:12; Isaiah 65:5; II Corinthians 10:12; Philippians 2:3-4; Titus 1:16.

COMMENT: Simon's pharisaic sensibilities were shocked by the sinner's action—and even more by Christ's attitude toward her. He was complacent and self-absorbed, and his self-righteousness manifested itself in pleasure with his own "goodness" and "importance." Although he invited Jesus to eat at his house, it was not to learn from Jesus or to honor Him, as his lack of effort to supply the traditional courtesy of water to wash His feet shows. Jesus could have regarded this serious breach of etiquette as a direct insult.

Simon also shows Jesus no warmth or concern when He arrives at his house; in that day's culture, a polite kiss was appropriate in greeting. Neither does he pour oil on Jesus' head, another widespread custom among the Jews. The oil was a sweet or olive oil prepared to give off a pleasant smell, as well as to render the hair more smooth and elegant. His negligence of concern toward Jesus exposed Simon's true spiritual bankruptcy.

2. What was the woman's attitude? Luke 7:38, 42, 44-47; I Corinthians 13:13; 8:1-3; I John 2:10.

COMMENT: The woman's entrance is not as rude as it may seem to us, as it was customary for an uninvited guest to join a gathering in a house as an observer. Her silence reveals her appropriate behavior; she came to learn from Jesus and receive forgiveness rather than to talk or eat. Knowing she was a sinner, she wept in repentance, washed Jesus' feet with her tears, and dried them with her hair. "Began to wash" in Luke 7:38 means "to water with a shower," and "kissed" implies kissing repeatedly. The "fragrant oil" of verse 46 was a mixture of various aromatic substances, far more costly and precious than the "oil" commonly used for anointing the head.

Her conduct, compared with Simon's, is dramatically different. While he shows comparatively "little" love, she shows "much." She expresses abundant appreciation for the forgiveness Jesus offers and openly displays her love for Him. What a contrast to Simon's disregard of extending the common courtesies to Jesus!

3. What is the significance of the question, "Which of them will love Him more?" Luke 7:42; I John 3:10-11, 16-23; 4:19.

COMMENT: Simon admits that the one forgiven more would feel the most obligated and should love more. Jesus succeeds in

causing Simon, by his own admission, to pronounce judgment on himself for misconstruing the woman's act, doubting Christ Himself, and dishonoring his guest.

All three people knew the woman had many sins, but Jesus' declaration that her sins were forgiven—in contrast to Simon's condemnation—conveys great love. She, in turn, responds by expressing lavish love upon Him. Christ was willing to forgive Simon as He did the repentant woman. However, while both debtors in the parable are forgiven, Luke gives no indication that Simon repented.

4. What is the significance of the question, "Do you see this woman?" Luke 7:44; II Corinthians 7:9-10; Hebrews 11:6; I Peter 1:6-9.

COMMENT: Christ wants Simon to realize that her loving and faithful attitude is what is required for forgiveness. His emphasis is on the words "you" and "this." Jesus could discern Simon's attitude. Simon saw nothing but the woman's past reputation as a reckless, rejected, sleazy woman. Then Jesus delicately and graciously exposes Simon's callousness, hatred, and poor judgment. He also points out to him the depth of her repentance and faith. Her past may have been full of sin, but because of her genuinely repentant attitude, display of love, and obvious faith in Him, Jesus discerns a desire in her to change from her old ways and begin living God's way of life.

5. What is the significance of the question, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Luke 7:49; 5:20-25; Acts 13:38-41; Romans 3:23; James 2:16-17; II Peter 1:2-4.

COMMENT: Simon's guests are surprised to hear Jesus taking on the divine prerogative to forgive sin. He says that it is her faith that brought forgiveness—not her tears, kisses, or ointment. His last comment to her is "Go in peace" or "Go into peace." She receives Christ's command to enjoy that peace and live in the full realization of the peace that passes all understanding.

We are all debtors in the sight of our just Creditor. All have sinned, so none of us has a way to discharge our debt on our own. Christ can forgive all who truly repent of their sins and turn to Him in faith. Through His willingness to take our debt and blot it out with His own blood, we receive the remission of our sins. Once freed from sin's oppressive debt, we must show our gratitude to Him by living in holiness and loving service to others, glorifying Him in a life of righteousness.