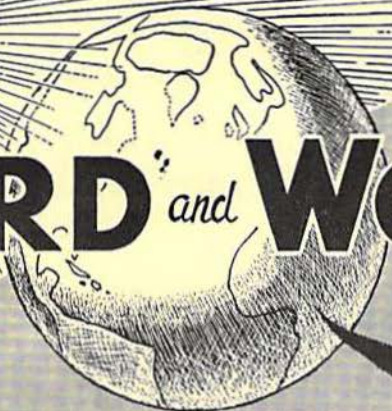


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AUGUST, 1976

Commentaries--Help or Hindrance?

Both Sides of the Question—P. 234

A Lesson on John the Baptist

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

Healing and God's Sovereign Will

Alex Wilson

We Refuse to Part with Our Old Views

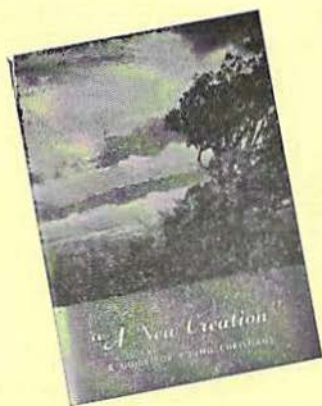
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Robert Heid is a minister in Louisville, Kentucky



God's Family

W. R. H.

"No man's opinion is any better than his information," said a board member at a college board meeting. This statement, if looked at squarely, becomes axiomatic—it need not be proved. And if this statement is true in business matters of a college, I think it is also true in the deeper matters of the Spirit.

Let's look at the 42nd chapter of Job. "Then Job answered Jehovah, and said, I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be restrained. Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not."

Although Job was a perfect and an upright man—and we have Jehovah's word for it—yet he did finally admit to imperfect information in the things of God. We, who are of much smaller stature, can but admit to the same ignorance in various areas.

For example, many blind men are near-geniuses in music, and have most sensitive touch; yet when it comes to photography or painting, they are out of touch. Not having the sense of sight, they have a void that has been only partially alleviated by super development of the other senses. We would not ask their judgment about the blending of colors, nor the expression of perspective.

One of the qualifications of an elder is: "not a novice, lest being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil." The alternative is for one to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." How our opinions go through a major change as we gain knowledge from Him who is the Giver of life!

In the twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians, Paul begins: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." (I need to read this, then, for myself!) "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. . . . But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit, to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit, the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another

workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally as he will." In verse 21 he adds: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; or again, the head to the feet, I have no need of thee."

Am I wrong in saying, we try to size up the other person's gift by placing it alongside of ours? I know the experience of having prayers quickly and miraculously answered, but do I know about fasting? No. I know that the Lord has shielded my life by His divine providence, but can I understand the afflictions of an invalid? No. I have, on many occasions, received special help from the Lord when preaching, or in my study, but have I experienced praying in the Spirit in such a way that my lips speak unutterable words to my Lord? No. So, I may be able to give an opinion about one or two of the Spirit's manifestations, but there are other gifts that are beyond my experience, and I must take God's word for it, and measure others' experiences by the Word alone.

I believe, by experience, that praying and anointing with oil (Jas. 5:14ff.) by the elders, in answer to the call of the sick, is in God's order for raising up the sick today. I therefore will question the opinion of those who have not had like experience. I am beginning to see something of "corporate worship" and "the unity of the body of Christ," in a very real and spiritual way. And, as Bro. Linscott recently pointed out, all Christians are not cut out with the same cookie cutter.

I am no authority to compare the Rocky mountains (a few of which I have seen) with the Alps, which I have not seen. And merely because I have not scaled Mt. Ararat, will I deny that the remains of Noth's ark have been found there? I rejoice, rather, in this glorious testimony from those who have "been there."

If others report experiences that are unknown to me and unlike anything I have had, I can thank God for what He has revealed to me, and for those other gifts that He is giving elsewhere, for the profit of the entire body. O, how the hands need the feet. O, how the ears need the eyes. If I, like Job, hide counsel without knowledge, I will be found "uttering that which I understood not."

Gamaliel, the great teacher of young Saul of Tarsus, was a wise man. Yet, when he was confronted with the problem of a group of believers who had broken with Judaism and were openly manifesting the work of the Holy Spirit, he advised against opposing them, fearing he would be found "fighting against God." This, too, has been written down for our admonition.

Carl Kitzmiller is a minister in Oakdale, La., and author of the Word and Work Lesson Quarterly. Write for a sample copy.



Questions Asked of Us

Carl Kitzmiller

A QUESTION CONCERNING JUDGMENT

Our printers are human and a printing mistake was certain to happen, sooner or later. In the June issue, page 174, one of the questions was omitted, with the result that an answer was tacked on to the preceding answer concerning the rapture. The following question should have appeared following the first paragraph on that page: "Is not everyone to be judged? How can it be said that Christians are not to be judged?"

How can one know that God has forgiven his sins?

Just like practically everything else about the Christian life, it is a matter of faith. David Livingstone is reported to have said that God is a gentleman who keeps His promises. If we believe man, we can surely believe God. He has revealed the conditions of pardon, and when one seeks forgiveness according to His will he need only count the forgiveness as an accomplished fact. When a man says, "I have forgiven you," he may intend it to be that way, or even desire it, but due to the weakness of the flesh he may find that the intellectual decision is not always followed up by the heart. God has no such weakness. When He tells Christians, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," we may count it so. If a Christian has confessed his sins (i.e., the confession of repentance) and does not have a consciousness of forgiveness, it is because he has not believed God's promise.

There are several extremes in this matter. Some suppose forgiveness is known by feeling or some subjective experience. Now if there has been true repentance and one believes God has forgiven, there likely will be some very deep feeling. The lifting of guilt can remove a terrible burden and can bring emotional stirring. In some types of people this might bring a variety of emotional upheavals. We do need to be reminded, however, that feelings can be produced by falsehood as well as by truth. Some who have watered down God's terms of pardon or who have created a system of their own may be deceived into thinking they are forgiven

when they are not. The resulting emotion may be very real, but it is also misleading. Assurance based on this might seem very solid, but it is a house built on the sand.

Some, even some who are sincere and devout, look for some sort of unusual, supernatural, or miraculous experience as evidence of forgiveness. I am persuaded that much of the emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit is prompted by the desire to have something more than the assurance of faith that God has accepted a person. We are always tempted to walk by sight and do desire that which visibly shows God at work in our life. I have just finished reading a "Christian" autobiography in which there were many good things, but the subject continually found assurance in lights turning blue (caused by the presence of the Holy Spirit, it was said), in unique experiences, and even in some dreams and cases of ESP (extra-sensory perception). Nowhere does the Lord promise such things as evidences of pardon or forgiveness.

There are those who seek assurance of forgiveness on terms other than those given by God. There are few greater tragedies than the unregenerate man who supposes that everything is well with him or the Christian who expects to repent selectively of his sins while he keeps some of them. Some are sure God is so good He has forgiven them without repentance, some minimize their sins to the point of extinction; some try to forget their sins or to atone for them with good works; some would repent partially but not to the extent of becoming a Christian. The only man who has a right to expect assurance is the one who has dealt with the whole sin question by becoming a Christian, and thus has a Savior from sin, and who then in his Christian life brings every sin in genuine repentance to the Lord. But this man does not need fireworks, voices, or unexplained sounds in the night. He must just take his stand by faith on what God has said.

Obviously it is important for us to know what God has said if we are to stand by faith on God's promises, and many fail of true assurance at this very point. They may have allowed themselves to become dependent on what someone has told them. It is also important that repentance be genuine. We cannot deceive God in this, and we may not always deceive ourselves. Repentance may require us to deal drastically with those things that tempt us, so that we stop toying with dangerous situations. It is necessary to call sin what it is, to repent of it toward God genuinely, and then to believe He has done what He said He would do.

Why do so many people consider drinking to be socially important?

This must be largely an opinion question. I have taken no polls and have done no research on this question, but I suspect most of us know enough about human nature and our world to give a fairly reliable estimate of the situation. In our day, the movies,

television, and related public opinion influences, along with the advertising agencies, have done a good job of convincing people that drinking is a glamorous, prestige-conferring activity. The alcohol interests have spent millions to create favorable attitudes. The result is that many people tend to think of drinking as a mark of sophisticated, gracious entertaining and living. In other words, people have been sold a lie.

Certainly Satan is back of the campaign to make alcohol a part of the "good life." Alcoholic beverages have been around almost as long as man. Probably no compound has brought so much misery or has served Satan's cause so well. It quickly becomes habit-forming, and it causes man to lose inhibitions toward sin of many sorts. It is mind-destroying, so that intelligent action against it becomes more and more difficult. Satan will work to convince people that alcohol is "socially important" or anything else since it serves his cause so well. The whole world lies in the evil one (1 John 5:19), so we need not be surprised that he succeeds in getting so very foolish ideas accepted.

Of course some have fallen for the social drinking bit because they are lukewarm, half-committed Christians, who would like to hold on to the Lord with one hand and with the ways of the world with the other. Too many professing Christians have not been willing to take a stand for what is right regardless of the cost. In some circles the non-drinker tends to stand out like a sore thumb, becomes the object of bantering and ridicule, and may find himself in an embarrassing situation socially (because he is different). Some are such moral cowards that they yield rather than resist. In some cases the demands of a job or position may be such that the non-drinker tends to be regarded as not qualified, and some have loved material gain more than righteousness. Many of these are not deceived concerning alcohol and they know the cost to their spiritual lives, but they love the wrong more than they love the Lord.

The wise man of old challenged mankind with this bit of wisdom: "Can a man take fire into his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?" (Prov. 6:27-28). This is spoken concerning another great wickedness, but it is surely applicable to social drinking.

113 N. 6th St., Oakdale, La. 71463

Sometimes on the rock I tremble
Faint of heart and weak of knee,
But the mighty Rock of Ages
Never trembles under me.

—Author unknown

The writer is a professor of music at the University of Louisville, and minister of the Highland Church of Christ.



Viewing the News

Ernest E. Lyon

SWEDEN welcomed American deserters during the Vietnamese war, even advertising for them according to reports I've seen. But now news reports say that when members of a Russian destroyer (*Storozhevoy*) mutinied and requested asylum they were turned down by a political commissar who said that deserters could not be granted asylum. Russian bombers attacked the ship when it left Sweden, killing most of the crew and then hung the others when they captured the ship. Russia certainly gets lots of help keeping people in slavery. The same news sources say that America will not object when the Russians break the Montreux Convention by sending a 40,000 ton aircraft carrier (Kiev) into the Mediterranean.

SOME IN OUR government have sworn to break up the eighteen oil companies that are large enough to expand our oil resources. They plan to do this on the assumption that the eighteen form a monopoly. Actually the oil industry seems to me to be one of the most competitive basic industries in the country. I am told that there are more than 10,000 companies and individual operators in active production, that there are 130 refining companies and 15,000 wholesalers of petroleum products, 100 pipe-lines for gas and oil, and about 18,000 companies supplying fuel oil. Of the 200,000 service stations, ninety-five per cent are operated by independent businessmen. Incidentally, don't look for lowered gas prices when oil starts coming from the Alaska pipeline. The pipe line is so expensive that it will not help prices.

HAE YOU HEARD? A news item that reached me said, "The city fa-

thers in our national capital ignored fathers on Father's Day and instead celebrated that Sunday officially proclaiming it as 'Gay Day.'"

INTERESTING FIGURE: The Standard Oil Company of Indiana says 427 full-time employees (\$21 million annually) devote their time to filing of reports or maintaining of records required by the regulations of the federal government.

THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE has lost interest for the conservatives of the country. A conservative in this country politically is one who wants a government as close to the intents of our constitution as possible—a limited central government giving people freedom wherever that is possible. The liberals, as they are called now, work for a powerful central government that controls the politics, economics, and social life of the country. The Democratic candidate and his vice-presidential running mate are committed to change through a powerful centralized government, with the v-p boasting that he is the most "liberal" senator. Of the two Republican candidates the incumbent president has been a liberal for many years and the one with the only chance to upset him has just chosen one of the most "liberal" Senators as his running mate.

EVANGELICAL NEWSLETTER, in its issue of July 16, 1976, had this interesting item: "Mormon bigwigs were elated when original copy of 'book of Abraham' Joseph Smith translated into Pearl of Great Price was discovered; asked Mormon Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson to translate it again. He agreed to tackle hieroglyphic text if result would be publicly

printed, but discovery hasn't gotten much publicity since Nelson announced book was nothing more than Egyptian burial service—certainly not what Smith had claimed to translate. Nelson family has resigned from Mormon church; higher-ups are keeping mum." Emphasis by EN.

H. W. ARMSTRONG's Worldwide Church of God has had a good deal of trouble in recent years over the church standards, losing ministers and laymen. New rules announced in June no longer forbid inter-racial marriages, birthday celebrations, voting; and they now permit divorce, remarriage on grounds of illicit sex. And members are no longer "disfellowshipped" for not tithing 30 percent of their income.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT. The new Armed Forces hymnal is reported to contain "to hell with Jehovah" and other blasphemous phrases. One song, "It Was on a Friday Morning," is supposed to be a first person monologue by one of the thieves on the cross with Christ. He is represented as saying, "It's God they ought to crucify instead of you and me," which is supposed to be irony, but many doubt its message is worth such lyrics.

STRANGE ITEM: Evangelical Newsletter reports on the July issue of Psychology Today article on divorce that says that there are more broken marriages among housewives than among working (outside work, that is) wives. That would be odd if true.

INTERESTING QUOTE: "Our whole slave system depends on your economic assistance."—Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Thanks to The Coming Storm, Dr. N. Burnett Magruder, Editor, for this quote.

CHRISTIAN Anti-Communism Crusade Newsletter of July 15, 1976, gives a great deal of detail on a famine in Red China. The world will ignore the report and various countries in the "free" world will bolster the communist regime by selling them much grain, usually on credit terms they will give no one else. Have I told you of the current joke in Russia? It is told of the day when communism supposedly finally accomplished its aim by conquering the entire world. At the big celebration in Moscow one of the higher-ups in the Kremlin was seen with a sad look on his face. When

asked if he wasn't happy at the success of communism, he said, "Of course. But who's going to sell us food now?" A grim joke but with too true a point.

SINCE MUCH has been made of Jimmy Carter's Christianity, it is only fair to repeat here this item from "Spotlite" for May 24, 1976. The article "Strange Christian Credentials" says that Carter recently revealed who his favorite theologians are. They include Beinhold Niebuhr (known to me to have been in many Communist fronts), Karl Barth, Tillich (these two reject the absolutes of the Bible and were true "modernists"), and Soren Kierkegaard (one of the major advocates of "existentialism," a philosophy which gives us no moral absolutes or transcendental law.) The strangest item in the article was an alleged quotation from Carter—"The other source of my understanding about what's right and wrong in this society is a friend of mine, Bob Dylan." You can listen to Dylan's lyrics and know his blasphemy.

ANOTHER CONVERSION REPORT: This one from Christianity Today, July 16, 1976: Four years ago nightclub entertainer Susan Haines, billing herself as Miss Nude Universe, performed in the altogether at Oklahoma City's Playgirl Club. Police arrested her, but the indecent-exposure charges didn't stick, and the city has had to put up with an increasing number of nude shows ever since. Last month a large ad in the Oklahoma Journal's movie and nightclub pages announced that Miss Haines, 29, was back in town—this time to give her "testimony for Christ" at suburban First Baptist Church of Del City, sponsor of the ad. Seems she had a run-in with the law in 1974 and somebody gave her a copy of Hal Lindsey's book, Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth. She became a follower of Jesus as a result. Now she and her husband, residents of Jacksonville, Fla. are planning to visit the fifty cities across the nation where she worked as a dancer. This time she intends to bare her soul.

THE CONGREGATION OF THE Eastminster United Presbyterian Church in Wichita, Kansas, is reported to have voted to provide the entire \$120,000 needed to rebuild 20

Presbyterian churches damaged or demolished by the Guatemalan earthquake, voting to cancel part of its own building program and then to borrow money to make immediate construction possible in Guatemala.

A SIGNIFICANT development in Burma, where no Christian literature may be published without government permission: The Buddhist government has reportedly granted permission for the printing of Christian literature by The Christian Literature Crusade, including 5000 complete Bible correspondence course lessons, 7500 copies of special literature designed to show how to become a Christian and 30,000 copies of a letter to be used in replying to people who respond to a radio broadcast released over the Far East Broadcasting Company's radio stations in the Philippines.

IN SHELBY, N. C., some 75 young members of Bethel Baptist Church destroyed about 200 rock and roll records they had owned. They had come to believe, as many others do, that there is satanic force in rock music.

SHOULD WE SUPPORT radio programs? The Good News Broadcaster for July-August, 1976, says that Earl Poisti, of Austria, writing in the publication of the Eastern Europe Mission, estimated that at least a million people in the Soviet Union have found Christ through radio broadcasts.

THE LATEST I have seen in the Billy James Hargis accusations was in the same issue of the Good News Broadcaster. It stated that Hargis issued a statement saying, "I deny emphatically charges leveled against me," and, according to the Tulsa Tribune, has now said specifically that he is not a homosexual.

MAJ. GEN. ORRIS KELLY, chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army, says that there has been a phenomenal growth in Bible study groups in the U. S. Army. He said that there are over 500 such groups in Europe alone.

I HOPE that now that the Republic of China, Rhodesia, and the Republic of South Africa, have been refused participation in the Olympics for political reasons (all are anti-communist) the United States will decide to end its participation. However, we should take note of the fact that there is a

tremendous witness for Christ at Montreal, both by athletes and by churches and Christian organizations.

BRIEF NEWS ITEM: Canadian Keswick Conference has gone bankrupt . . . A new Census Bureau report indicates that if current trends continue (a big "if") 17 percent of America's population will be 65 or older by the year 2030 (the figure is 10.5 percent now) . . . The movie version of Hugh Schonfield's *The Passover Plot* has been causing a stir in Israel, where it was filmed. It will raise even more stir in the U.S.A., since the film depicts Jesus as an angry political revolutionary who was unexpectedly killed while trying to feign death . . . Korean churches in the Los Angeles area have increased from 5 to 110, according to news reports . . . There were 2.2 million marriages in the U.S.A. in 1974, down 54,000 from the preceding year, the first decline in marriages in sixteen years, according to a government study. Early reports indicate the number in 1975 was 2.1 million . . . The new chief justice of Japan's Supreme Court is described in news accounts as "an ardent Christian." He is a member of a "non-church" movement which employs non-traditional forms of church life in "an attempt to duplicate New Testament patterns." . . . Jitsuo Fuchida, 73, Japanese commander of the air strike against Pearl Harbor in 1941, died of diabetes in a Tokyo hospital recently. Converted in 1950, he became a widely known Christian evangelist, sometimes teaming up with Jake DeShazer, an American who bombed Tokyo and who became a Christian in a Japanese POW camp . . . I'm sorry there wasn't space to include a long item on the fact that the trend toward discrimination against white males in work is now turning around and that many are working for a fair chance for all, especially Senator James L. Buckley, who has put in a bill to that end in the Senate.

WHERE, OH WHERE have my correspondents gone since I missed the month of June? I had accumulated materials to carry me through this month. Send in those clippings pronto to Ernest E. Lyon, 2629 Valletta Road, Louisville, Ky. 40205, U.S.A.

MAY I DIFFER WITH YOU?

EDITED BY MICHAEL T. SANDERS

It was late in the afternoon. Both the manager and the lady had had a long day. Their "conversation" about her refund kept getting louder. Finally, he retorted to the unreasonable customer, "May I differ with you?"

Whether or not the lady got her refund I don't know. Her answer to his question was, "No." Oh, she didn't say No in a straightforward way. That would have been rude. She did say no, however, by insisting that no refund meant loss of her business.

On a brotherhood and congregational basis the same scene can be observed. From time to time doctrinal or procedural issues arise and brethren differ. Somewhere in the progress of this scene the question is posed, "May I differ with you?"

This has occurred many times. There are at least three answers one can expect of the question.

The first answer is no. The brother would answer, "If you differ with me I will no longer consider you in good fellowship or invite you to speak at the Spring Lectureship or have you for revival meetings or etc., etc."

Differing is not allowed under the first arrangement. If you have by study or observation come to different doctrinal conviction or procedural approach then you must keep it to yourself. You can't let your position be known. If your acceptance means anything to you then you must kowtow and conform. But by all means don't think for yourself.

The second answer is really the same as the first, however, it is a little more deceitful. In this arrangement the brother will speak of unity and freedom that we enjoy as a brotherhood and answer affirmatively to the differing question. The deceit, however, comes in the next step. This brother then quietly will spread the word that you have differed. The outcome is the same under the second arrangement as is the first. The procedures are just considerably more deceitful and dishonest. Once more, if you are in "good standing" be careful not to consider any additional information as to doctrinal positions or procedures. Read only the "approved" reading list. One can't afford to study with the goal of learning more due to the inherent danger of differing with the brotherhood creed or the brothers' creed.

The third answer is the best one. The answer is an honest yes. It is honest in that there are no ramifications or penalties that are going to be encountered. Under this arrangement brethren can sincerely differ and feel a freedom to study and think in hopes of acquiring a better, more complete knowledge of God's will and way.

"May I differ with you?" How do you answer the question? Some have been deceitful. Generally, the attitude (according to

my observation) has favored the third answer. Study and thinking are encouraged in the scriptures as well as in our brotherhood. I, personally, want to be exposed to the things that you are thinking and learning. Oh, yes, you may differ with me!

May I differ with you?

This column will be appearing frequently, Lord willing. The topics chosen will be answered by two writers with somewhat different positions. Their names will be deleted so that we will consider what is being said rather than who is saying it.

Some of the topics that have been chosen are "Modesty" and "Instrumental Music." There are others that are on the agenda that have not yet been answered. The article this month deals with the use of commentaries. What is the place for the commentaries? Should we use them at all? Please consider what is said in the following articles. I hope you'll learn something from both authors.

I USE COMMENTARIES BECAUSE . . .

As a minister of the Gospel, I use commentaries for these reasons: (1) The experiences and ideas of contemporary great men of the Word of God can be a help to those who are new in the ministry.

When we look at Church history, we see many years experience in great preachers who have given their lives completely to the study of the Bible and to the teaching of it to others as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28: 19, 20. These men have dedicated their minds to the Word and have taken the time and effort to record their thoughts for future generations. Their personal experiences and knowledge can be shared with us only in their writings. Of course, these writings are not intended to take the place of the Word of God. They are to help clarify it so that the inexperienced person can learn.

I appreciate many of our brethren that have shared their experiences through their writings. Brothers R. H. Boll and Stanford Chambers could not share their insights with young preachers except through writings. Men who are living, like Brothers H. N. Rutherford, Richard Ramsey, and Robert Boyd will leave their thoughts and experiences to younger preachers through their writings, even though they may not be in book form. A commentary is not necessarily a volume, but a series of explanations of Scriptures.

(2) The explanations or interpretations are systemized to bring depth to our thoughts on the Scriptures. A commentator brings out a relationship between a verse in John, for example, with that in Mark by referring to that verse in the comments on John. We must be careful, though, never to isolate a scripture, or take it out of context to prove our point.

There are many commentaries that put thoughts in a systematic order so that we may understand the Bible. We need to be careful that we do not take another man's thoughts or ideas and call

them "sacred writing." We must realize that commentaries are written by human beings, dedicated to God, though not fully inspired. These writings are explanations or interpretations of the Holy Writings. We may not always agree with their thought, but God has given us a mind and we can accept or reject their ideas and adapt them to our lives.

(3) The Bible is a commentary. When we read about Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, we see they made comments on the Scriptures (the Old Testament) and the apostles recorded them. Jesus took passages from the Old Testament, making comments, explanations, or interpretations to His listeners. The Sermon on the Mount contains several of these instances. See Matthew 5:21-26; 27-32; 33-37; 38-42; 43-48. These examples contain a verse from the Old Testament and then the explanations that our Savior made.

In Acts we notice the same procedure. Peter in Acts 2:22-36 explains Joel 2:28-32, relating it to events of the day. Peter explained the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:14-21) and made comments on that Scripture. Philip did the same in Acts 8:26-40, the account of Philip and the black man from Africa. The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7, 8. Philip made comments about the same text (v. 35) and "preached unto him Jesus." These are only a few instances.

Webster defines "commentary" as a "systematic series of explanations or interpretations of a writing." This would mean an organized group of thoughts by a person or a group of persons about sacred writing. It is not intended to replace God's Word. It is to help us find our interpretations, insight, and understanding.

We can benefit by using commentaries. We can learn from experiences of others. Commentaries help systemize our thinking to clearly present our ideas to others. Since Jesus and the Apostles "wrote commentaries" about the Scripture, we should not close our minds saying we will use only the Bible to study. If our study (2 Tim. 2:15) and learning helps present the Gospel of Jesus Christ more clearly, let's use them to win souls to Christ.

COMMENTARIES ARE GOOD, BUT . . .

Hamburger or round steak? Ground round or sirloin? The preceding suggests one of the reasons for not having too great an appreciation for commentaries. One of the great freedoms and opportunities that the Lord has made available to His own is expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 14, "The faith that THOU hast, have to thyself before God." In context this is especially referring to matters where Christians hold differing views. We are also given the responsibility to be diligent in presenting ourselves approved unto God as workmen who need not to be ashamed in handling aright the Word of truth. In many cases one of the two greatest blocks to a personal experience of these truths is "commentaries," the other being "tradition." It is much easier to fix a hamburger than to pre-

pare a steak, and so with the Word. It is much easier on the flesh to let someone else do our digging into the Word, to let someone else establish the straight course and thus give up this freedom and opportunity.

Associated with this freedom and opportunity is the very specific exhortation and promise of the Holy Spirit through John, "And as for YOU, the anointing which you received of Him abideth in you and ye need not that anyone teach you, but as His anointing teacheth you concerning ALL THINGS, and is TRUE, and is NO LIE, and even as it taught you, ye abide in Him." 1 John 3:27. Again it is easier on the flesh to trust the tangible, logical interpretation of men of high esteem of the past or present than to trust the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth personally . . . besides it is faster.

Now public teaching and interpretation of the Word is provided for and presented as having its place in God's dealings with His own. So these two apparently opposing positions (personal responsibility in study and faith development versus public teaching) are not presented in the Scriptures as mutually exclusive. However, in a land and an age where the Scriptures are so readily available, it would seem that commentaries would have a hard way to go in light of the promise of God which is so specific and clear concerning His provision for us to be personally taught by one of the Godhead. Yet it is amazing that so many of those who wear the name of Christ are so unfamiliar with the Word itself, are unable personally to hold a straight course in the Word, and are so dependent upon the study of others. Without question there is a place for teachers in the body of Christ both in person and by means of writing. Yet putting concepts, ideas, and interpretations in writing has a way of making them static and permanent, stopping further growth. Besides the words of men have always appealed to men, the flesh is attracted to the wisdom of the flesh. The Christian is not beyond this temptation. Matt. 15:1-11; 2 Pet. 2:3; Jude 17-21; etc. So there is the need for us to learn to be taught by the Spirit of God, allowing Him to wield His sword directly in our reasoning processes. 2 Cor. 10:1-6.

A third reason for not viewing commentaries favorably is that the flesh is usually looking for a short cut to spiritual growth and knowledge, a "quickie" to spiritual heights, an instant all-inclusive spiritual "vitamin" pill. Paul as an experienced apostle spoke of still moving forward. Phi. 3:12-16. Peter speaks of the writings of Paul as containing "hard to be understood" things. His solution to this problem was a warning and an admonition. Don't twist the Scriptures, but "grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 3:14-18.

No doubt there are many Christians who can handle commentaries because of their growth and experience in the Lord, but for one who has been studying the Scriptures for a number of years, this writer has a greater respect for the personal teaching of the Holy Spirit through the inspired word of God. 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

Bible Exposition -- Matthew

THE HERALD OF THE KING

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.

That John the Baptist is an important biblical character could be gleaned from just one statement of our Lord. That statement is found in Matthew 11:11, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Add to this the opening of the Gospel of Mark, in which his ministry is said to be significant for "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:2), and the point is demonstrated clearly. In harmony with this is the two-fold mention of him in the Old Testament prophets (cf. Isa. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1).

John was a rugged type of person, a stern John Knox kind of character who thundered out "the way of the Lord" to a stiff-necked generation. His Old Testament counterpart is Elijah, to whom he is likened (cf. Luke 1:17), and whose ministry also was filled with the announcement of judgment.

And yet this rugged and stern character, although his message was not, humanly speaking, "geared for the times," had a tremendous influence on his contemporaries. John was popular, for the crowds flocked to hear him and receive his baptism. Campbell Morgan describes his ministry as attractive, convictive, and invective. John's ministry, however, was not popular in the sense that he was successful in influencing the majority to turn to the way of the Lord. In fact, it was just the opposite. His work led to his imprisonment (cf. Matt. 4:12) and death (cf. 14:3-12). In this the servant was not above his Master.

We have been saying that Matthew is the royal gospel, presenting the King and His coming kingdom. We have looked over His genealogy, impeccable in its claim of the kingdom for the Son of Joseph. We have read of His virgin conception and birth. We have stood at the cradle of the young Infant, observing the homage of the Gentiles, the Magi, as well as the dread of the wicked Herod. And we have observed the divine providential care in the preservation of the Infant from the malevolence of the king. In the following section, that which we consider in this study, we listen to the voice of the herald of the King, John the Baptist.

John the man

His coming (3:1-2). The voice of prophecy had fallen silent for four hundred years when John began his ministry. It is now heard again through the ministry of this modern Elijah.

The opening phrase, "in those days," may be somewhat misleading to the casual reader. About twenty-eight years had passed

since the events of the preceding chapter (cf. Luke 3:1-2). We are to take the words, then, in a very general sense. The likeness of the herald to Elijah is seen in the way he is introduced to the reader. "His portrait," Maclaren aptly says, "is flung on the canvas with the same startling abruptness with which Elijah is introduced. Matthew makes no allusion to his relationship to Jesus, has nothing to say about his birth or long seclusion in the desert. He gives no hint that his vague expression 'in those days' covers thirty years. John leaps, as it were, into the arena full grown and full armed." Matthew, thus, assumes that his readers are familiar with John. As for the modern speculation over John's relation to the Essene community, or to the Qumran sect, known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls, neither Matthew nor the other evangelists give us any light.

Matthew does not expatiate upon the origin of the coming of the ambassador. He simply states that he came "preaching in the wilderness of Judaea." The Apostle John gives us the real source of his coming, for he writes, "There was a man SENT FROM GOD, whose name was John" (John 1:6). And everything about this rugged prophet confirms the truth of the statement. He preached with a conviction born of fellowship with the living God. As Richard Baxter put it, he preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.

There is a one-word description of his work. It is "preaching." The Greek word means *to proclaim*, and it is a very fitting word or a herald of the King. "It means proclaiming, or acting as a herald," Maclaren says, "and implies the uplifted voice and the brief, urgent message of one who runs before the chariot, and shouts, 'The king! the king!'" It has none of the modern connotations of "preaching," such as long-winded tediousness and mild, bland platitudes.

The burden of John's message is set forth in striking brevity in the second verse. The details of it shall be expounded below.

The cause of his coming (3:3) Matthew relates the coming of John to Old Testament prophecy, as is his method in this work. Isaiah 40:3 is cited as being in harmony with the work of John. The words originally were a part of the consoling message given to the exiles in Babylonia, who were to return to their own land under the guidance and protection of their God for His kingdom. That return and that kingdom are to come through the ministry of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew. John's ministry is that of forerunner and herald of the King, and in Matthew's view the verse in Isaiah speaks of John.

John's manner of life and ministry

The mantle (3:4a). One gains the distinct impression that John's manner of life was similar to that of an ascetic. If he was, it was not by reason of a desire to imitate the former prophets. He wore a robe like Elijah's, but his asceticism was the expression of his stern, severe, no-nonsense spirit, living in detachment from the worldly delights of the senses. The world of today would probably

regard him as some sort of "freak."

The meals (3:4b). In our day we have seen the fads of swallowing goldfish, and other similar things, but it is doubtful that John's diet was anything other than the simple diet of a poor man. In the Congo, I am told, they eat fried ants, and the French, with some misguided Americans, regard snails as delicacies. In John's day, the eating of locusts and wild honey simply meant that he preferred, or was limited to, the simple fare of a man with limited resources. Perhaps it would be comparable to our saying that one made his diet from grits, or oatmeal, and cornbread.

This simple food does reflect the sincerity of the message he proclaimed, and it gave a touch of reality to his heralding of thunderous judgment upon his generation. His thoughts were directed toward the heavens, not the earthlies. Richard Baxter said, "If a hardened heart is to be broken, it is not stroking but striking that must do it." And striking is more effective, if it is done by one whose motives cannot be questioned.

The ministry (3:5-6). John's ministry produced a kind of universal excitement and great results, so far as numbers were concerned. He moved the entire community about him. This fiery soul did not mumble the tired old clichés, the worn-out formulas of the scribes. He did not engage in the tediousness of splitting theological hairs. He spoke with conviction, and they flocked to hear him, and to hear him denounce them!

There are several questions to be answered here. First, what is the origin of John's baptism? Some have traced it to the Old Testament purificatory rites, and others to proselyte baptism. The latter involved the circumcision of the candidate, the immersion of the candidate by the candidate himself, and an offering in the temple. John's baptism differed from this in two respects: (1) he baptized the candidates, a fact from which he derived his name, *the Baptist*; (2) he baptized Israelites, not simply Gentiles. It would appear safest to conclude that his baptism was a radically new thing.

Second, what was the relation of John's baptism to the forgiveness of sins? Some have contended that the rite conferred remission of sins. They would read the reference in Mark 1:4 with this emphasis, *a baptism of repentance unto remission of sins*, linking the "for the remission" directly to the "baptism." Such an interpretation does violence to the spirit of the entire Word of God, in which spiritual blessing is never related to a physical act. Further, it does violence to other New Testament statements regarding John's message and ministry (cf. Luke 1:77-78). As a matter of fact, in the expression that Mark uses the remission is linked to the repentance, not to the baptism. It is *repentance unto remission of sins*, not baptism unto remission of sins. The baptism was only the outward symbol of the inner reality of repentance. That this is John's meaning is confirmed by the charge he gives the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance"

(Matt. 3:8), not worthy of baptism.

Third, was John's call for repentance a call to the nation as a nation, or did it also have to do with individual salvation? Surely it had to do with both. There can be no real national repentance apart from the repentance of individuals in the nation. Of course it should be remembered that the salvation that John proclaimed was an Old Covenant salvation. The relationships to our Lord introduced by the Spirit's coming at Pentecost were not known by His disciples. This is evident from a consideration of Acts 19:1-7, which relates the experience of Paul with certain of John's disciples.

John's message

The proclamation regarding repentance (3:1-3, 7-9). We now attempt to analyze the essential characteristics of the message of John, which, incidentally, is identical with that of the Lord (cf. 3:2; 4:17). There are three terms which we must interpret.

First, what did John mean by the term *repent*? Perhaps it will help to note several things it does not mean. It does not mean to be sorry for one's sins. The emphasis of the word in the original text is not upon one's feelings, but upon the mind or purpose of the one who repents. The Greek word means literally *to have an afterthought*, or *to change the mind*. The herald, then, was calling upon Israelites to change their minds regarding their sins and guilt, to see themselves as sinners under the judgment of the Lord for their rebellion against Him.

Nor does the word mean to promise to do better. In the Old Testament it was the common word to express the return of the people of Israel to the Lord, being the equivalent of the Hebrew word *shub*, or *teshoubah* (cf. Hos. 14:1-2; Jer. 33:18; Ezek 33:11). It was associated with the covenantal status in which Israel stood with Jehovah. In effect, for Israel to repent is for the nation to return to the Lord from their sinful state, to return to the covenant established between the Lord and Abraham's seed. This is the essence of the appeal of John the Baptist.

That the term *repent* is not very different in meaning from the term *believe* is seen in John the Apostle's description of the ministry of the Baptist, "The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might *believe* through him" (John 1:7). *Repent* stresses the negative side of the terms of salvation, while *believe* stresses the positive. The former is very appropriate for those who have rebelled against a previously established covenantal status.

Second, what is meant by the term *the kingdom of heaven*? While the term *kingdom* may have different forces, it is hardly to be doubted that it refers here to the Messianic kingdom, the millennial kingdom. The eternal kingdom of God was always present and could not be said to have drawn nigh in Christ. The fact that the term in the Old Testament in most of its occurrences refers to the Messianic kingdom supports this identification. Since John does

not explain the meaning of the term, he must intend his listeners to understand it in the common sense.

Third, what is meant by the expression "is at hand"? Simply stated, what John means is that the kingdom of God is imminent. That which was future to the Old Testament saint is now *near* (cf. Mark 1:15). It has *come upon* them (cf. Matt. 12:28). In the words and works of Jesus it has come near, for He is the king. The only thing that remains is its public manifestation in glory and power (cf. Matt. 16:28), which will take place at the time that the nation responds to its Lord (cf. Luke 19:11; Acts 3:19-21). Certain of the Jewish teachers taught that, if Israel could repent perfectly for even one day, the Messiah would come. The sentiment is not unbiblical.

The proviso regarding reality (3:7-10). In these verses we have a very instructive picture of the Pharisees, the ritualists of Israel, and the Sadducees, the rationalists of Israel, getting religion! The words used by John to describe them, "O generation of vipers," are very vivid and illustrate the fearlessness of the Baptist. It is true that John is a "voice"; he certainly was no echo (cf. v. 3)! "Honeyed words were not in his line," Maclaren points out, "he had not lived in the desert for all these years, and held converse with God and his own heart, without having learned that his business was to smite on conscience with a strong hand, and to tear away the masks which hid men from themselves. The whole spirit of the old prophets was revived in his brusque, almost fierce, address to such very learned, religious, and distinguished personages. Isaiah in his day had called their predecessors 'rulers of Sodom'; John was not scolding when he called his hearers, 'ye offspring of vipers,' but charging them with moral corruption and creeping earthliness." I am sure he felt these words when they took up the love-offering!

A few words bear comment. The "wrath to come" (cf. Mal. 4:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:10) is the anger of the Lord in the eschatological Day of the Lord, the time of the judgment of the Tribulation.

The call to produce "fruit" (the word is singular in the Greek text) is a call to produce the evidence of genuine repentance. A repentance that does not issue in good works of a Scriptural nature is not genuine repentance (cf. Rom. 2:17-29; Jas. 2:14-26).

In the reference to the divine ability to raise up children to Abraham from the pebbles on the Jordan beach, or from the loose rocks of the desert, there is a telling thrust at "the lofty structure of confidence in their descent." And there may be some indication here of the ultimate reach of the gospel to the Gentiles (cf. John 8:39). It was a word especially suitable for people who said, "All Israelites have a portion in the world to come," and that Abraham sits at the gates of Hell to turn back any Israelite who may have been sentenced to its terrors.

The immediacy of the coming judgment is suggested by the

statement in verse ten. The ax lies at the root of the trees, soon to begin its work of judgment. The trees are men, and the judgment is an individualizing one, and it embraces all the unfruitful. Nothing but genuine fruit shall prevail to deliver them. What happened historically is sadly unfolded in Romans 11:16-24, where the Apostle Paul speaks in detail of the breaking off of the natural branches from the tree of the Abrahamic Covenant through unbelief of the nation.

The promise regarding a future baptism (3:11-12). In the final verses the Baptist compares his ministry with that of the Messiah, the Coming One (the term is a messianic title). His ministry is symbolic and preparatory, possessing no intrinsic vitality. His baptism is in water; the Messiah's is in the Spirit and in fire. The reference to the baptism in the Spirit and in fire in verse eleven refers to the purifying nature of the baptism of the Spirit, not the punitive nature of it. The ultimate reference is to the Day of Pentecost, when the church came into existence (cf. Acts 2:1-4).

There is something very appalling and terrifying in the heavy refrain at the end of the three consecutive verses—"with fire" (cf. vv. 10-12). We have spoken of the meaning of the words in verse eleven. In verses ten and twelve, however, they clearly look on to the time of the judgment of the Day of the Lord, the apocalyptic day of judgment upon the unbelieving world. In the later chapters of the gospel further details will be given of this time (cf. 13:36-43, 47-51). That John does not see the interval between the first coming and the second coming, presenting them both in the same context, is not surprising. In the great prophetic passages of the Old Testament there is no perspective, the first coming and the second coming of the Messiah being described in the same contexts. As Maclaren says, "The future is foreshortened, and great gulfs of centuries are passed over, as standing on a plain, we see it as continuous, though it may really be cleft by deep ravines. He did not know 'what manner of time' the spirit which was in him did 'signify.' No doubt his expectations were correct, in so far as Christ's coming really sifted and separated, and was the rising and falling of many; but it was not attended by such tokens as John inferred. Hence we can understand his doubts when in prison, and learn that a prophet was often mistaken as to the meaning of his message.

John has given us an important understanding of the work of the Messiah, but he has omitted a very important aspect of His work, which is essential for salvation. We find no hint of a mention of His work of sacrifice for sin. We must not, however, conclude that he knew nothing of it. It is the same John who in the Gospel of John cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the 'world'" (John 1:19). This is the last and highest plateau of his message. He is the King, the bestower of the Spirit, the awe-inspiring Judge, but before all else the Passover Lamb. It is not surprising that, having uttered this, there was nothing more for him to do but to decrease.



Does Jesus Want You Well?

Alex V. Wilson

"Jesus Wants You Happy," boldly proclaimed the headline of a leaflet. It was advertising a book entitled *JESUS WANTS YOU WELL*. But we have seen in earlier articles that such thinking is simplistic. Last month's study extracted the following principles about sickness and healing from the Bible:

1) Sometimes sickness is sent by God, as chastening for sin. 2) Sometimes sickness is not related to sins at all, but is merely part of the "fallenness" of life in a creation that groans and is in bondage to decay. (Rom. 8:19ff.). 3) Sometimes sickness is attributed to Satan or demons. 4) Often God heals the sick through natural processes, by the use of doctors and medicines. 5) Sometimes God heals the sick miraculously—that is, suddenly, completely, and apart from medical treatment. 6) Often God does not heal the sick, even His own children who trust and obey Him. (See last month's article for Scripture references.)

Using those principles as a plumbline, let's look at statements made by some godly Christians who lay great stress on healing. One typical pamphlet has four main points, as follows. "1) God is **ABLE** to heal you now." (Well, we surely agree with that statement.) "2) God is **WILLING** to heal you now." (Are you sure?) "3) God is **LONGING** to heal you now. He wants you strong and well. It is not His will that anyone should suffer disease. 'He delighteth in mercy' (Micah 7:18)." (Of course he is merciful, but what about Elisha, Trophimus, Timothy, Paul, etc.?) "4) God is **PRESENT** to heal you now." (Possibly, but possibly not—depending on His sovereign good pleasure.)

In the same way, a tract makes these statements: "God never puts sickness on anyone." (See principle 1 of our study for Scriptures that contradict this opinion.) "God does not want anyone to be sick, or to suffer pain or weakness." (See principle 6).

Do these verses promise healing to all Christians?

What is the Biblical foundation upon which these Christians base their view. There are seven major passages. *Exodus 15:26*

says that if the Israelites would obey the Lord they would not suffer from the diseases experienced in Egypt, "for I am the Lord, your healer." But this promise was made to the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant, when God also promised national protection from enemies and material prosperity (see Ex. 23:25-27; Deut. 7:12-16). Someone observed, with only slight exaggeration, "Prosperity is the promise of the Old Covenant, while adversity is the promise of the New Covenant" (see Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22). We can claim Old Testament promises for ourselves today only if they agree with New Testament promises and principles.

The usual reply to our preceding statements is, "But 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever' and God said, 'I am the Lord, I change not' (Heb. 13:8; Mal. 3:6)." Of course it is true that God is unchangeable in His nature and character. But it is also obvious that His *dealings* or *methods* changed from time to time. For forty years He kept the Israelites' clothes and shoes from wearing out (Deut. 29:5), but don't *yours* wear out? His Spirit moved prophets and apostles of old so that what they wrote was divinely inspired—their words and yet also His (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16). But since the death of John the apostle, the Holy Spirit has not inspired anyone in the identical way or degree. Since God's dealings change, we now cannot claim Ex. 15:26 as a blanket promise.

A fourth passage is *Psa.* 103:3, "The Lord . . . forgives all your iniquity and heals all your diseases." That sounds as though He wants to heal *all* illnesses, just as He pardons all sins of His justified people. But wait. The psalms are poetry, and are often written in broad general statements, just as proverbs are. The statements are true, but not universally so. There are many exceptions. *Psa.* 91:16 promises long life to the man who abides under the shadow of the Almighty, i.e., who trusts in the Lord; yet Jesus died young! *Prov.* 16:7 says that the godly man's enemies will be at peace with him; yet Jesus' enemies hounded Him to execution! *Psa.* 103 says not only that God heals all our diseases but also "works justice for *all* who are oppressed" (v. 6). Yet many of God's servants have suffered injustice and oppression: Jesus, Stephen, Peter, Paul, the underground Christians in Communist lands today, etc. Psalms are expressions of praise, not explanations of doctrine.

Two other passages often quoted are *Mt.* 8:17 and *1 Pet.* 2:24b. A number of Christians sincerely believe these verses teach that healing is in the atonement. That is, Christ died for our sicknesses as well as for our sins, and thus by faith we can receive healing from Him now just as we can receive forgiveness. But when Matthew applies *Isa.* 53 ("He took our infirmities and bore our diseases") to Christ, he is talking about His *healing ministry* not His death (see v. 16). And when Peter quotes *Isaiah* ("By his wounds you have been healed"), the first part of the verse makes it clear

he means *spiritual* healing, for he says Christ "bore our *sins* in his body on the tree."

It is true enough that Christ's atoning death is the ground upon which all sickness will be eradicated. But that will be only when Christ returns. It is *then* that He "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). Until that day, God in His sovereignty may heal many people naturally and some people supernaturally. But we cannot Biblically insist upon healing nor demand it as our right. Nor should we feel frustrated and bitter should He choose not to heal us. He tells us to trust and rejoice in Him in all circumstances.

There remains one more important passage about healing, James 5:14-16. Lord willing, we shall examine those verses next month.

Next month: Healing and the Prayer of Faith.

Understanding the Scriptures

W. J. Johnson

Inasmuch as God desires that we "be filled with a knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding," and that we may become enlightened concerning the hope of our calling in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour, and may stand by faith in His grace and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Col. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-23; 5:1, 2), it behooves us to search the scriptures diligently and to believe what we find written therein. With this attitude of mind and heart we can meet the approval of God in handling the scriptures, as workmen that need not to be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:15). For believing the word serves to clarify the hardest passages. It is not necessary to be able to expound them and show their relation to other parts of the Bible in respect to meanings and point of time. But we can believe them, and as our knowledge of the will of God grows in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, we can appreciate their place in the word of God and the meaning that they convey more fully.

Trying to understand what is hard to understand in the scriptures in view of preconceived ideas often leads to confusion and foolish questions which gender strife, contention and schisms in the body of Christ. We may not always be aware of the influence that preconceived ideas wield over us in the study of the sacred writings. Because of their having been handed down for generations they are viewed as scripture. Belief in them becomes manifest in efforts to make what God has revealed to harmonize with them. Thus the

doctrines of men are accepted and made to contribute to the establishing of human creeds, confessions of faith and different systems of worship. What has just been said is manifest in the religious world today.

But because of our having accepted ideas of how things should be or of our being influenced by them, it is possible for us to deceive ourselves in observing the motto, "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; and where the Bible is silent, we are silent." Doubtless many of our conflicting views are due to this condition of heart. For divisions, contention and strifes are not due to what God has spoken, but to ideas of men injected into it. For this reason self-examination is important.

In this present evil world where we are confronted with many conflicting religious views the reasonable course for us to pursue is a straight course through the word of truth, proving all things, holding fast to that which is good, and not to be too hasty in arriving at a conclusion, lest we should fall short of the whole truth pertaining to the subject under consideration. For one-sided conclusions become dangerous to the peace which we should hold in the bond of love. For where hearts are knit together in love different degrees of knowledge are recognized as possible in our spiritual growth. All can be of the same mind and speak the same things in respect to doing the will of God. The danger of disrupting the peace is not to be attributed to him who desires to be "filled with the knowledge of the will of God in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" but to him who stops, refuses to accept further truth, and calls a halt on others, requiring them to recognize his views of the matter. If this is not done he sees that there is a disturbance in the camp. Such is evidently due to stubbornness of heart, which differs from slowness of heart to believe in all things that are written. However, we may be slow to recognize this difference. With the latter there is need of "forebearing in love and in giving heed to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Consider Eph. 4: 1-3. But the former needs to be dealt with according to Rom. 16:17, 18.

Reluctance to relinquish views of long standing or to revise them according to newly discovered truths is often due to slowness of heart to believe what we find written. It may become necessary to supply courage to our faith to take the step. But when it has been taken we rejoice because of the enlightenment received. We have seen what has just been said manifested in the conversion of souls; how their hearts were made to rejoice over having learned new truth concerning their salvation from bondage to sin, and also how they can worship and serve God after the pattern given us in the New Testament, looking for the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who will save us from the wrath to come. Compare 1 Thes. 1: 9, 10.

The Power of Christ and His Cross

(1 Cor. 1:17-18, 23-24)

“There is no sin so black that it cannot be washed white by the blood of the Lamb. There is no sinner so lost in the far country that he cannot be fetched home and reconciled to God by the power of the cross. There is no sin so deeply ingrained in human nature that it cannot be conquered by the virtue of the cross of Jesus.

“Oh the power of the cross to save! The cross brings *forgiveness* to the guilty, and *peace* to the conscience-stricken; *deliverance* to the captive and *victory* to the defeated; *relief* to the burdened; *rest* to the weary; *courage* to the suffering, *confidence* to the dying and *comfort* to the bereaved.

The cross, it takes our guilt away,
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day
And sweetens every bitter cup.
It makes the coward's spirit brave
And nerves the feeble arm for fight,
It takes its terror from the grave
And gilds the bed of death with light.
The balm of life, the cure of woe,
The measure and the pledge of love;
The sinner's refuge here below,
The angels' theme in heaven above.

. . . The cross is the most luminous revelation of God that there has ever been in history. Brighter rays of divine glory stream from the cross than from anywhere else in the universe. We can learn more of God from meditating on the cross of Jesus than from any of the philosophies of the world.

We must trust this God revealed in Christ crucified. We look around us at the vastness of the universe, at the chaos of the world, at the pains and the griefs of men and maybe in our own life, and we are tempted to doubt. We are tempted to doubt the love of God. “God doesn't care about me,” we say. We are tempted to doubt the justice of God. “It isn't fair,” we cry. We are tempted to doubt the wisdom of God. “It just doesn't make sense,” we say. We are tempted to doubt the power of God. “Why doesn't God do something,” we ask.

We need to look away from what appears superficially to be unkind or unfair or unwise or incompetent, to the cross. Feast your eyes on that lonely figure—God the Son who dies for sinners like us. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. See this historical evidence for the love, justice, wisdom, and power of God. Doubt these things no longer! Trust Him who has thus revealed Himself in Christ crucified.

—from a sermon by John R. W. Stott
248

The Forgotten Christian

There are hundreds of small deeds being done today by timid, quiet, and unassuming brethren which may be doing more good than all the campaigns, workshops, and seminars among us. For example, here is John Doe. He is not a "dynamic" personality. He has never shown a filmstrip, never attended a workshop, never made a public speech, or even led a public prayer. Yet, in his own quiet unassuming manner he goes about doing untold good. He mows the lawn of a sick neighbor, picks up an elderly couple on Wednesday nights and brings them to services, lends a sympathetic ear to a fellow worker on the job who is having marital problems, keeps a promise made to a little child, reads his Bible, writes a letter of encouragement to a lonely man in service, shows appreciation and gratitude, mends a quarrel, welcomes a stranger to service and sends a contribution to a mission field he is especially interested in. The sum total of all these seemingly insignificant deeds is a powerful influence for the cause of Christ.

But in the light of some present day preaching this man would be considered a complete failure. It is often said from the pulpit that he does not love souls because he is not a dynamic, on-fire-for-the-Lord Christian with a projector in one hand and a screen in the other going out each night to show a filmstrip. Now showing filmstrips is a good and much needed work. But is this man a failure as a Christian because he doesn't do this? Who is to say this Christian does not do as great a work in other ways as the one who is a specialist in showing filmstrips?

Then there is that unnoticed housewife who has five little children. She will never be chosen president of the garden club, she has never taught a Bible class and will never address a group of ladies at a lectureship. She is, however, a faithful Christian and a good mother who is diligent in her domestic duties. While her role as a housewife might seem rather dull and boring to some, yet, to God her works are most significant and important. A faithful mother is one of the most powerful forces on earth.

I am convinced there are hundreds of Christians today whose seemingly insignificant works accomplish more than some of those who receive so much recognition and attention for their "great" and "dynamic" deeds. We all get excited and carried away with our organized programs, projects and schemes and completely ignore what is one of the most productive and important works among us. I am convinced that it is not always the big things among us that have counted so much as it is the little things that go unnoticed. Rather than big things it has been a composite of little things done in an unassuming manner by countless hundreds of modest brethren, who, due to the modest nature of their works, have been ignored and forgotten. Truly they are bearing much fruit. God bless them all.

--Selected, via Belmont *Bulletin*

Bringing in Life

H. L. Olmstead - 1927

(2 Tim. 1:10)

Jesus Christ has brought life to light. That kind of life which he brought into light had been obscured by the darkness of sin.

Natural life, mysterious and wonderful though it may be, has always been in evidence: There is no place it is not. From the highest air to the deepest sea it may be found in its myriad forms and manifestations. But the life which Jesus came to bring is not natural but supernatural. It does not come from man but from God. It is not the result of natural generation but comes to man as the result of supernatural regeneration. It comes from Him who is the last Adam, and the Lord from heaven. The first man Adam had to *become* a living soul but the last Adam is a *life-giving spirit*. (1 Cor. 15:45). It is a life which is *communicated* from the Life-Giver to the spirits of those who believe, and only to those who believe. "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may *have life* in His name." John wrote his gospel that men might believe in order to life. He wrote his first epistle that those who believe might know that they possess eternal life. "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God." (John 20:31; 1 John 5:13).

Not by a slow process

When of old God said, "Let there be light," there was light. So with the "life which is the light of men." (John 1:4). When Jesus Christ is received by a heart of faith the life begins. However slow may seem the manifestation of that life in the individual, or by whatever means this life develops and bears fruit, the life must be there first and is there. Birth and life always precede living. While it is true that Jesus came to show men how to live and to teach them how to live and what to do, he does not ask them to live that way until they first have life. It is a significant fact that the apostles of our Lord never under any circumstances held up Jesus as an example to unregenerated human beings. To them He must first be a Savior. There must first be the reception of Christ himself, "who is our life," and a passing from death unto life. "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life." (John 5:24). For the true believer the possession of life is an accomplished fact. He "*hath passed,*" not *will pass,* "out of death into life."

The agent and instrument

Without doubt the agent is the Holy Spirit. Except one be born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

(John 3:5). "Not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5). The renewing is of the Holy Spirit and is in no sense connected with natural life or generation. Men become children of God because they are of God's generation. The right to become children is given to those who believe (John 1:12), but the birth itself is not of man but of God. "Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The beginning of this life in the hearts of men is not due to themselves but to an act of God. The Creator is also the re-creator.

The instrument is without doubt the Word of God. The Word is preached and Christ is received by faith. The Holy Spirit using the word as His instrument quickens or makes it alive in the believing heart. There is no receptacle except a believing heart in which the Word of God will germinate. It is those who hear His Word and believe who have this life. (John 5:24). This is how and why it has been said, "It is the Spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you, they are spirit, and are life." (John 6:63.) The Holy Spirit is one thing, the Word of God is another; but when faith comes through the hearing of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), then through the Holy Spirit that word becomes life and life really begins in the believer.

In John 3:5 and in Titus 3:5 we have "the water" and "the washing of regeneration," in connection with "born of the Spirit" and "renewing of the Holy Spirit." If this refers to baptism—and the scholarship of the world is pretty well agreed that it does—just what is the connection between baptism and the new life? Let it be emphatically understood that there is no connection between water and the reception of new life; but between baptism and the new life there is. Baptism in these and in other passages is the *sign* of faith. Yea, more, it is the *fixed* sign of faith, fixed by Christ Himself. In Rom. 6:4 Paul does not abandon his profound argument for justification by faith and change in favor of "baptismal regeneration." But it is clear that we are not raised to walk in newness of life until we are buried with Him by baptism." There can be no walking in newness of life without the possession of new life. What Paul does is to use the fixed sign of faith for the thing signified. In New Testament times and now, baptism was and is the expression of faith and is not to be separated from it. Water without faith meant nothing and faith without the water was not counted for faith. The church is said to be "cleansed through the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26); and God put no difference between Gentile and Jew "cleansing their hearts by faith." Acts 15:9. Here again we have "water" doing what faith is said to do. Water cleanses only in the sense that it is the sign of faith. "Belief" and "Life" is the New Testament order and baptism and "newness" of life" is also the New Testament order; and this is true because baptism stood for faith and was its sign.

The life abundant

Jesus came not merely that men might have commandments, law, and an example, but life. "I am come that they may have life and have it abundantly." That is, in an overflowing sense. The promise to the believer was that from within should flow rivers of living water. This is explained by Jesus as the Holy Spirit which they that believe should receive. (John 7:37, 38, 39.) This abundant life is the glorious distinctive feature of Christianity. This is one of the three great things which Jesus did: "He abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." This life as we have seen comes down to man from God. It is the only real way that humanity can begin again. This is good news, *gospel* indeed. No matter what may have been one's heredity or his environment, he may have the very life of God through which he may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. He who by faith receives Christ Jesus the Lord receives in and with Him eternal life.

Far better

The possession of this life from God is far better than law from God; for it is the only thing which can make possible obedience to law. It is far better than commandments for it makes man able to keep the commandments. It far outshines all the lustre of brilliant theological argument, for this life is the light that lighteth every man. How terrible to take this great and inspiring truth from man and substitute human culture in its stead, or to argue it away in order to save some accepted position. How like a stone in the place of bread is the substitution of mere human effort to please God when those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:8). We sadly fear that many preachers and many church members are not possessed of this life. They have accepted a church, a position, a plea, a system, but not the living Christ. This impartation of life from God will make man master of every disturbing and disquieting passion and fill the world with fruit. It is the one thing which insures our sonship to God and is the only asset that can be capitalized by God's grace for a spiritual life.

Missionary Messenger

"Greater things for God"

Elaine Brittell

Livingstone, Zambia

July 11.

Friday evening Brother Hobby entered hospital from severe burns on both legs and especially on his left hand and some on his right hand. So I came down yesterday to stay with Georgia Hobby while he is in the hospital. I wish you could have heard her lesson in Women's Class yesterday afternoon as she taught the wo-

men Romans 8:28—witnessing God's care and reason for all that happens in each of His children's lives. How great and wonderful God is—to let all things *work together* for good to those who are called and are serving Him! Bro. Hobby and some of his workers had been burning grass around their garden out at Mitchells' (where Lester and Joye are staying while Dennis, Anita, and family are on furlough). Lester was putting brake linings on his land rover. Joye had sheets in the bathtub in cold water. Truly God knew just what needed to be for the good of His precious child, Bro. Hobby. As Lester was nearing to finish putting on the brake lining, he thought—"shall I go down now and help Bro. Hobby burn the grass or go later?" and God helped him decide to go later—after he finished the wheel. He went to Bro. Hobby and found the grass fire was out. As they started walking back up to the house, the worker called, "fire." Lester turned and there was Bro. Hobby in flames trying to beat out the flames with his hands. God made the worker nearby have a wet sack to put out the flames; they carried him to the bathtub full of cold water; and just as they arrived at the hospital Sister Kalyati got out of her car—she rushed him into Emergency theater so he was treated quickly. Only our great wonderful God could make *all things* be thus, so Bro. Hobby's life would be saved. Praise be to God!

When Georgia went to see him this morning, he was sitting in a chair while they changed his bed to put on sterile sheets, so Georgia gave him a shave and haircut, and then he was to have an antiseptic bath. So, praise and thanks be to God, he is recovering as only God can do for man. Please pray for his complete recovery for further years in the Lord's service here in Zambia, and for Georgia to have renewed strength each day as she carries on for the Lord. We know God promises these blessings; however, His children must be asking and trusting Him always.

Shichiro Nakahara

Shizuoka City, Japan

July 19.

A little over a week ago when we heard from Bro. Mullins telling us of their meeting in which the Admission Committee had decided to accept Annette as a student at P. C. S. and so we got busy making the preparations for sending her, and after much thinking and prayer we have come to a conclusion that it will be best for Teruko to go along with her since making such a long and lonely trip by herself isn't too desirable for her, and it's been over 15 years since Teruko got back from the States, while I have had a couple of opportunities to visit you all in the meantime. She is very anxious to come to visit you all—though she won't have too much time to spare, for at home still two children will be waiting for her coming back. If the Lord is willing, the two will be leaving from Tokyo on Aug. 17 for Dallas and they will be expected to be in Louisville around Aug. 25 at latest.

Bro. Mullins has written us a most courteous letter with so much deep concern for a place of abode. I'm pretty sure that he has

some idea as to what can be done, for in his letter a suggestion is made to the effect that there were some who were asking about it. We trust that the Lord will provide a way for her to go to P.C.S. She is very happy that the Lord has made it all possible for her to come to school there. We trust that she will do her best to live as a Christian girl for the Lord above anything else and we know she will need much encouragement from all of you.

A Bible study for the mothers is to be taken up again in the fall and now it is temporarily interrupted because of the summer vacation. We're sorry to say that one of the mothers is going away next week since her husband is going to be transferred. I hope there are more mothers wishing to come to learn cooking and also Bible truths. So far four families wish to go with us for a Bible camp, which is different from the other that we will have for the young people on Aug. 12 through 15. This family camp is our new attempt to reach homes with the Gospel of Christ. Most of the husbands seem to be excited over it except one. We have a Christian woman, a pharmacist, who is going to share with me classes—I am to teach a Bible class and she is to lead more or less discussions in which they as women can have opportunities of talking together about their own problems from the Christian points of view, in the meantime I with Sis. Sugimura and Stephanie, our daughter, are to lead the children in hiking, drawing and collecting insects for their nature study. We try to make it most interesting and impressive on mothers and children as well. We are sorry that Teruko cannot be with us during this time. We wish for you to remember this effort we are trying to make in order for their salvation. We hope and pray that the Lord may give us an increase in number and most of all in spirituality.

Alex Wilson

Manila, Philippines

July 3.

Central Bible Institute began its 21st (I think) school year in mid-June. One hundred and eighteen students have enrolled—our highest number yet. Seven other teachers and I are teaching fifteen different subjects, ranging from life of Christ to chorus to methods of Bible study. My subjects are doctrines, ethics, the preacher and his work, and Daniel-Revelation. All of us value your prayers for us. What an encouragement it is when someone writes and says they are praying regularly for the work and workers here.

Our three congregations in Manila are burdened because of our weakness in evangelism. Half of 1976 is gone already, and only fifteen people have turned to Christ so far. We need to know more of the Lord's guidance and convicting power as we seek to make the Savior known. Please intercede for us all.

T. W. Hartle

Capetown South Africa

June 25.

We are still busy with cottage meetings, and film strip classes in various homes, on request from various families. But a most thrilling and blessed experience for me was that at the City hospital where I normally conduct services on a Monday afternoon, it was

there on the evening of the 23d of June that I was privileged to present to 90 patients in Ward 2 a filmstrip series entitled "How We Got The Bible." While it was convened in this ward, nevertheless other patients came over from other wards to see this film strip, along with nurses, and it was a joy to share in and listen to 90 patients singing various hymns before I started showing the film series, all to the glory of God.

All we can do, while we at all times, along with other of the active brethren endeavor to reach the lost, is just to pray that many souls will be obedient to the gospel of Christ.

While prayers are going up for our new building project, there has been no further development, since we have not found a contractor suitable to do the complete foundation within the limits of our finances. We are just praying and asking others to share in their prayers, towards the final success of this project.

NEWS AND NOTES

"They rehearsed all that God had done with them . . ."

Lexington, Ky.: Bro. Billy Ray Lewter spoke at Cramer & Hanover Sunday, June 20. He and his family left Saturday, June 26, moving to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he is to serve at the Westside Church. We at Cramer thank the Lord for the blessing he and his family have been to each of us. Their address is: 5365 Plantation Rd., Plantation Florida 33317.

The Ebenezer Church of Christ will be holding a meeting the week of July 25 with Bro. Harold Preston preaching.

Rangeland Church, Louisville.: Bro. Dennis Allen, former missionary in Hong Kong, was the speaker June 13 during Bro. Boyd's absence. He is currently connected with Portland Christian School as Guidance Counselor and teacher.

Huntingdon, Tenn.: I received the Word and Work thru a period many years ago—and then for some time I failed to get it. I have been receiving it again. I've always enjoyed the spiritual food I found in its contents. It doesn't seem to be confined to a creed or bound by anything other than a free discussion of scriptures, regardless of what religious group it may be similar to or with whom it

differs. I think all scripture is profitable and should be taught and considered. We should endeavor to confine our beliefs to the Bible and not try to wrest the Bible to make it conform to our beliefs.

I just wanted to send these few remarks with my renewal. With appreciation and thanks. Mrs. Alma Ross

WOODLAND BIBLE CAMP

Remember that "memberships" are always available from the camp for anyone who wants them. The owner of a membership has the right to vote at the annual meetings in September. But more than that it gives one the privilege of helping the camp financially. In fact, it is the best way of contributing to the camp financially since the state prefers it. The memberships are only \$5 each. Why not buy one for the whole family or even as a gift to someone else? Bros. Jim Reintjes, S. Reeves and Dick Lewis are in charge of selling the memberships.

WORDS OF LIFE RADIO

July 13 Bro. Rutherford and Bro. Bennie Hill baptized a 90 year old woman into Christ. She had been convicted by listening to Bro. Robert B. Boyd's radio program (11p.m. on

WHAS-840, each Sunday night in Louisville). She wrote to Bro. Boyd and received a personal reply together with some printed sermons, including one on "Baptism and Faith." In her next letter to Bro. Boyd she expressed a desire to be baptized. Since she lives in Lexington, Ky., Bro. Boyd made contact with Bro. Rutherford and suggested that he and Bro. Hill call on her. As a result, she was baptized into Christ. We are praying that the program "Words of Life" may continue to bear much fruit for the Lord.

Starting Aug. 15 "Words of Life" will be heard on 3 stations expected to reach Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Bahamas, and south Florida. The mailing address of "Words of Life" is P.O. Box 1871, Louisville, Ky. 40201.

SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

This is to announce the beginning of the School of Biblical Studies at the (under the auspices of the eldership) Buechel Church of Christ. The training session is to begin in the fall, 1978. The classes will be held at the church building during evening hours. Classes will be conducted on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evening. The confirmed instructors at this point include Earl C. Mullins, principal of Portland Christian School. Dennis Allen is another of the instructors. Brother Allen has served as a missionary in Hong Kong as well as in various areas of teaching statewide. Michael Sanders, minister of the Buechel Church of Christ will also be one of the instructors.

The objective of the School of Biblical Studies is to provide training for Bible teachers in the local church, elders and deacons of the local congregations and those aspiring to serve as ministers and evangelists.

Obviously, there are costs and a fee of \$7.50 per credit hour is to be anticipated by the student. These funds will be necessary to defray instructor expenses and various overhead items.

The curriculum can be completed in approximately three years. In addition to the class work, there will be seminars available during holiday weekends and summer break. These seminars will be held at Echo Valley

Camp and considerable credit can be earned during these concentrated study periods. In addition, correspondence work will be available.

All interested individuals should contact the Buechel Church of Christ at 2105 Buechel Bank Road, Louisville, Kentucky 40218. Phone 1-502-454-4724. Applications and correspondence should be sent to the church office.

There are those who have worked in previous Bible Institutes. Work accomplished in these Bible Institute efforts will be recognized in the School of Biblical Studies.

If you are interested in serving as an instructor, please contact:

Buechel Church of Christ
2105 Buechel Bank Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40218
Telephone: 1-502-454-4724

CHURCH DESIRES MINISTER

Chattanooga, Tenn.: We wish that we had a minister that could attend the fellowship. We want to ask that the fellowship meeting pray for the congregation here in Chattanooga, we have been without a minister or any leadership now for several months, and our membership and attendance is gradually declining.

We have been a congregation since 1938, and of course for many years before that we were under the ministering and leadership of Bro. E. H. Hoover. At one time we were a rather strong congregation.

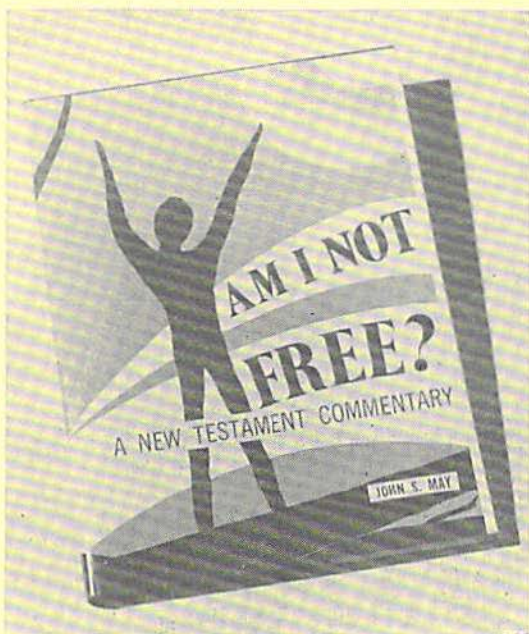
We do not want to give up, we need the fellowship, and we feel that Chattanooga needs a Church of Christ of our persuasion. The so-called main stream Church of Christ here has a large following with approximately 40 congregations in this area.

Please ask for prayers for our situation. And if any person or any of the churches in that area can be of any help to assist us in finding a minister and supporting him until we can get back on a solid basis once again, we would appreciate your assistance, advice and prayers -John Lockman, 601 Highview Drive, Chattanooga, Tenn 37415 Phone 1-615-877-8940, for the McBrien Road Church of Christ.

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