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Solo Christo — Sola Scriptura — Sola Fide — Sola Gratia

Jesus and the Parables



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—statement of faith—

This magazine is dedicated to three principal reference points of the Christian faith:

1. **The centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ:** The gospel centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ in history. Its principal modes of expression are those of law and covenant. In Jesus Christ God's final verdict on man has been rendered, and therefore the gospel anticipates fully God's decision in the final judgment. It is the window through which all life and history is to be seen and understood.

2. **The authority, sufficiency, and clarity of the Bible:** The Bible is exclusively authoritative in all matters of faith and practice. While its writers reflect their respective contemporary world views, these do not compromise the integrity of their witness. While we admit that all Scripture does not enjoy uniform clarity, we affirm that the Bible is essentially clear in its central message — the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. **The priesthood of all believers:** The gospel, through the Scriptures, is the central means by which God expresses himself in the world, and constitutes the basis on which all Christian fellowship is built. We believe that true fellowship is best expressed and preserved in a congregational setting. The primary purpose of church government is the orderly preservation, teaching, and promotion of the gospel message on the sole authority of Scripture alone, and we affirm all forms of government that prove compatible with this objective.

Our support of these objectives is without antagonism or prejudicial exclusiveness toward any individual or group. We feel a kinship with all who have embraced the good news of the cross, regardless of human distinctions such as race, color, denominational ties or forms of church government.

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—editorial—

It has been said that interpretations of parables are like the stars in the sky, there are a lot of them but they don't shed much light! Commentators are agreed that parables generally teach one major point but often they are not agreed on what that one point is. And evidently the problem is not new, even Jesus' close associates did not fully understand his parables. "When he (Christ) was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven'" (Mk 4:10-12).

Is Jesus serious? Does he really tell stories **so that** people will not understand? Is he teaching in such a way that people will not seek forgiveness? What kind of pastor would do such a thing?

It seems to me that what Jesus is saying is that the secret of the kingdom, of God's righteous reign in the affairs of men, was understood by those who, like the disciples, came to Jesus to seek greater understanding. It is not sufficient to just hear the parables (vv 9, 23), one must listen, concentrate, study, discover and apply them. To follow Jesus meant more than to simply use one's mind as a scrapbook to paste in a series of cute stories collected from the lips of Jesus. No, these profound insights from the great teacher must be cracked open, the kernel must be discovered.

And the parables were to touch the lives of those who heard. We might paraphrase the expression, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (v 9) in this way: "Now work that out for yourself, if you can!" The teachings of Jesus are to be taken seriously. Jesus comments on those who do not comprehend the seriousness of his words and deeds. Referring to Isaiah 6:9-10 he pictures these people as being like ones who have sight but act blind, or who hear but act deaf. And if this were not the case — and now Jesus indulges little holy sarcasm — they might actually repent and be forgiven (v 12)!

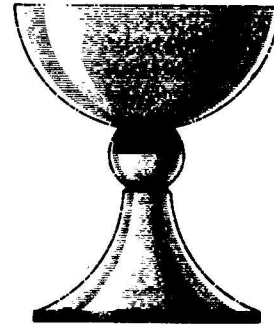
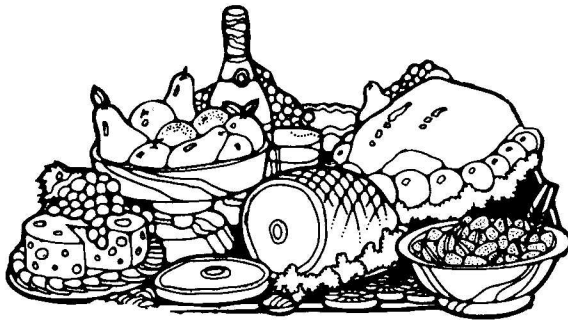
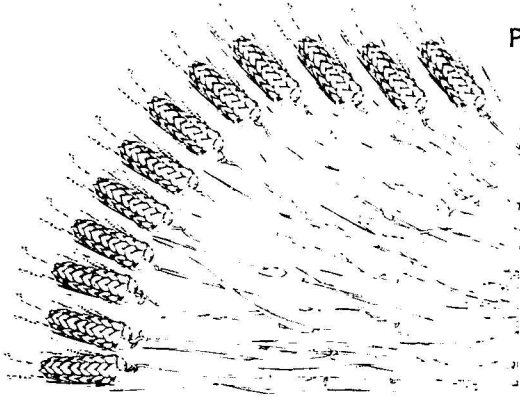
So where does all this leave us? Precisely here: Jesus insists that the true meaning in his parables must be discovered and lead to action. They are not nice little stories to stack away in the attic of our brain somewhere. In them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are unfolded. In them theology is made to intersect with life. In them we find our convictions and presuppositions challenged. In them we are led along to the birth of new insights.

Religion as sterile axioms of pious truth is dead. Cerebral faith is no faith. The parables of Jesus urge us to bring our religion to bear on life in a dynamic way. They attack our impotent religious convictions and remind us that theology that does not touch life is an exercise in futility.

Calvin W. Edwards

Introduction

Peter Rodd



Common sense dictates that we must keep in mind two things: the ones to whom each story was told, and what incident or what point of discussion provoked the story.

More than once, I have wished that I could have been one of the peasants in the crowd that listened to the stories that Jesus told. Of course, we have been speaking of them as parables for hundreds of years, and that makes them something more than stories. I suppose you'd expect me to be pleased that I met these parables at a time when we are all equipped by education and sophistication to see so much more in these parables than did the peasants. But the fact is I'm not very excited about that.

What the centuries have done for the parables is this: diligent students have scanned every word and found symbols and metaphors, and parables within parables — gold everywhere. But some of it has been "fools' gold." Most of it would have left

the peasants gaping in mystification, and maybe even Jesus would have been surprised. Indeed, some of these discoveries have proved to be an embarrassment, for they have confused our ideas about God. Besides, they have caused us to undervalue the one simple thing that Jesus set out to illustrate.

Of course, we can take the view that the parables were primarily intended to be over the heads of the peasants and preserved for more sophisticated readers in later centuries.

I don't believe that. That is why I want, in imagination, to place myself somewhere in that peasant audience. Common sense dictates that we must keep in mind two things: the ones to whom each story was told, and what incident or what point of discussion provoked the story. We are then ready to listen with the attention and orientation of the peasants.

See if you can hear as they heard. . . .

This series of five articles is written by Peter Rodd. He is retired now but as a former pastor and Bible teacher he has spent much of his life writing.

The Parable of the Sower

66 A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop — a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear. ☞☞ (Matthew 13:3-9)

This parable is so simple and it is explained so lucidly by Jesus himself, that we are almost bound to miss something. That "something" lies in the background of the parable where there is drama and tension that most of us never become aware of.

Jesus had the awesome problem of superimposing his concept of the Kingdom of Heaven over the deeply entrenched and, to the Jews, very satisfying religion of Judaism.

The Jews were, at that time, the most cynically racist nation on earth. They were smug in the conviction that God was exclusively their God. He had no interest in any other nation. When the time was ripe, they could rely on him to destroy their enemies. At this stage of their history, they were sure that their Messiah would come in super-human power and majesty, and they believed that the glad day was almost at hand.

So they had the leisure to look on all other nations with contempt, even half-Jews like the Samaritans. They, and they alone, had the sacred scrolls, the God-designed temple, the law. They had their circle of literates who could interpret God's will for them. They only had to obey what their leaders taught them, and time for them would merge into an eternity of bliss. The rest of the world had nothing, and that didn't matter in the slightest.

And now it was the destiny of Jesus to tell them with uncompromising certainty that they were wrong, wrong about everything. The Kingdom of Heaven was for the whole world. The God that the Jews thought they knew was nothing like the God of the Kingdom of Heaven. He loved everyone in the whole wide world, and there was no advantage in being a Jew.

Anyone who could believe in Jesus had a right to this kingdom. In this kingdom the Jews had to replace their intense national pride with humility.

It was a kingdom where rich and poor, literate and illiterate, strong and weak were all equal. Here brotherhood replaced racialism. Here love was of the essence, and nonviolence made militarism a childish thing.

A few minutes before Jesus began his story of the sower, there had been drama and wild excitement. He had just created the miracle of the stupendous haul of fishes and, within minutes, he had before him a noisy, excited crowd. In a mere moment he had achieved fame and stature. Surely now was the time to begin. He could preach his sermon of the Kingdom of Heaven. But, even as he looked at the crowd before him, he knew that nothing would sink in. The idea was too shatteringly new, and these people were not equipped to accept new ideas of any kind, especially in religion. Too many priests stood between them and truth, and their minds were slowed down by smugness, prejudice and limpness of thought.

So he deferred his sermon on the kingdom and presented his warning about the reception of new ideas. He knew only too well that there must be many more miracles, and much more fame before he could expect anyone to believe in his kingdom, believe enough to forsake the comfortable exclusiveness of Judaism, ringed, as they were, by the whole nation of bigots, and tread a lonely road with him.

Through the carefully indirect medium of the parable of the sower, he warned them of all the states of mind that would prevent them from accepting this devastating new concept of the Kingdom of Heaven as final truth.

He warned them of the mind trodden into imperviousness by the constant repetition of their theologians. Such a mind could not tolerate any new idea. Minds in that kind of shape would come away from any new

revelation quite untouched by the message. Jesus warned them, too, of the fatal condition of the stony-ground hearers who half-listened, not understanding and not caring at all. What little they grasped of the new idea might trouble their minds for a few minutes, but by morning it would be gone beyond recall.

Then there were those whose minds were possessed by the thorns of authority. They had never experienced the vital interaction of challenging ideas fighting for acceptance against older and more popular but less credible beliefs. Few ever would.

Finally Jesus presented the comforting picture of the relaxed minds of thoughtful people who could welcome new ideas as good loose soil accepted seed. Such minds had the capacity to judge as they mulled over new ideas. Such minds were also untroubled by hostile voices, and the scathing words of those

There were those whose minds were possessed by the thorns of authority. They had never experienced the vital interaction of challenging ideas fighting for acceptance against older and more popular but less credible beliefs.

in authority, and when they were convinced by what was obviously true, they were changed by that conviction. One day they would find themselves in the Kingdom of Heaven.

I wonder how many in that crowd by the lakeside would later find themselves on the hill where they could listen to the sermon beginning: "Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . ."

3

The Unjust Steward

66 There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg — I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 'Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied.

The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

'A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied.

He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. ¶ (Luke 16:1-8)

To the casual reader, the parable of the unjust steward is a simple story of the doing of a clever scoundrel who swindled his employer and then got himself out of difficulty by a piece of criminal skulduggery clever enough to gain the reluctant

admiration of the Lord himself. Of course, that does not please the theologian or the preacher. It seems to be a misrepresentation of the character of God. And I have heard one or two cunning explanations of how we ought to read the story.

But, in the long run, it is the casual reader who turns out to be right, or nearly right.

Here is the story: The business of a financier was supervised by a manager who was determined to fill his own pockets at his employer's expense. One day he learned that his boss had caught up with him. Now he knew that not only was he certain to be dismissed, but that his crime would be public knowledge and that he had no prospect of being manager of anything in the future.

He thought fast and came up with a very shrewd idea. He deliberately involved the financier's principal debtors in his crime. He called them in one at a time and made sure that they

Sad to record, in spite of his warning, the church has, through the centuries, been fleeced by pious hypocrites who found "the children of light" easy marks, because their interest and their education were directed elsewhere.

knew the precise amount of their indebtedness. Then he changed the books to make a generous reduction. The greedy men went along with this, and the scoundrel was now in a position to blackmail them. He planned to make himself an uninvited guest for long periods in each of their homes. Furthermore, when one circuit of their homes was finished, he planned to start a second round. Of course, they would hate it, but what could they do? After all, they were all criminals together.

Somehow, his employer got to hear of his plans, and as he dismissed the scoundrel he congratulated him on his shrewdness.

The real problem is that the employer was not an ordinary man. He was the lord. That horrifies many people because to them the lord means God.

But this is a difficulty that is not so hard to deal with. The Greek word "kurios" did not necessarily have anything to do with God. It was a word used to distinguish superior people from the crowd. It might be applied to a viceroy, a general, a philosopher or teacher, a rich man, or an employer. After all, it is not surprising that the word is translated "lord." Lords in England are certainly not thought of as gods. Anyway, Jesus was called "lord" by people who did not, for a moment, think of him as God.

But now we come to the real problem. Why did Jesus tell the parable at all? And why did he make the odd comment that he did? "For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The comment looks like a warning to the disciples to watch lest some scoundrel should relieve them of their money. But, what money? They had only a paltry bag of small coins in the hands of Judas.

But Jesus knew that he was coming to the end of his ministry. He must have foreseen the Pentecost of the future and the rapid growth of the church. Some of these disciples would have the responsibility of handling a great deal of money from the tithes and offerings of the new church. They might have become too trusting. They might even have indulged in a little careless investing. And they were babes, magnificent material for the unscrupulous swindler.

Sad to record, in spite of his warning, the church has, through the centuries, been fleeced by pious hypocrites who found "the children of light" easy marks, because their interest and their education were directed elsewhere.

We should not fear and avoid this parable. We ought to take it at its face value, seriously.

4

The Prodigal Son

6 33 There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!' So he got up and went to his father.



THE GAME SHE DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS PLAYING

Estelle Hughes

Natalie had just moved to a new school and she was lonely. She didn't know one person in that great big school, and she had known EVERYONE in her old school. "Life is so hard for an eight-year-old" she sighed as she arrived at school the second lonely morning.

At lunch time Natalie had only eaten one of her small sandwiches when she noticed a little boy near her softly crying and not eating. She looked around; no one else seemed concerned about the little lad so she slid along the seat toward him and said "Hey, why aren't you eating your lunch? Soon the bell will go for us to leave the shed and you won't be finished."

Conrad looked at her sadly. "I don't have any lunch. They tossed it in the fish pond and I can't eat it." And he cried a little bit louder.

"Then you must eat what's left of mine. I'm a little bit sad too and I don't want the rest of my lunch." And Natalie pushed her packet of lunch onto his lap, slipped back along the seat and vanished into the girl's room.

When the World's Biggest Circus came to town, Natalie stood in the line to buy a ticket. She had been to circuses before, but everyone loves a circus. The little girl in front of

Natalie stepped up to the ticket window and said "Please give me a" Then she fumbled in her pocket, her hanky, her little bag. She looked on the ground behind her and behind Natalie, but nowhere could she find her money. "I just had it in my hanky," she wailed, "and now it's gone, and I've never been to a circus before, Oh what shall I do?" Her poor troubled little face was wet with tears and looked so tragic, but there was nothing anyone could do. Or was there?

Pressing her own money into Jodi's hand Natalie said "I've been to lots of circuses before, you take my money and I'll look for yours, it might be in the sand. But we are at the end of the line, so you go in before the door closes."

As she walked along the street Natalie was shocked to see her dear friend Mrs. DeGroot rolling along the street in a wheelchair.

"Why Mrs. DeGroot," shouted the girl, "Why are you in a chair? I've missed you lately. Are you very badly hurt?"

And the questions would have gone on tumbling out had Mrs. DeGroot not patted Natalie's cheek and said, "Natalie dear, not so fast! No, I'm not badly hurt, but my poor leg won't be strong for a while. I broke it when I fell, and the doctor is going to remove the cast today. I'm so glad I have this



wheelchair, or I would really be helpless."

2 Natalie walked slowly on wondering about the hard luck some people have. She turned down a street sooner than she needed to just to see Mrs. DrGroot's garden again. That would cheer her up again she knew. Mrs. DeGroot's garden was always perfect. Natalie thought of the garden plot her mother had offered her. There were always weeds in it, but NEVER weeds in Mrs. DeGroot's.

But Mrs. DeGroot's garden did NOT cheer Natalie today. She could hardly believe her eyes. There were actually WEEDS in this most perfect garden! Almost without thinking, Natalie dropped to her knees and pulled out the biggest and ugliest of the weeds. "It must hurt my friend more than that broken leg, to have weeds in her garden," she said to herself, and she worked feverishly till the last fat weed was gone and she knew she must hurry home. "That looks more like Mrs. DeGroot's garden," she grinned and tossed the weeds into the trash tin and ran toward her home.

What no one could know, was that Natalie would be joining Mrs. DeGroot that very night for a long stay in the hospital and another long spell in a wheelchair. A car driver lost control of his car, mounted the footpath and pinned the little girl against a fence breaking both of her legs.

But soon the misty days of pain gave way to clear faces of mother, family and friends, and Natalie began to feel that life was worth living again. Mother read from her many pretty and cheery "Get Well" cards words like this: "To the dear little girl who helped Jeremy cover his book." And Mother would ask "When did Jeremy need help, honey?" But Natalie's little face would frown as she replied "I don't remember."

Another card read "Thank you for sharing your lunch with Conrad when his was spoiled." While another said "Jodi will never forget your kindness in letting her go to the circus in your place."

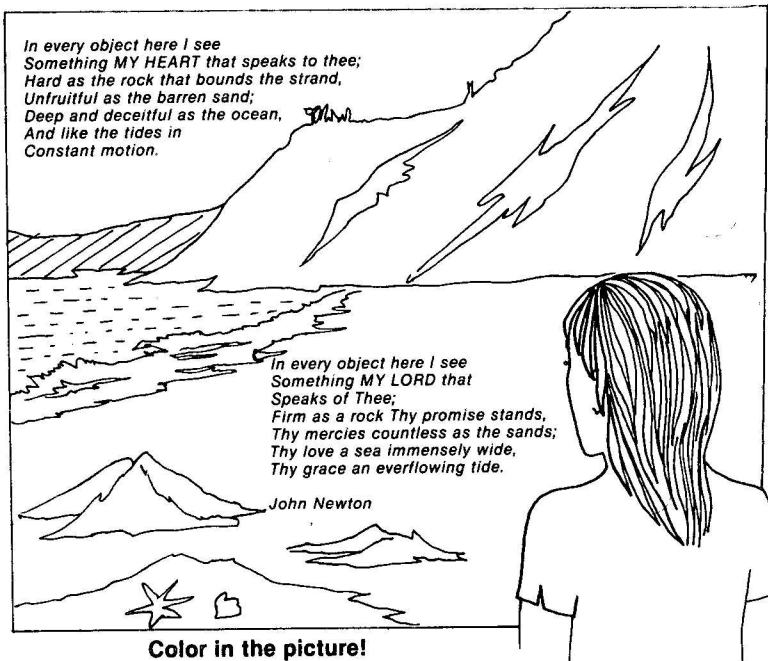
It was a specially happy day for Natalie when Mrs. DeGroot walked in to visit using only one walking stick. "I just had to come," smiled Mrs. DeGroot. "I couldn't think of anything else I could do for you like you did for me when I was in a wheel chair." Natalie looked surprised. "What did I do for you, Mrs. DeGroot?"

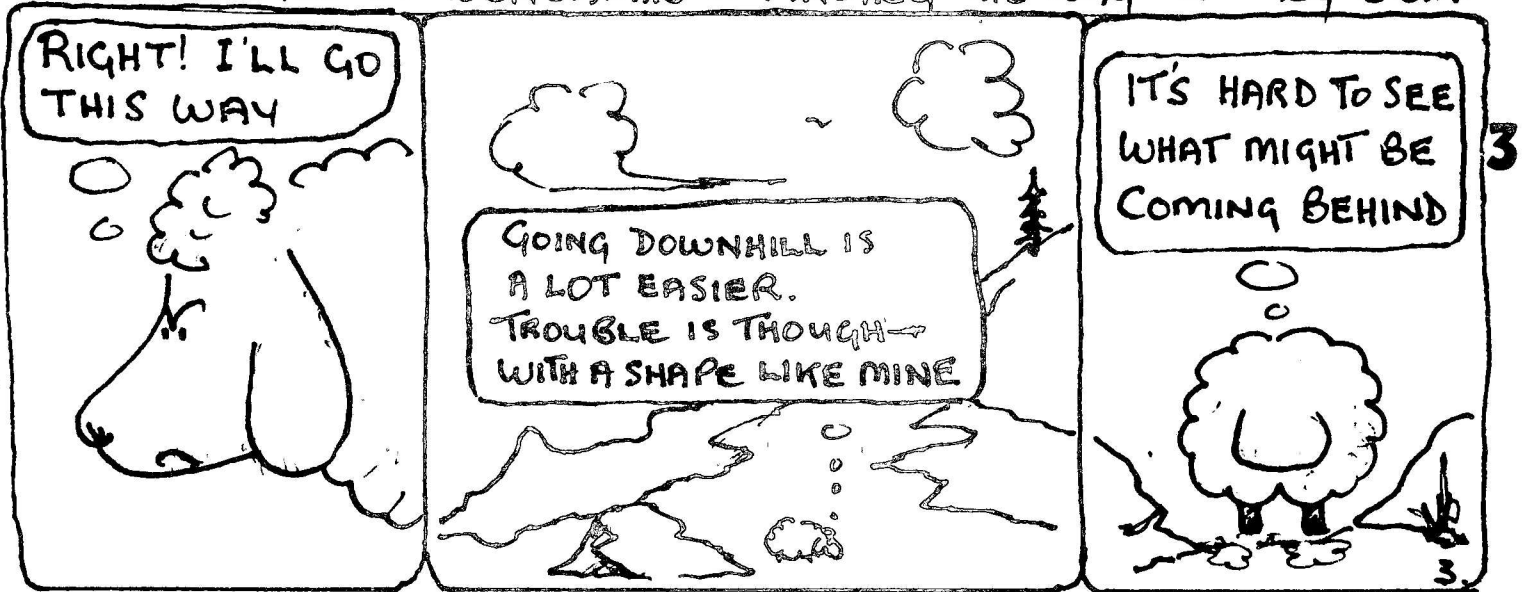
"Oh, I think you remember," laughed Mrs. DeGroot, "I know who weeded my garden when I was in a wheelchair. My neighbor told me it was you."

Natalie smiled. "Yes, I do remember. I couldn't bear to see weeds in your beautiful garden. You never had weeds in it, and I was so surprised I guess I just pulled them out."

Her minister visited Natalie, and the words of grateful friends reminded him of a story Jesus had told long before. The story about people who were invited to the King's country because they had been kind to the King. But they couldn't remember being kind to Him. So the minister made a suggestion to all the children in his church when he told the story of Natalie, and here it is.

"Let's play a game this week," said he. "A game that Natalie played only she didn't know she was playing it. Here are the rule Do a very kind deed for someone who won't know who did it, and then see if you can forget about it. It will be hard to play because we usually try to boast about what we do. But try it for just one week and I think your King will be very pleased."





GOD'S FIREWORKS

Romans 3:21, 22
Gillian Ford

Once I went to Disneyland with my son and at night we sat on the sidewalk and watched the Cinderella parade. Some of you may have seen it. It is a long time ago, but I can still see some of the electrical floats in my mind. They were huge shapes of different things with lots of bright lights on them. There were beautiful ladies with crinolines dancing around, and people dressed up as Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters playing on the edges of the parade.

After came the firework display, and oh, was that beautiful! The brightest light in the parade was dim compared to those fireworks. Can you see the rockets bursting into streams of different colored stars? There were trails of pure white light, and swirls of green and red. They would suddenly explode, shoot up at a furious rate, and then slowly and gracefully die like a cat lazily stretching itself on a comfortable seat.

We are going to look at some fireworks in the book of Romans. But first there is a parade. Romans chapters 1 to 3 describes a parade of all the people in the world. First come the pagans who don't know God. Then come the Jews who were the most religious people who ever lived. Finally the rest of the world follows on. Yes, I'm there and so are you. Think of all the millions of people in that

parade for everyone living and everyone who has died are in it. How huge it must be.

Some people are there you wouldn't like much. They have lied and stolen and even killed other people. But there are also many good people. They have done lots of good deeds. They are the world's bright lights. But you know, boys and girls, the book of Romans says, "the whole world is accountable to God." That means that no one in the whole parade is good enough to go to heaven despite all the good that they may have done.

After this parade come the fireworks found in Romans 3:21 to 26. Oh, you'll look at them and say you can't see anything but a heap of hard words. But still, these are God's fireworks and we must light their fuses by explaining what they mean. Then maybe you will see how beautiful their lights are. They tell us about what God has done for you and me in Jesus.

Here's one firework text. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifest apart from law . . ." (v. 21). Oh those are hard words. What can they mean? First of all, we need to know what "righteousness" means. "Righteousness" is what God is like. It means good with no bad in it at all. It's like pure white with no black in it — not the

4 slightest bit of gray. It means not just nice on the outside but as good and kind and loving as possible right inside your heart. God's righteousness is like that. The trouble is that men's righteousness is not like that. It is not good enough to allow a man to go to heaven.

Those words, "the righteousness of God" did not bring any joy to Martin Luther. He thought, "If God is righteous, he can't love me because I am not righteous." How he worried about that text. To try and become righteous, he went into a monastery, the place where monks live. He didn't eat properly — often went without breakfast, dinner, and supper. He made a little whip with leather thongs and tiny metal ends and hit himself on the back over and over again. He hurt himself so badly he would faint. You see people living then thought that if you starved and beat your body, your bad thoughts would go away, and you would become completely good. But, boys and girls, it doesn't work.

Martin did not understand those words "the righteousness of God." He had read them in a Bible chained to the monastery wall. If that text was one of God's rockets, it seemed aimed straight at him. He could see it coming and he couldn't escape. How afraid he was of that text. He thought it would burn and kill him in the end. But do you know, before it hit him, it was as though that firework burst into a glorious and dazzling light. One day he saw what it meant.

What did he learn? Well, he read the next verse and he found out what God's righteousness was — "the righteousness of

God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Can you see what Martin saw? He didn't like what he saw in himself and felt that God couldn't love him. If he had to be good and holy inside and out, he would never make it. But God showed him through this verse that he wasn't looking at Martin, but at Jesus. All goodness and holiness is in Jesus and not in men.

The "righteousness of God" is a gift, not something God asks of us. He gives us the very thing we need for salvation! Isn't that amazing?

In fact, when God thought about whether he would take Martin to heaven, the only question he asked was, "Is Martin trusting in my Son?" If he was, God didn't look at Martin at all, but only at the life and death of Jesus. When Martin understood that Jesus took his place, he found peace with God. He didn't starve and beat himself any more. He said that when he understood this text, he entered the gates of Paradise. He meant he knew that he was saved. You can know it too.

Boys and girls, there is another parade in the Bible which you would love to be in. We are told about it in 2 Corinthians 2:14. "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere." This is a happy parade made up of all those who trust in Jesus. They follow him spreading joy everywhere they go by telling others about Jesus and how he saved them. God and his angels watch that parade from heaven with far more joy than you would watch the one at Disneyland. Come and be part of God's parade by trusting Jesus.

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But while he was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his servants, 'Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' 9 9
(Luke 15:11-13, 17, 20-32)

The parable of the prodigal son is more like a short story than is any of the other parables. There is a more elaborate plot, and there is more definition of character, too. However, as it is usually presented, there is a degree of misplaced emphasis that is quite sufficient to blur the whole intent of the parable. In such a presentation, the father becomes the central character, and his love for the erring son becomes the be-all and end-all of the story. And it is this emphasis that prevents the parable from answering the question that prompted it. This is a shame because the answer to the provocative question is most carefully underlined in the story. I fancy that most people who can retell the story in great detail have not the faintest idea of what this question is.

The circumstances that prompted the parable were as follows: Jesus was talking intimately to the peasants who flocked about him and was apparently totally unaware of the presence of the little group of famous theologians who were also "honoring" him with their presence. They grew more and more indignant under this neglect till they finally asked what Jesus meant by his exclusive concern with the ignorant and disreputable masses while he left the people who really counted out in the cold.

Jesus treated this question seriously. He used three parables to answer it. In the parable of the lost coin he reminded them of the way they had felt about a lost object. Coins are an anonymous lot. But a lost coin has gained identity simply by getting lost. It is the only one that calls for attention. It is natural that you should lose sight of the rest till you have found the lost one.

"Lost" means not knowing where you are. It has connotations of misery and danger. The peasants were certain of nothing in the religious world. The theologians were very certain of their

whereabouts. They didn't need Christ's attention.

The story of the lost sheep added something vital. A lost sheep claims your attention because you care. You feel badly about its suffering. While you are out looking for it, you can afford to forget the ones safe in the fold. But the misery of the lonely, bleating sheep in the darkness and the danger compels your compassion.

And now we come to the story of the lost son, the prodigal. It is, in no sense, a repetition of the theme of the other two stories. No one went out in search of him. He had the sense to come home, and home he came. The fact is that Jesus had already answered the question of the theologians. This parable was a stinging comment on their attitude, and it is the elder brother that carries this theme. He took no part in the excitement and general rejoicing that followed the return of the prodigal. He had no interest in a lost brother. He had never taken the time to worry about his probable plight. He was sulking because everyone seemed to have forgotten how much better than his brother he had always been. It was a galling thing to see all attention pass from him to someone so undistinguished and so unworthy as this foolish wasteful young brother of his.

Jesus wanted the theologians to see themselves as he saw them. It was a daringly stinging rebuke. Everything that you could dislike and despise about the elder brother was being vividly portrayed in the very question that prompted the parable.

The Pharisees did not fail to get the point. But sadly they didn't profit by the lesson. Indeed, the parable only intensified their attitude of contempt for the peasants and hatred for the one who had held up the mirror so effectively before their eyes. It put them in a fury of self-discovery that ended a little later in that terrible chorus: "Crucify him. Crucify him."

The Marriage of the King's Son

66 The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

But they paid no attention and went off — one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 22:2-13)

I want to conclude this rather sketchy series about the parables with some remarks on perspective. The parables I will refer to are all well known but they are seldom looked at from the proper perspective.

During the last week or so of Jesus' ministry, he told a number of stories that all have the same theme of rejection, retribution and replacement. The parables are very brief, but they all carry a sense of urgency. They are all so different from the other parables that we are tempted to ask, 'Why this more intense feeling? Why this repetitiveness?'

The parable that is to stand at the center of our discussion is usually called: The Marriage of the King's Son. The story's told in the text above. The chosen guest list was replaced in a surprising way.

The story of the landowner who sent servants to collect the rents from those leasing his land is similar. The rent collectors were attacked, and some of them were killed. At last the land-owner said: 'I will send my son. He will be respected.' But he suffered the same fate. Those who listened to this story agreed that the lessees should be punished, dismissed and replaced with people who would do their job properly.

8 All the other parables have similar lessons to teach. The message that emerges is this: In the world, if you are selected to do anything, however simple, you must do it, or you will be punished and replaced. The job may be no more difficult than girls have in a ceremonial meeting with the bridegroom. Or it may involve the responsibility of

investing a little money for the boss. It is no use making excuses. You must do just what you are directed to do. Otherwise you will be dismissed and replaced. That is how things are done in the world. Jesus wanted to make it plain to the Jews that it is only to be expected that God will respond to irresponsibility in the same way.

Now we naturally ask, 'Why did Jesus repeat this lesson so many times? What was troubling him at this period of life?'

The answer is not hard to find.

What Jesus had feared from the beginning of his ministry was proving to be irrevocably true. His effort to persuade the Jews to renounce narrow Jewish ideas and embrace his own concept of the universal Kingdom of Heaven was not going to succeed. He had told them in the most lucid and attractive of sermons how surprisingly different God's view was from theirs.

Jesus had vigorously attacked the view of Jewish superiority. In fact, he made it plain that a Samaritan 'nobody' was better than a Levite or a priest in God's eyes, if he showed real concern for those who hated him. But all this teaching had no effect on the leaders of the people. And now Jesus knew that this was the end of the Jewish nation. They would be scattered by their own foolish convictions. It was the logical result of failing to do what their destiny expected of them. What Jesus had been trying to tell them through these parables was that, even by their own social standards they were justly doomed.

Q. Why are there so many conflicting interpretations of Daniel? How can I know what to believe about this book?

A. Many doctrinal conflicts could be resolved quite simply if the various parties would devote more attention to proper principles of interpretation. During the last century Christians came to see that the Bible didn't drop from the sky, nor were the biblical writers God's secretaries simply taking down what God had dictated. For centuries the Christian church had a view of the Bible that overemphasized the divine aspect to the neglect of the human, historical and cultural aspects.

Nineteenth and twentieth century biblical studies have stressed the need to interpret the Bible **in the light of its own historical setting**. Too often in the past the Bible has been interpreted in the light of the reader's own culture or life setting. We so often forget that language dates just like everything else. "The ideal of timeless English," wrote C.S. Lewis, "is sheer nonsense. You might as well ask for a motionless river." This is true of all languages including those of the Bible. This factor alone highlights the importance of employing a sound historical approach to the literature of the Bible.

The following principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) are, I think, representative of those employed by all evangelical Christian scholars today. In the attempt to discover the original meaning and intent of the text one should:

1. Determine the historical background, the geographical setting, and the chronological period of the biblical event, saying or teaching being studied.
2. Consider the relevant socio-economic and cultural factors of the time, the event, saying or teaching occurred, or was intended to be heard or observed.

3. Consider the contextual setting of the Scripture passage being interpreted. This should include the immediate context, the book context, the testament context (old or new) and finally the whole biblical context.

4. Consider the grammar, syntax and definition of words in the text. Good Bible translations and exegetical commentaries help immeasurably here.

5. Discern the literary type. Is it poetry, prose, prophecy, etc.?

6. Apply the eternal, trans-cultural truth of the passage to our day.

Put briefly, this way of interpreting the Bible is known as grammatico-historical exegesis. Negatively, this indicates that we have no liberty to impose on biblical words meanings they never intended to bear. Positively it lays upon us the discipline of studying words in their grammatical context and their historical setting. It is grammar and history together which determine the meaning of words.

A text means what the author meant it to mean and the task of exegesis is to make that meaning clear. Let us now take Daniel and apply some of these principles of interpretation.

Christian scholars are divided over the dating of Daniel. Some believe that Daniel was written in the sixth or early fifth century during the Babylonian exile. Others argue that it was written in the second century when the Jews were persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes. Some scholars who argue for a second-century date believe that the final author of Daniel incorporated some materials from the sixth century with some of his own. One thing is clear, the message of the book is pertinent to God's people in both centuries for both were hard and bitter times for the Jews.

Another point is clear — the book was specifically written for the old covenant people of God, the Jews. The text of Daniel

couldn't be more explicit. The book commences with an attack on Israel and her sanctuary (Daniel 1:1-3). In the prayer of Daniel 9 the phrase "thy people" (9:15,16,19) is a reference to Daniel's people — the faithful Jews. In Daniel 10, the one who is sent to Daniel informs him that he has come to make him understand what is to befall his people in the latter days (10:14). Furthermore, Daniel is assured that at the "time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time," Michael will intervene and deliver Daniel's people — the faithful Jews (Daniel 12:1-3).

The prophetic scenario of Daniel 11:40-12:1-3 is replete with Palestinian geographical details, e.g., the "north" and the "south" are antagonistic powers north and south of Palestine; the "sea and glorious holy mountain," is the Mediterranean Sea and the "mountain" is that upon which Jerusalem is situated. The portion of the prophecy in Daniel, the portion which was specifically sealed is thoroughly old covenantal and Jewish. Thus, Daniel presents a picture of the end with Israel as God's covenantal people.

This is true of all Old Testament visions of the end. "In the Old Testament the eschatological salvation is always pictured in terms of the national theocratic fate of the people of Israel" (G.E. Ladd, **The Last Things**, p. 8). Daniel's prophecy of the end would have been fulfilled had Israel been faithful to the covenant. But as the New Testament clearly teaches, Israel failed and forfeited its covenant privileges and promises. □

(To be concluded next month)
— Noel Mason

In Australia & New Zealand

Investigative Judgment Debate

As we mentioned last month, on May 14 this year the San Joaquin Valley Chapter of the Association of Adventist Forums held a debate on the investigate judgment, the speakers being Dr. Bill Shea, Chairman of Old Testament at Andrews University, Pastor Alex Ortega of California, and Dr. Desmond Ford and Pastor Smuts van Rooyen of Good News Unlimited.

In his introduction the Forum president, Joe Battenberg, refers to the four speakers as those "individuals who in general are perceived to be the clearest spokespersons for the traditional and non-traditional positions" and indicates this is the first occasion when such a discussion has taken place before lay people.

Originally GNU had anticipated being able to distribute tapes of this meeting through its own outlets — at the moment this is not possible, though our Australian office is still negotiating with the San Joaquin Forum group, hoping that permission will be given at least to us. Meanwhile we have received two sets and are prepared to loan these to groups wanting to hear the meeting.

Though on four tapes, there are some strange long gaps in the recording and so actual discussion and question time only lasts about 1½ to 2 hours. As would be expected, at the end each speaker remains convinced of the rightness of his own view, but those still interested in this topic will find it instructive to hear the two sides of the question presented in this manner.

Books Arrived

Recently to hand are new supplies of Desmond Ford's "Physicians of the Soul", first printed in 1980. In this book Dr. Ford examines the role of the prophet and the function of prophecy. He shows how Scripture

reveals the meaning of life and God's plan for all mankind, centred around the person of Jesus Christ. Price \$5, plus \$1.20 postage.

Also, Gillian Ford's "The Inside Story" — a book on maximum nutrition, with appropriate recipes. Price: \$4, plus \$1.20 postage.

Both available from Desmond Ford Publications, P.O. Box 65, Chadstone, Victoria, 3148.

In Queensland

Ken Aitken in Brisbane advises that he has a supply of Dr. Ford's Glacier View manuscript "Dan. 8.14, The Day of Atonement & The Investigative Judgment". This exhaustive study is invaluable as a reference book and those who have a copy will refer to it over and over again. If you are in the Brisbane area, then contact Ken Aitken, Lot 22 Chambers' Flat Road, Parkridge, Queensland, 4125. Phone 297 0069. (Price \$15, plus postage of approx. \$4.)

This publication is also available from our Victorian office.

Looking for a Spiritual Home?

The Adelaide Christian Fellowship advises that their hearts and doors are open to any and all who find themselves in spiritual limbo. We quote from their advertising: "Please don't misunderstand us. If you are happy where you are worshipping, whether you be Baptist, Anglican or Adventist, we are not trying to woo you into something else. If you are happy in your church life, if you are not experiencing conflict either from within or without, then stay and give your best to the life of your church. We are not in the business of competing with other churches. Rather, we want to co-operate with our brothers and sisters in Christ, wherever they may be, in the work of preaching the gospel. But if you are desperately looking for

something else because your needs are not being met, then we hope we can provide that alternative that you may be looking for."

Adelaide Christian Fellowship meets every Saturday at 10.15 a.m. in the Salvation Army Citadel, 76 George Street, Norwood. For further information please contact the pastor, Graham Byrne, on 265 1502.

You've Got To Be Quick

Supplies of the San Francisco papers advertised in our last two issues were snapped up quickly and we regret to advise that these are no longer available.

Tape of the Month

The two sermons on the August Tape of the Month have the objective of uplifting Jesus as the centre and source of hope in our lives. "If I Be Lifted Up" is a study from the Gospel of John by Calvin Edwards; and "The Anchor" is based on Heb. 6:19 and presented by Smuts van Rooyen.

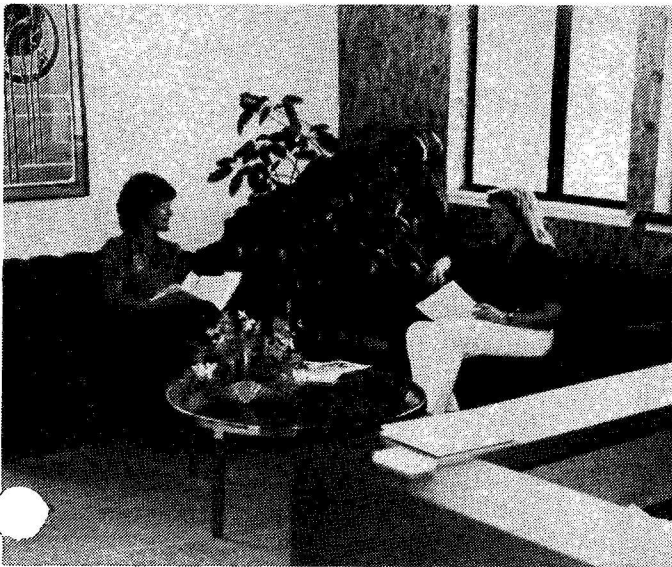
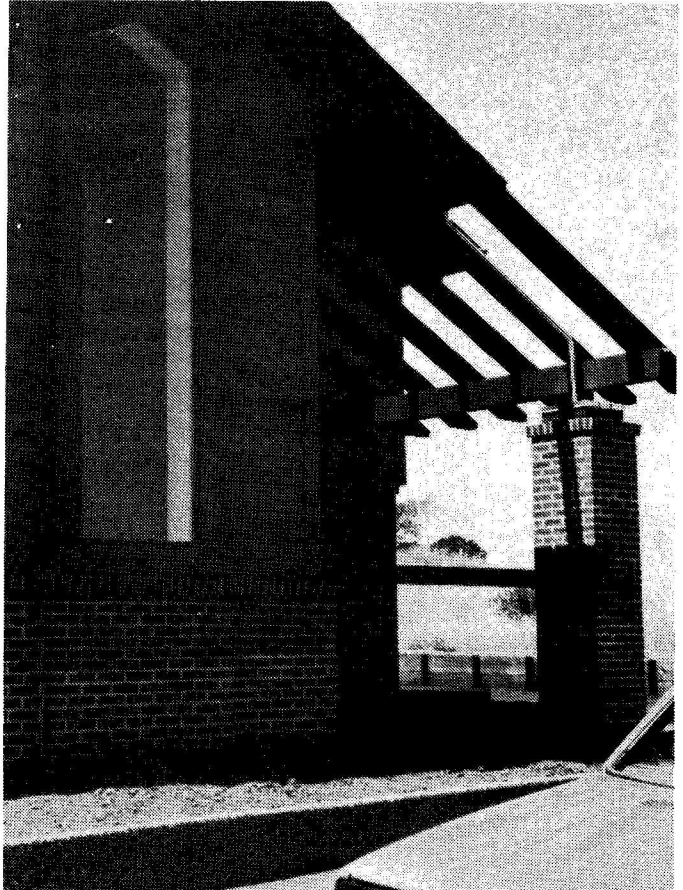
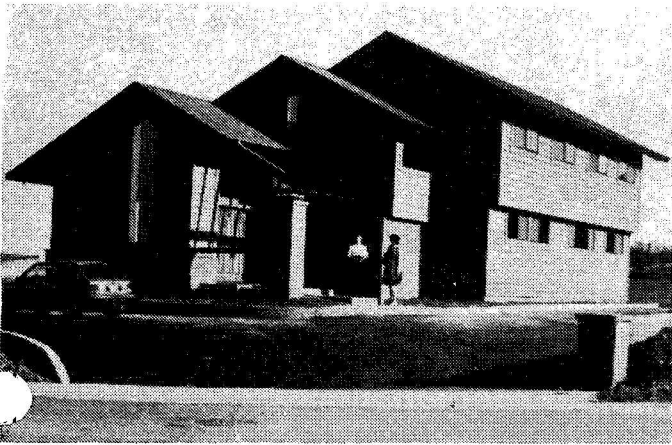
The Tape of the Month is posted to all who donate \$25 or more during the month (or the equivalent earlier), members of the Tape of the Month Club (\$42 yearly subscription), or those specifically requesting it with a donation of \$3.50.

Donations

Good News is a non-profit, non-denominational organization. We have many very diverse ministries — radio, cassette, publications, public seminars, etc. We are solely dependent on donors to maintain this program. Our sincere thanks go to the many persons who faithfully give to support us. This month we have again received anonymous donations — one for \$110, the other \$30 and sincerely thank those who have made these gifts.

The New GNU Office

On June 9 the 3,000 square foot office of Good News Unlimited was opened. Many friends and business people visited and helped celebrate its completion. Again, we praise God who has graciously provided for our needs.



Happily Retired

Sirs:

Thank you for the monthly tape, it is much appreciated. Also the literature. I am so happy that the cheque is \$30 improvement on last month's. I certainly live by faith as far as money for GNU and Asian Fund goes; it keeps me very happy and busy. One of my girl friends of before the twenties asked me to join the Senior Citizens get together. I replied that I hadn't the time. She said, "Nonsense. You are retired." I said, "I have not retired, but retired for 100 miles!" She thinks I am over the hill — perhaps I am, but I am very happy, and it keeps me out of mischief.

I trust this scribbled note finds you all full of courage. God bless, guide and strengthen each one.

Ruth Bird
Cooranbong, NSW.

Wasting Time in Judgment

Sirs:

I am sending two names I would like you to send your monthly paper to. I am sure they would enjoy it as I have.

I heard Dr. Ford when he spoke in Riverside, California. It was like a breath of fresh air. I have really been blessed by all of your ministry. I want to share with others. I am so blessed by the Tape of the Month. Thank you Calvin Edwards for the nice letter you wrote.

I have had eye surgery and it is a little difficult to write, but I want you to know you are in my daily prayers and I want to help support this ministry.

Do keep up the good work. The sharing of God's work with others is so wonderful. So much time is wasted in judging others because they don't see eye-to-eye with tradition — when what we need to do is to

love one another. Our very lives should speak the love of Jesus.

Thank you so much for all your inspiring messages. God bless you all and keep you safe in the circle of his love and care.

Minona S. Weaver
Long Beach, California

Totally Dependent

Sirs:

Thank you very much for your ministry. Over the past year and a half I have been blessed and received great mental stimulation from the ministry of people such as Walter Rea, Robert Brinsmead, Geoffrey Paxton and a friend of mine who ministers in Perth, W.A., whose name is John Polglase. Many of my friends tell me I think too deeply and philosophically about things. Conversely, I find much of their thinking and conversation is too shallow and simplistic and therefore I greatly appreciate some of the articles I have read in your magazine which probe deeply into life and what the gospel really means to us humans. I try to keep my mind as open as possible and try to make life as enjoyable and as much fun as I can for myself and those around me, while thinking about the age-old question, "What is the meaning of life?"

I think immense meaning in life can be found in the gospel, in knowing how God loves us and in knowing God as a friend, but I honestly think that a clear understanding of the meaning of life will always elude mortal men. It seems to me to be quite foolish to suppose that we can contribute to our own salvation unto eternal life when we don't even understand what this life means. In this way we are hopelessly lost, for how can a person find their own way when they don't even understand where they are going, let alone how to get there! Such thinking just

confirms my belief that we are totally dependent on God for our eternal life.

Peter J. Shackleton,
Allanson, W.A.

Sharing Testimonies

Sirs:

I would like to comment on the letter "Joy Unspeakable" by Mary Jean Murray — what a praise-filled, inspiring testimony. She expressed what I feel is in the hearts of many of GNU supporters and I was overcome with tears of joy welling up within me as my husband read the letter out loud during breakfast.

I want to thank her for her expression and it gives me such joy to know that we have this hope in Christ — what a wedding banquet it will be when we all sit and sup with him in glory. And what a tremendous fellowship to meet with all the redeemed through the ages to converse with and praise our God almighty in never-ending adoration of his wonderful works through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Yet none of these will be esteemed as above the other. No, they will only acknowledge that what they have wrought in the body of flesh was accomplished only by a faith which left its successes in the hands of the Lord.

It is truly too much to comprehend and even more difficult to find the language to express this joy unspeakable. But I found in this letter the beauty of a truly converted, born again heart. I believe it is wise to share testimonies such as these with others since they are in themselves a source of witness to those that hear them.

God bless you Mary. I look forward to meeting you on that great and wonderful day.

Sylvia Berketa
Fraser, A.C.T.

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