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Editorial

Dear Reader,

As the months pass, the time to sow and grow has once again become the time to harvest. In His Word, our Savior explains that good land bears fruit: some hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matthew 13:8). In other cases, the seeds fall on stony soil, into thorns, or onto the wayside. Unfortunately, these seeds cannot bear fruit; the same is true of those who reject God's Word.

Farmers sow their fields and hope for a good harvest; but this hope calls for patience because a long time can pass between sowing and harvest.

I once knew a sister who has been in eternity now for many years. She came from a refugee family that held house meetings in West Germany. The collapse in 1945 left refugees and even locals shaken, and for a short time, many came to hear the Word. This sister believed and hoped that people would seek God and be saved. As Abraham once had, she prayed for fifty souls and did what she could, inviting people and distributing literature. But when her family emigrated after eight years, where were the fifty? Only one woman from the village had even accepted a copy of her literature—which she later subscribed to herself.

However, several years later, a young man from this village came to visit the sister and her family. The first time she saw him, the Lord spoke to her through His Holy Spirit, saying, "That is one of the fifty souls!" She began praying for him daily. This man was later saved and became a worker in the vineyard of the Lord!

Dear Reader, do not be discouraged if you do not see fruit right away. Do what you can and work for your Savior. Sow good seeds, and you will enjoy a boundless harvest one day.

H. D. Nimz



Sowing Words

Many years ago in America, a young criminal sentenced to death sat in prison. His execution was to take place in the next few days. As usual, the condemned man was asked if he had any special wish before his death.

“Yes,” he said, “I still have one wish, and I kindly ask you to fulfill it. I would like to speak with Mr. R. R. in this city.”

They gladly notified the precisely designated man, who was most astonished at this strange request. He could not refuse the wish of a man condemned to death at the last hour, so he immediately set out. He was led to the cell of the condemned man, where the convict calmly and composedly confronted the visitor with this story:

“You will certainly no longer know me, but I know you very well and have never forgotten you. You laid the foundation of criminality in my life. In the next few days, I must die, and I am not excusing my crimes in any way. But before I die, I need to tell you that indirectly, you bear part of the blame for my misery.

“You often ate in a hotel where I was employed as a waiter’s trainee. You sat with your friends in the eve-

nings, drinking beer and playing cards, and I heard a lot of the things you so lightly talked about. The mocking, evil words of your conversations penetrated like poison into my then-still-unspoiled mind and were the evil seed that continued to grow in my heart, making me sink deeper step by step, until I became a common criminal and murderer. I deserve my death, but you and your friends have brought upon yourselves a heavy responsibility.”

So much for this story. What can we learn from it, dear Reader? Has our conscience been awakened in some way? If we examine ourselves closely before God, don’t some of us feel spoken to? How often have we perhaps said words that hurt our children or whoever heard it? Let us stop and become still before God and consider the words of a poet: ■

Lord, in every word and action,
Let your Spirit speak to me:
Did Jesus speak as such?
Did Jesus do such deeds?

F. M.

Lord, Guard My Lips

My phone rang. It was a dear acquaintance of mine, someone I know to be a sincere Christian. “I have something to confess to you.”

“Yes, what is it?” I asked.

Then he answered, “I said an unkind word about you yesterday in a circle of friends. I don’t have any peace now. I just have to tell you what happened.”

Deeply moved, I put the phone down. The question arose in my heart, “Do I also weigh my words so conscientiously?”

I could now imagine that one or another reader would angrily say, “Oh, that’s petty. I can’t constantly weigh my words on a scale.” Well, I know that if we don’t want to place our words “on the scale,” then Someone else does: the living God.

The Lord Jesus clearly declares, “But I say to you, that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). This is a scary thought. The writer of Psalm 139 knows this terror when he says, “For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether” (v.4).

Jakob Gerhard Engels, a man who lived in the nineteenth century, showed many people the way to eternal life. After his death, a collection of thoughts was found in his desk. He had chosen these statements as life principles, among which were found these two of

particular interest to us today: “I will not say anything that elevates me, nor anything that demeans another, unless it’s absolutely necessary.” And the second one: “I will be gracious toward everyone, so that I need not be ashamed when we meet in eternity.” These are the words of a man who was right with God. In contrast, most people utter their words so carelessly.

Someone approached a sincere Christian to share defamatory rumors about a third person. The Christian gave him a solemn look and said sternly, “You are a thief!”

The latter flared up, “How dare you! Me, a thief?”

“Yes,” replied the Christian, “and you are a very dangerous thief. You steal your neighbor’s reputation. And that is more valuable than money and possessions.”

Yes, that’s really how it is. We consider a thief to be a despicable person. But isn’t the worst thief the one who steals someone’s good reputation? A good name is irreplaceable. You are defenseless against such theft. You cannot get insurance for it.

Let us pray with the writer of the Old Testament, “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3) that they speak no evil. Help me, that the “words of my mouth [may] be acceptable in Your sight” (Psalm 19:14). ■

W. B.

*Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.
Proverbs 16:24*

*She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue is the law of kindness.
Proverbs 31:26*

Chosen To Bear Fruit

If your relationship with the Lord Jesus is genuine and intact, you will discover He is the true Vine. From Him you may draw, take, and drink. Then you will experience the riches in Jesus Christ that can never be depleted. “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him” (Colossians 2:9-10a).

We possess unimagined wealth. In Jesus, the Vine, we are the grapes. In general, grapevines are rather useless. In the same manner, we are worthless without the bond to our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. The vine should have only one goal: to bear fruit.

The branch draws the sap from the vine, and what is not required for its own growth is left to help produce the fruit. Fruit is a concentrated juice: the value and essence of the vine. Since the vine’s nature is to use everything to climb and grow and spread its natural shoots, the vinedresser intervenes.

God, our Father and Vinedresser, does the same with us, the branches. He ruthlessly severs whatever does not contribute to bearing fruit. He often uses your fellow man to do this for you. It may be another Christian, or perhaps worldly people, whom He uses as a pruning knife. The pruning tool may also be a member of your own family. It may be at work or in the community of God’s

children. But always keep this one thing in mind: the knife can do nothing at all to harm your inner life. The pruning tool is guided by the hand of the Father with just one goal in mind:

Fruit

Please read John 15, especially the first sixteen verses, and immerse yourself in this Word. You wish to bear fruit. It is your goal and desire to glorify your Savior and Redeemer by bearing fruit. You desire to live for His praise and glory.

More Fruit

Yes, you desire to bear fruit. Every branch that bears fruit, including you and me, God will prune so it bears more fruit. This purification process has caused the flow of many a tear in you and also in me. According to an expert, the natural vine also “weeps” when it is pruned by the vinedresser very early in spring. One “tear” after another falls to the ground.

You have often, yes, very often, been unable to cope with your fellow human beings. You feel they are to blame for what is happening to you. But know this: the Gardener has placed these people in your life so you should bear more fruit. You may often think the hand of the Father, the Vinedresser, is merciless and severe. He has no compassion. On the one hand, you may be right. He does not want to

coddle you. It is not the shoots that glorify the Lord but the fruit itself. He wants to enjoy this fruit and receive His praise.

Much Fruit

The Lord is seeking much fruit in you. This is what we read in John 15:5 and verse eight. Bringing forth fruit depends on whether you abide in Him, the true Vine, whether you rest in Him and His glorious, completed work of redemption. The Father is glorified when you bear much fruit. You should be an eager student. You can assimilate the love of the Father and radiate it in honor and praise to Him.

When you continually draw from His love anew, your joy will constantly grow. The abundance of the fruit will be more and more to the glory of His wonderful name and to the glory of Christ. You will no longer desire to walk in your own strength. You will only want to live as His servant and slave, as His bondservant. In this manner, the Lord Jesus will always reveal anew how much He loves you and how He wants to give you great and greater things. He will make you a vessel to share His love with the world as you confess Him as your Savior, in season and out of season.

Lasting Fruit

In John 15:16, we read of this lasting fruit. This is what the Lord has chosen, ordained, and appointed

us for. We want to detach ourselves from everything, from absolutely everything that hinders us from bearing lasting fruit. Let us also not confuse our own actions and good works with divine fruit.

There are many people who are very zealous in their apparent

service for the Lord Jesus, and yet they lack life in Christ. They must not confuse their own zeal and will with the work of God.

How precious are the words of John 15:11, where the Lord says, “These things have I spoken to you, that My joy may remain in

you, and that your joy may be full.”

Allow me to emphasize again: fruit, more fruit, much fruit, and lasting fruit. This is our calling. Yes, we are chosen to live and bear fruit for the glory and honor of God and in praise of our exalted Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! ■

The World Needs You

“The world needs you, and there is a place that only you can occupy.”

After spending long, tedious weeks in her room, a sick woman received the aforementioned message. Again she read the letter from her faithful friend, her eyes remaining fixed on that particular sentence. At first she thought it must be a mistake, or at least an exaggeration. But no, she knew her friend always meant what she said.

“The world needs you.” How could it be possible that the world needed her, she who had spent so many years in a disabled state? She who, despite her great desire to work for God and man, was so hindered by her illness that she almost wished to be freed from her condition through death? How could it be possible that she, who

felt her incapacities keenly, should fill a place that no one else could fill for her? Over and over again, she repeated these words in her mind. Then God made something clear to her. This message gave her hope, and she felt that some special duties and responsibilities did indeed rest on her.

This message was not only for the dear sister, but also for you and me. “The world needs you.” Whatever your circumstances, or wherever you may be, you have a task no one else but you can fulfill. This world so fallen into darkness and misery, suffering in body and soul, so corrupted by sin, needs you. God has given you gifts and abilities to use for blessing your fellow man. What a responsibility this places on

all of us! Are you taking your place, or have you abdicated your calling?

From a dark, lonely corner, a voice seems to say, “But I can’t do anything. There is no place for me.” Oh, no, you are mistaken. You have at least one gift, and God expects you to use it. The world needs you. You have tasks to perform that no one else can do. Maybe it’s just a friendly smile, which often means a lot, yet God expects it from you. Maybe it is just a kind word. In your circumstances it may be hard, but someone needs it. No one else can fulfill this for you.

Let us not look at others and long for the abilities God has given them. Let us make use of what God has given us by faithfully and patiently doing what we can. ■

What Will Be the Yield of My Life?

*We stand in harvest time
And praise Your gifts.
In life and eternity,
You store for us
What we have sown.*

As the Seed, so the Harvest

When we speak of harvesting, we mean the result of a work, perhaps of a laborious effort, consciously made towards this day. The harvest ultimately shows us how our efforts have paid off. It lets us know whether we have wisely considered all the things that make a good harvest possible. It is obvious to everyone that we cannot first wait until the day of harvest to consider the best way to obtain the greatest yield.

Our whole life is a time of sowing, not by chance but according to God's wise plan, according to the order of life set by Him. At the same time, it is always harvest time, although the last great harvest day is yet to come, of which Paul writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to

what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Sowing and reaping will always correspond to each other. There can be no error at all in this matter. Whoever sows carrot seeds in his garden in the spring will certainly not expect a spinach harvest in the fall.

The law of the harvest is also true in our personal lives. Don't we also have to consider this when sowing our words, deeds, and behaviors in our daily lives? Paul is correct when he warns believers, not unbelievers, against deception. He warns, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Whoever lives frivolously as a believer not thinking about the seeds sown in life, despises God. He must painfully experience the consequence of divine sowing and reaping.

The Eternal Day of Harvest Has Not Yet Arrived

But is it always true that the harvest corresponds to the seed? Certainly, we could give many examples of how the seed of the spirit of strife finally brought the harvest of lasting discord, how selfishness caused love



to die, how evil gossip destroyed once blessed community.

But in the case of Jesus Christ, isn't precisely the opposite experience true? How many good seeds of love, mercy, and selfless devotion did He sow? At the end of His earthly life of good sowing, the cross was the harvest. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews makes an important point: "[He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus knew that the great, glorious day of harvest was still ahead of Him and would certainly come, despite the cross, indeed precisely because of it. Because He was willing to give His life, even as a grain of wheat unto death, He was able to bear so much fruit.

The Yield Depends on the Soil

Crucial for a good harvest, however, is not only the seed, but also the field into which it is sown. Paul in his letter to the Galatian Christians writes, "[H]e who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life"

(Galatians 6:8). We must choose between two options available to us at every moment of our lives.

He who sows has a right to think about the harvest. Prudence simply dictates so. Therefore Paul gives thought to the one who sows mindlessly to the flesh, whose harvest will inevitably mean ruin. He certainly does not only mean eternal perdition, but the life of faith that is already perishing, falling into decay. Such signs were already visible in the Galatian churches.

It would be advisable for us to consider and examine such relationships as well. The Spirit wishes to convict, restore, and revive. Whoever sows in the Spirit will experience God's power in life. These seeds become effective in healing and correction, in illuminating and witnessing powerfully where we are placed.

Let us also be thankful for the assistance of the Holy Spirit Who guides and leads us to good, rich sowing according to the example of our Lord Jesus. Here and there, this may also include "sowing with tears," but God's promise speaks of reaping "in joy" (Ps 126:5-6). ■

G. B.



Rejoicing Before God

“You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil” (Isaiah 9:3).

The prophet Isaiah looks forward to the New-Testament time of salvation and says, “They rejoice before You.” We too can say, “We rejoice before You!” The joy this salvation brings is present. We have witnessed it and experienced it. With Jesus’ coming, many promises of the prophets have been fulfilled. The day of joy, salvation, and redemption has dawned.

Rejoicing before God is compared to joy at the harvest. Harvest time is also pay day! Who does not rejoice in receiving wages for his work? When we think of a harvest, we involuntarily think of a farmer. In our imagination, we see a field where industrious hands are busy bringing in the grain. When city dwellers can observe harvest time in the countryside, it can be a great experience for them. The psalmist David also describes harvest time as a joyful time: “The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered with grain; they shout for joy, they also sing” (Psalm 65:13).

All the effort and work have paid off. God has poured out His blessing so that human diligence and God’s favor have brought success. Blinded to God’s goodness, many people forget to thank Him, and therefore never experience perfect joy during harvest time. Remember the Israelites who went to the house of the Lord with their first fruits and offered their sacrifices with grateful hearts. The psalm singer knew about this privilege: “For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise” (Psalm 42:4).

How pitiful is the man who looks proudly at his work without giving glory to God. Not so the God-fearing man, for he looks up to the Giver of all good gifts and says, “You crown the year with Your goodness” (Psalm 65:11a). His heart is full of praise and thanksgiving, and his mouth worships the Lord.

God’s blessing is the source of success and progress. Therefore, as grateful reapers, we should agree with

the hymnist Martin Rinkart: “Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices, who wondrous things has done, in whom His world rejoices.” Harvest time is a time of joy. The barns and storerooms are filled, and every lack ceases.

The prophet Isaiah compares rejoicing before God to the joy of harvest: “They rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest” (9:3). David says in the sixteenth Psalm, “In Your presence is fullness of joy.” What a wonderful salvation the Lord Jesus brought! Zachaeus was overjoyed when Jesus entered his house. The Gadarene Jesus freed from demons wanted to go with Him out of gratitude, but Jesus said, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (Mark 5:19). This man went forth and told others about the joy that came to him through Jesus.

Yes, Jesus brings joy, Jesus brings salvation. An encounter with the Master is a great event for every person. Jesus says, “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). If heaven rejoices, shouldn’t we rejoice? However, it should also be an incentive to win souls for the Lord. Spiritually speaking, it is still harvest day, so let us work before the sun sets and night falls, when no one can work anymore.

Jesus came to make our joy complete (John 15:11). God’s people are happy people because God is with them. In the Old Covenant, people looked to visible earthly blessings. In the New Testament, earthly goods pale in comparison to spiritual blessings. By contrast, the glory of salvation should be the largest portion of our praise. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Christ is our joy and strength. Mary chose the good part (Luke 10:42). Brother and sister, dear

friends, what matters is to rejoice in God. Whoever does not rejoice in God will truly not be able to rejoice in anything.

Complete joy also comes from serving the Lord. Jesus Himself served, for He went as a sower on Earth. Peter says He “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). He did not pay attention to the wind or other opposition. Some fell by the wayside, on the stony places, and among the thorns but undaunted He sowed on. However, we know that some also fell on good soil. He was sowing in faith, looking up to God, and self-sacrificing without slackening. “God was with Him,” Peter testified of his Master.

The result of this faithful service is our salvation. We have not earned it, and yet we may reap from His

bounty and draw grace upon grace. His love has made our lives rich. “They rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest.”

Jesus has given us an example to emulate. We should sow in faith and spread the joy and good news, telling others who have not yet experienced God. Do not pay heed to opposition but remember, “those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5-6).

Life with God brings joy; service to the Master makes us rich. What we do for the Master in weakness will be shown glorious one day. On the great harvest day, the joy of God’s children will be inexpressible. ■

Fritz Lenk

Thankfulness

For which things in your life do you thank the Lord? What has He done for you? Has He forgiven your sins? Has He clothed you with a robe of righteousness? Has He placed you on a firm foundation? Has He prepared a home for you in heaven? Has He written your name in the Book of Life? Has He reserved for you treasures of grace that no eye has seen and no ear has heard? Then do something for the Lord that is worthy of His love.

Do not just offer your Savior the empty praise of your lips. How will you feel when the Master returns and you have done nothing for Him but have kept your love behind a barrier that lets it pool like water behind a dam, not allowing it to flow to God’s children nor to water the arid land? What kind of love is that? What do people think of love that does not have works, that is not demonstrable by action? Have you ever heard of love that is so feeble and weak that it

never leads to a single act of denial or display of generosity, of heroism, or of excitement? Think of how much God loves you, so much that He gave Himself for you!

Do you know the power of such love? Then let it become a mighty wind that sweeps away the waves of worldly desire and the dust of sin. “For the sake of Christ!” Let that be your heavenly inspiration that makes you as bold as a lion and as sure as an eagle in your service for the Lord. Love should give wings to feet in God’s service and strength to the hands and arms active for Him. Let us be focused on God with a consistency that cannot be disrupted, determined to honor Him and act with resolve that cannot be turned aside by anything. Let us go forward with zeal that never fades and demonstrates with power our love for Jesus Christ. ■

Spurgeon

Thank God In Deed

At Thanksgiving, many Christian congregations sing the song, “Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices.” Many years ago, people sang this song, and we also sing it today with reverence that the Lord has done so much good for us. His goodness rises above us every morning just as the sun did. Over and over again, we experience that we have a gracious Father, a Father in heaven, Who loves us and wants to bless us. He shows every person patience and perseverance, even those who do not honor or love Him. He lets His sun rise on the wicked and the good and lets rain fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. He provides a harvest every year so people have their daily bread. He does all of this so sinners will recognize Him, the Heavenly Father, and will also accept Him. In Romans 2:4, we read, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” God wants to offer redemption to those who are willing to accept His grace and have their sins forgiven. That is why He meets them with His grace.

Even though we should be grateful every day, Thanksgiving Day should be a day filled with even more gratitude. We should be thankful with our whole heart. The heart is the basis of our life. That’s where the heavy battles are fought either for or against God. That’s where the person makes the decision to stand on God’s side or to oppose Him. That’s where the seat of decision is that gives direction to life. When someone makes decisions with their heart, the responsibility for such action occurs simultaneously.

People often hide their true being with deceit. However, God knows what is happening in the heart. No one can hide that from Him, which is why we should thank God with our whole heart, for only that kind of thanks has true value.

We also sing of giving God thanks with our voices. That, too, is important. The Lord Jesus said, “For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). If we have thanksgiving in our hearts towards

God, it will be evident through our mouths. Is there someone who can keep quiet when he is happy and full of thanks? Will there not be songs of thanks with praise and worship to the glory of God?

It is the sentiment of the heart that breaks through in such a way to praise God. The person whose heart is in rhythm with God’s, will express his thanksgiving in words and will testify with his mouth of God’s goodness towards men. This testimony is clear and certain: “For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Psalm 71:8); “I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yes, I will praise Him among the multitude” (Psalm 109:30).

We also sing of thanking with our hands. That is a special way of showing thanks. If we think about it, we can see a connection between praising and giving. Our thankfulness towards God should also be seen in giving. This form of thanks, however, is the least well known. Many don’t like to hear sermons about giving, yet it belongs to the gospel Jesus shared.

Jesus laid great emphasis on giving. Among other things, He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (see Acts 20:35). He points to an experience many are unaware of. When people praise God with their hearts and thank with their mouths, their hands will also express thankfulness. Some don’t give out of abundance but give sacrificially. As the Bible says, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Even our salvation is based on giving: God gave us His only begotten Son. The Son gave His life for our sins so we may be saved from this present evil world. Without such giving, there would be no grace. That should move us to thanksgiving and cause us to devote ourselves to God entirely through our love and thanksgiving. Thanking with our hands also belongs to that. Only then can the song truly be sung: “Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices.” ■

G. Sonnenberg

As God Has Prospered Him

“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper” (1 Corinthians 16:2), or “as God hath prospered him” (KJ21).

Paul proposed a systematic method to the church at Corinth by which they could collect the money to be sent to Jerusalem. We know that the first believers gathered on the first day of the week. I can well imagine how they gathered every Sunday and gave their offering on that occasion.

By all appearances, Paul considered the lawful application of good business practices in the financial affairs of the churches. If a farmer rents a cornfield, he cannot pay the owner his rent according to how he feels or thinks. He must pay the portion previously agreed upon, regardless of the size of his crop. He cannot say, “My family is large, so here are two sacks of grain from my yield.” Would the owner accept such excuses?

Yet, how many people say in terms of offering, “Here is my income for this week. I will buy what I need, and if there is anything left over, God can have some.” Giving is one of the demands God makes of us, and we are to be honest and systematic about it.

Some people think offering is not necessary at all. They may be honest, but they do not see it as a command from God. However, we keep receiving from God, so shouldn't we share with Him? If we don't, we will soon become like the grumbling Israelites. They became dissatisfied with their menu and demanded meat. “And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul” (Psalm 106:15). Many souls become lean as soon as their wallets begin bulging.

Many do not give a specific amount. They hear of a need or see the offering plate coming. Then they reach into their pockets and pull out a bill or a few coins. Some are self-seeking, unconcerned, or even ignorant in regard to better methods of giving. Then there are brothers and sisters who carry the burden fully, who give not only their fair share but even much more.

Is everyone in your congregation doing their part? What part did you contribute to the offering last Sun-

day? Who will receive the blessing? “The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself” (Proverbs 11:25).

Some say they are too poor and therefore cannot give anything. And yet, the poor should share in the offering. God holds them just as responsible as the wealthy. However, the rich usually seem the hardest to reach with the gospel of giving. Too many search for salvation of their souls, but it has no influence on their bank accounts.

I talked to a sister who was richly blessed with material goods. She had many good virtues, but something was missing. She told me she did not think she had to give anything for God's work. I have found most givers among the “middle class.” I don't mean to accuse anyone of this. Some still have no revelation about it, but the Bible teaches to give an offering, and the sincere soul will accept this.

I knew a man who, year in and year out, gave from time to time. When he understood the biblical principles about systematic giving as an act of worship, he began to set aside a certain amount for God every week. He has now been giving in this way for years and confirmed that giving a certain amount of his income now satisfies him more. The Bible states, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). If I omit giving an offering, then I am disobeying part of the commands in the Bible.

There will come a day not too far off when we will all come before God's presence. Only our “treasures in heaven” will be found in the heavenly bank. This earth, all our earthly possessions, and everything left behind will pass away. Some are striving to be rich on that coming day. Are you one of them? Some will never step into the eternal city because a wall of gold is blocking their way—the resources they have taken away from the Lord's service.

Our finances come from God, should we refuse to share with Him? ■

It All Depends On Trust

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have abundance for every good work. As it is written: ‘He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.’ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:6-10).

We Owe God Our Thanks

We are a great gathering of debtors on Thanksgiving Day. We owe our thanks to God the Almighty and the Merciful for the gift of a harvest. The fact that the earth produced daily bread for us is a miracle of the divine Omnipotent. God makes no distinction between unbelievers and believers, which truly demonstrates the miracle of His love and patience.

Our text engraves some important points onto our hearts and burns them into our conscience. We would do well to be attentive while reading and to accept and cherish this message.

The message from 2 Corinthians 9 is key for the Christian life. It seeks to clarify that sowing and harvesting cannot occur without trust. Only people who trust God can see His miracles.

You See It In The Fields

We are told that everything comes from God. As it says in verse ten, God “supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food.” Sowing and reaping are in God’s almighty hand. We can do nothing on our own. When God withholds His blessing, our machines run dry. Therefore, the first thing we should gratefully testify is that God, in His love and fatherly care, has again given bread for food, having previously given seed to the sower. Man alone cannot do this.

But at harvest time, do we really still marvel at the miracle of this divine omnipotence and love? Do we still marvel at the fact that a little has become a lot because of a process that seems so simple and natural?

Certainly, we have every reason to give heartfelt thanks to our farmers on this day for their diligent work whose yield benefits the whole nation. Yet, above all, we must bear clear witness to God’s power and love on this day: “All good gifts and all we have, O God, come from You.” At the same time, we should praise and extol God for His gifts: “Thank You, God!”

No Sowing and Reaping Without Trust

As it was thousands of years ago, it still remains today: man entrusts something to the earth and hopes that it will be multiplied in return. We do not even attempt to mechanically produce the grain which is needed to feed the people; we still do it the ancient way. Our trust is expressed, which has grown rock-solid through experience over thousands of years.

Try It With Money, Too

Now Paul reminds us: You experience how abundantly God blesses the confidence you practice in sowing. That should strengthen you even more when an offering is gladly made out of love for Him and for others. This is about sharing, giving to others. What is true in planting is also true in the area of finances.

Paul offers an explanation. You do not bring all the grain to the mill, but you put aside a part of it and offer it into the ground at seeding time. You do it in order to have a harvest again the next year. You must do the same with the proceeds of your harvest, with your money. If you are wise, you must not use it all, and certainly not just for yourselves. You must sacrificially



give some of it; otherwise, you will have no harvest in eternity.

Whoever uses up all his harvested grain has no seed at sowing time and no harvest in summer. He who uses all his earned money entirely for himself, no matter how much labor, will stand with empty hands in eternity. He will be damned and lost. Paul's illustration of sowing and reaping can in this way, apply to money as well.

In regards to money, we must apply what we have previously learned in the field of sowing: to let go at the right time in order to reap at harvest time. Money is like seed. He who has no charity, no heart for the poor, is harming himself. He is cutting himself off from eternal life.

Lack of Experience

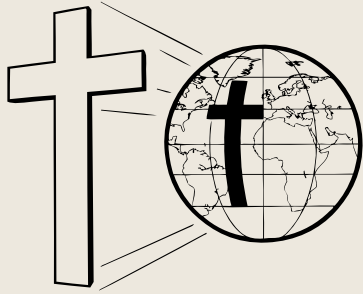
Sometimes we are extremely cautious about money; we are so afraid of loss. Surely we know that offered

seed will certainly come back one day with interest and even compound interest, but we are not so sure about money generously given as a gift. We fear it could be lost.

Where does this mistrust come from? We lack experience. We often give out of compulsion, not cheerfully, as described in our text. We give because we do not want to look bad before others, but we secretly take a wistful look after every offering. In doing this, we prevent God from blessing us, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Eliminate all skepticism of our bountiful God, Whose joy it is to bless us with abundance. No man ever became poorer by giving generously. Perhaps he did not become as rich in earthly goods but certainly in eternal and spiritual goods: faith, love, hope, joy, godliness. John testifies, "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). ■

G. Buntrock



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, ON

Four More Months Until The Harvest?

“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest?’” John 4:35

In the natural world we can calculate when the harvest will come. But sowing in our lives is different. We often already harvest in this time. What is certain, however, is that there will be a harvest at the end of our lives. Can you look forward to your harvest?

The disciples had openly discussed this. Most of us understand this as well. If sowing begins in March and harvest follows in July, that is four months. The Lord Jesus was also familiar with this, but He obviously wanted to direct His disciples to another harvest—one that is important for the kingdom of God.

The narrative in John 4 tells us about Jesus with His disciples in Samaria. At that time, the Samaritans were clearly more open and receptive to the Word of God than the Judeans. Close to the town of Sychar, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman, who had come to fetch water at a well. The pastoral conversation He had with her awakened her, and through her, there was a great revival in Sychar. People flocked out of the city to see Jesus and hear His message. This gave Him the opportunity to work directly in the city. The divine message gripped their hearts, and many came to believe, saying, “For we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). This was the reward of sowing, from which followed a harvest for the Kingdom

of God. In this case, it came not after four months but immediately.

Jesus directed His disciples to a field that was imminently ripe for harvest. However, this harvest first required sowing, the clear preaching of the Word of God. The disciples were called to this work, and in view of the harvest, Jesus wanted to awaken courage, hope, and joy in them. In this sense, the field is white for harvest today as well. The Lord expects clear sowing of the Word of God, because only from this can there be a Spirit-led harvest.

We also want to examine the harvest resulting in our daily bread. We depend on it for our daily nourishment and our external well-being. The Lord has graciously given it to us. We can only bring in what has grown and ripened in the fields. We should also think of the diligence and hard work of the farmers. Often, many have suffered great losses. In spite of their hard work, it cannot be easy when they lose the crops they had hoped for. Therefore, we should be grateful that there are still people who have the courage to continue their difficult farm work despite crop failures and losses.



Each harvest depends on the diligence and commitment of the farmer. From the very beginning of the world, God intended man to prepare the field and plant the seed. Much has been learned, and great progress has been made in the area of agriculture, but as far as having a fruitful harvest, the farmer always remains dependent on God. The Lord, in His gracious benevolence, has promised the annual harvest as long as the earth stands (see Genesis 8:22). Precisely for this reason we may hope for a new harvest every year, and the farmer sows his seed in hopes that after a certain time the harvest will come as a blessing from God.

We should also ponder the harvest of our lives, reminding ourselves that our words and deeds are also a type of sowing. In this sense, we are all sowing seeds, just as Paul reminds us: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). When will this harvest happen? Will it happen after four months? It may take far longer, but it may also be alarmingly soon.

Referring to this harvest, someone said, “Just go and sow; you’ll surely reap over time.” This is the har-

vest of life. It follows a time of sowing. If someone has sown weeds, he cannot expect to harvest wheat. If someone has sown sorrow, mockery, and injustice, he cannot expect joy, inner peace, and blessings as a harvest. Nature has already taught us this.

With this in mind, Jesus once confronted His listeners with the question, “Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16). In Luke 6:45, we read, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” It is certain that a harvest will follow from both.

God’s Word reminds us, “The harvest is coming!” It does not always come after four months, but it comes with time. Some wait for it with joy, others with sorrow and fear. Some may not really realize what they have sown until their harvest. The righteous must often sow with tears, but they will reap with joy. It is far worse to reap with tears. Let us keep this in mind and pay attention to what we sow in our lives. ■

Remembering to Give Thanks

We live in an affluent time, far different than what our grandparents experienced when they were our age. I remember often hearing stories from my grandparents and great-grandparents about the trials and hardships they went through. They would share stories of fleeing war-torn countries with nothing but a small bag and their wedding ring; or how they moved their whole family across the ocean to a new land in search of a better future.

As a child, these stories were fascinating. They were so far removed from my reality, it was hard to imagine what that would have felt like. In my early twenties I read my grandma's life story and I marveled at her strength as I read what she went through at my age.

Many of us today have it so good. Our basic needs are always met; we have shelter, food, water, clothing and are blessed with loving families, who provide for our emotional needs. As children of God, we can access Him daily through prayer and His Word. We also have the opportunity to receive spiritual blessings as we gather for worship services. In all this abundance, it is easy to forget where our blessings come from. It is possible that we forget to thank the One Who provides for us so well.

Gratitude, or thankfulness, is a beautiful virtue. We all like to be around people who are thankful. People who show their appreciation for others, and people who are content with their life and the things they have. On the other hand, we do not enjoy being with people who are ungrateful. The people of Israel wearied Moses with their constant murmurings, grumbings and complaints, instead of praising God for His faithfulness and goodness to them. My young children

need to be reminded daily to be thankful. It warms my heart when they remember to say thank you, or when they unexpectedly express their gratitude for something I have done for them. It is upsetting to hear them complain and grumble, especially when I know how well they are cared for. How much more does it hurt our Heavenly Father when we are ungrateful!

“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God” (Luke 17:15).

It can be tempting to become discontented with our life and circumstances. We are surrounded by media that reminds us of

all the things we don't have. It's tempting to focus on the daily trials and challenges we go through, instead of focusing on God and how He can bring us through these trials. Our emotions, and the way we feel about life, have so much to do with how we think. If we think positive and thankful thoughts, we will feel more positive and thankful too. This is sometimes easier said than done.

I recall one valley in particular, where it felt very difficult to thank God. Every small thing that went wrong in a typical day felt bigger than it was. But when I consciously stopped my spiraling thoughts and started counting the blessings I could be thankful for, it made an enormous difference. I encourage you to make it a habit to count your blessings daily and thank God for them. You will be amazed at the goodness of God.

We know the story of the ten lepers whom Jesus cleansed. All of them went their way rejoicing, yet only one returned to thank Jesus. Jesus was not pleased by their lack of gratitude. He said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this



foreigner?’ And [Jesus] said to him, ‘Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well’” (Luke 17:17-19).

Let us not forget to thank our Lord for His blessings. Let us make it a habit to count these blessings, not just on the good days when life is going well, but especially on the challenging days, when we need to be

reminded that there is always something to be thankful for. Remembering to give thanks will enrich our own life, and the lives of those around us and will give God the glory. ■

*Karina Knelsen
Seminole, TX*

From the Working World (2)

“*A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps*”
(Proverbs 16:9).

The decision to pursue further education had been made, and I began to make plans. My plan was to start the full-time course in the fall of 2018. Since the course was not being offered in our area, I began to look around a bit. The best offer for the course seemed to be in Frankfurt (about 1.5 hours away from us). It was to start at the beginning of October, but because of my current job I could only start in November. So, unfortunately, this option was eliminated. Another school was offering the course beginning in November, but it was even farther away in Bavaria. While I was still considering this second school, I suddenly felt an unusually strong restlessness. The decision had been clear; why now this restlessness? While I was seriously praying about it again, I sensed a quiet answer: “You can further your education, but

not now.” I was a bit taken aback by this and anxious to see how God would lead me further. I called the school to ask some questions, hoping for more clarity. The person on the phone was not very eager to talk. She was unable to help me with one point that was particularly important to me. However, it was not very surprising to me and instead was the confirmation that this would not be the right choice. It guided me even more to the decision to drop the plans for further education in the fall and instead, to start next spring in Frankfurt. With this thought, I once more had inner peace about it. God also gave me an encouraging verse that further strengthened this decision.

In the fall, we received an invitation to travel with our choir to Shalom, Bolivia, in the spring of 2019 ▶

for their camp meetings. Several choir members planned a two-week trip to Bolivia in February 2019. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of it. It was a particularly blessed time for all of us in Bolivia. If I had started the continuing education in the fall, the trip would not have been possible for me at all.

We came back from Bolivia in mid-February. I was able to work until the beginning of March and then

start further training in mid-March. God's timing is simply amazing. It would go beyond our scope to report further details about the trip's planning. It looked almost impossible at first, humanly speaking, that I would get a vacation, but opportunities opened up that I could just take from God's hand. To Him alone belong the thanks and glory! It's worthwhile to leave the planning and guidance in life to Him! ■

Dina Grötzing

Testimony

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits”
(Psalm 103:2).

I too, want to thank the Lord with all my heart for all He has done for me and for us.

Two years ago (2019) my husband was hospitalized and I didn't know how to cope, nor how I would be able to continue.

Then, the morning of the day he was to be discharged, the Lord directed my eyes to the verse, “Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5). So I was able to go to the hospital with confidence, and He made all things well, as no man could have planned or foreseen. His ways are wonderful. At that time I had promised to write a testimony, but then never got around to doing so.

Now this year (Feb. 2021) my husband went back into the hospital with high blood pressure and severe nosebleeds that couldn't be stopped for hours. But God carried us and helped us through again. A few weeks ago, I also got sick for a few weeks. I was in great pain and wrestled many nights with God in prayer that He would help me and heal me. In thanks to Him, this time I really want to share a testimony of His wonderful help.

Again and again the song came to my mind, where the chorus says, “Though many storms rage, I direct my gaze upward. You never deny comfort to the one who relies on you.”

Additionally, the Lord has done miracles to close relatives. He has stretched out His Hand and has saved them from great misfortune, possibly even from death. How should we not praise Him!

Thus, the faithful God shows us time and again that He is the same even today and if we call upon Him with all our heart, He is ready to help.

How grateful we can be as His children, to have such a place of refuge, of which the world does not know and often does not want to know!

So, I would like to continue to serve the Lord faithfully and remain steadfast, until I am allowed to move from faith to sight. May our faithful God make it possible for me, for both of us, and for all who firmly trust in Him. ■

Your fellow pilgrims to the Eternal Home,

Adina and Heinz-Lothar Heldt



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Say Grace

"We are so, so hungry!" the children shout one over another in an attempt to be heard. "We want an apple!" they yell emphatically.

"What do you say when you want something?" replies their mother.

Do you know, dear children? Of course, you ask, "Mommy, may I please have an apple?" When we want something, we should always say "please" and then also "thank you." Mom is happy when she can give her kids something to eat, but she is even happier when they first say "please" but then also "thank you." Well, if a mother is so happy

about it, how much more so our Father in heaven!

A young man once came to visit a farmer. The farmer, his wife, and children were kindhearted and asked the stranger to stay for lunch. When everyone was seated at the table, the farmer folded his hands and prayed, "Faithful God, we thank You with all our hearts for the good food and ask You now to bless this food." The whole family said a loud, "Amen!"

The man wrinkled his nose and said haughtily, "Well, I'll be! That seems very old-fashioned to me to still pray today. Who does that?"

The farmer answered modestly, "Sir, the cows and all the other animals in the barn do not pray with us. Otherwise, everyone who sits down at our lunch table prays." The formerly haughty man was ashamed of himself.

Do you not also pray when you are sitting at the table and the delicious food is before you? If you don't, just have the courage to say, "May I pray today?"

Now let us pray, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever! Amen." ■

Does That Still Exist?

| *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).*

Is it true that the meek conquer? At first glance, it probably doesn't look that way. You would think that a forceful, decisive demeanor will do much more, but that is a great fallacy.

Here is a true story to prove it.

A number of men were sitting together in a pub at a late hour. The conversation turned to women. Each one had more to gripe about his wife than the other. Only one kept silent and did not join in the ranting.

“You're not saying anything!” his cronies shouted. “Why don't you say something for once!”

“Well, I can't speak as you do,” he replied. “My wife doesn't talk back to me; she is always kind and loving to me.”

“Oh, there's no such thing!” clamored the others. “Women are all the same.”

“Not at all. My wife is very different from the way you describe your wives.” He took courage to continue. “If you came home with me now and I told my wife to get up and make coffee, she would do it without argument!”

“Bet she wouldn't!”

“Bet she would!”

The bet was made. The whole bunch set out to put the wife to the test. They arrived at the residence.

“Woman, get up and make some coffee. I've brought company.”

Now the visitors braced themselves for the storm that they expected to break out. But no storm broke out. A few brief moments later, you could hear movements in the kitchen, then the smell of coffee wafting through the home. It was not long before the woman appeared and brought in the coffee, greeting the guests in a friendly manner. They were sobered by the sight of the quiet, friendly woman.

Then one of them took heart and asked her, “Tell me, how do you do it, being so friendly to people like us who drop by your house unannounced in the middle of the night?”

“I will gladly tell you that,” the woman replied. “You see, my dear husband has only one life. After all, he does not have an eternal life. It is written in the Bible that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God, and he is attempting to shorten that one life himself. Because he cannot become old with this life, I want to make his one short life as pleasant as possible for him.”

The guests fell silent. They soon excused themselves. The woman had made them feel quite uneasy.

The man remained alone with his wife. Then he asked, “Honey, do you really still care about me?”

“Yes, Dear, God only knows!” she said, looking at him with tear-filled eyes. He hadn't spoken to her so gently in a long time.

“Honey, will you help me become a different person?”

“Yes, Dear, with all my heart, and with God's help!”

What convicted the man? The meekness of his wife. The other wives only had reproaches for their husbands, which caused such bitterness. But her meekness overcame him.

So it is true that the meek inherit the earth. It is also true that the great and powerful often rule the world, but the meek, redeemed by Jesus' blood, nevertheless exert a great influence and will one day inherit the crown of eternal life. That is certain.-

Therefore, wives, if you want to win your husbands, put on meekness. Husbands are to be won “by the conduct of their wives, without a word,” Peter says in 1 Peter 3:1. Put on meekness. Learn in the school of Jesus, Who said, “I am meek,” and you too will conquer. ■

Windows Of Heaven

An Experience From Long Ago, Told by a Woman

Fifteen years ago, I became a widow with three little children, ages seven, five, and three. My husband was a simple worker with a low income, so we were hardly able to save any money. On top of that, he was sick for seven months before he died. After his funeral, I had a debt of \$300. I was without money and didn't know where to turn. It was winter, and the deep snow lay all around the house. All I had left in the house was a bucket of coals, a few slices of bread, and a bottle of milk.

I was raised in a Christian home and knew that God answers prayers. Therefore, I knelt down and told God everything and asked Him for help in this difficult time.

Because I always made clothing for my children, I understood something about sewing. I decided to go on a job hunt and spoke first with a tailoring shop. They offered me work with a weekly income of \$3. It was very low, but I was happy to have this employment. A bakery supplied me with bread that was not fresh enough to be sold. A different store gave me expired milk so that my children did not have to starve.

When I received my first weekly income, I put \$0.30 aside for the

Lord. I read the passage in Malachi 3:10: "'Try Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.'" I was determined to always give the Lord a tenth of my income, even in difficult circumstances. With the leftover \$2.70, I bought coals and groceries, and we had enough to get through the week.

When I opened the letter with my weekly income, I noticed at the end of the second week, to my surprise, that there were \$6 inside instead of just \$3 like the previous week. There was a little note saying that I had received a wage increase. Oh, my heart was full of praise and gratitude to God! When I got home, I added \$0.60 to the \$0.30 from the previous week.

After I worked six weeks, my wage was increased to \$10 a week. I conscientiously laid away a tenth of my wage as soon as I got it. My Heavenly Father proved to me that He is still able to create windows from heaven to bless His children if they trust Him and obey Him.

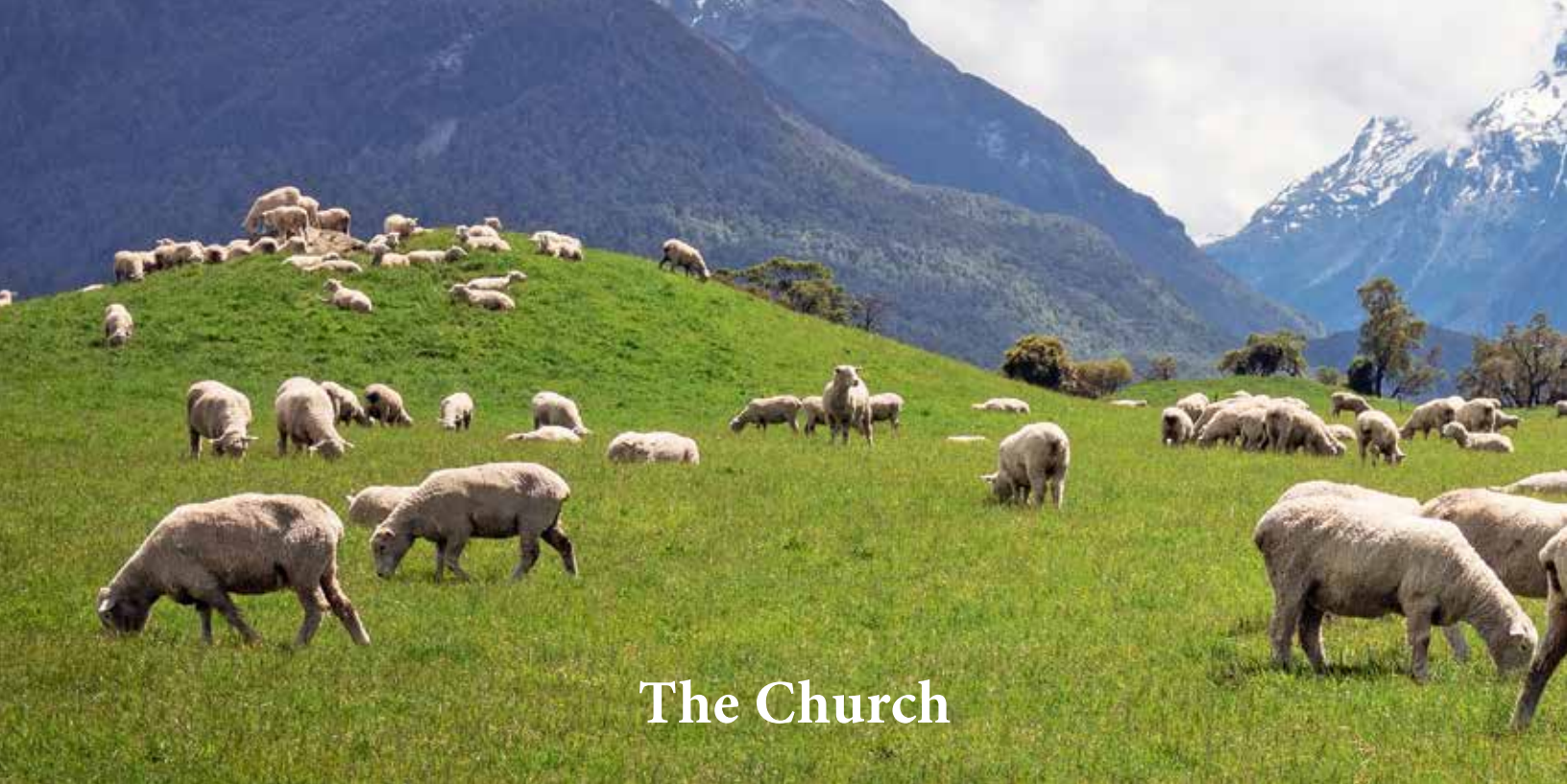
I attended services in my neighborhood where a zeal for missions was very noticeable. The tithe that I gave was used for foreign missions.

After a year, my wage had been increased to \$20 a week. Now I could take good care of my children, and God's blessings abounded in our home.

Since then, fifteen years have gone by. I still work in the same store where I started earning \$3 a week, but now they pay me tenfold. My daughter married into a good family, a true Christian home. Both of my sons have good positions, and both give their tithe to the Lord. All three children are children of God and lead a godly lifestyle.

I am convinced that God chooses to honor our faithfulness when we tithe. God fulfilled His promise in my life in Malachi 3:10, and I am certainly not the only one who has experienced this. Starting with Jacob our patriarch, who gave God the tenth of all he had, and throughout all time, God has blessed those who serve Him with their whole heart and who help further His kingdom, not from a sense of duty but out of love to God and souls who are still in sin.

Jesus has promised that if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, everything else will fall into place. He does what He promises. Everyone who follows Him fully can declare it. ■



The Church

To gain clarity about the church, we need to start with the Bible. In addition to answering the question of “What must I do to be saved?” it also tells me what to do next, once I have found salvation (Acts 16:31 and 2:47). The Bible governs my standing before God and my relationship with my sisters and brothers. If we earnestly want to seek the truth, we should remember that the truth is always simple. Since the way to salvation through faith is clearly laid out in the gospels, why should the question of the church be shrouded in darkness?

People move in a number of different circles, like the family and the state. Each person belongs to a family, and as a citizen, everyone is a member of a state. But if I am a believer, a member of the Body of Jesus Christ, where do I belong?

There is a Church

Writing to believers in Corinth, the apostle Paul directs his letters

“to the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 2:1). He also writes to “the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1). For Paul, the matter was simple: There was a local church in each of Corinth, Thessalonica, and the other cities. Having come to believe in the living God, they formed a congregation wherever they were.

At no point in the scriptures do we read that there were several different congregations in a city, whether in the flourishing trade cities of Ephesus and Corinth or in Rome, the world capital. This is already clear in the salutation, which simply says, “The church of God which is at Corinth,” making reference to a single church. This does not mean that all believers in a city always met at once, in a single location; rather, the church overall formed a single, visible, cohesive unit.

The church should always maintain unity inwardly as well. The united front it presents to the world should be reflected internally, which is why the apostle instructs us to endeavor to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). This unity of the Spirit precludes any type of partisanship. The apostle Paul sees the existence of different parties as a sign of carnality (1 Corinthians 3:3). In the congregation, there should be no dissension or divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10).

The Church has a Name

The church has a specific name, being called the “church of God” or the church “in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These are terms we find in the Word of God. Members of the church are called the “sanctified in Christ Jesus”; “called to be saints”; “beloved of God”; “faithful in Christ Jesus”; and “faithful brethren.” We never read of a church named after a person. The apostle Paul gravely



criticizes the partisan spirit arising from personality worship. But where is the name “church of God” today? An old hymn says that the church should never be named after a person or place, a message all the singers of the hymn should take to heart. People should allow the church to bear its biblical name.

The Name Shows Whose Church It Is

This name was not chosen at random. “Church of God” has a deeper meaning: the church is God’s property. God Himself founded the church through His Word and His Holy Spirit. It also belongs to the Son because He saved it through His precious blood (1 Peter 1:18–19).

We read in God’s Word, “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, . . . ‘And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates

of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:16–18).

The church in Philadelphia could have earned no greater praise than when the Lord said in Revelation 3:8, “[You] have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” It is of great significance that the apostle writes in Ephesians 5:23, “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” If the church belongs to the Lord, it cannot be organized and managed according to human whim.

God’s Word Tells Us Who Belongs to the Church

When the apostle Paul speaks of the members of the church in his letters, he refers to saints; those “called to be saints”; “beloved of God”; and “members of the household of God.” Often, the difference between the past and the present is expressly highlighted, not only by Paul but also by the other apostles.

Addressing the “pilgrims . . . elect,” Peter writes, “[you know] that you were not redeemed with

corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19). In verse nine and ten of the second chapter, he calls them “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people . . . who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” And Paul writes to the Corinthians, “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). At the end of the second chapter in Acts, we read, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

The church of the Lord consists of believers, of people who have been saved from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. ■

P. K.

Truth or Tradition?

We would like to emphasize a few observations made from the words of Jesus found in Mark 7:1–13: “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” (v.7–8).

The Truth Sets Free

Freedom lies in truth, not in the shackling bonds of tradition. On Reformation Day, we should greatly uphold and emphasize this. It is good that we have an annual day to keep reminding ourselves of some of the principles of our religious freedoms. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was the result of human questions about freedom. True freedom is the fruit of knowing the will of God and doing according to His will.

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day knew little of the freedom of the Spirit, for they were bound and misled, deceived, deluded, and defrauded by their own transgressions. To them, Jesus said, “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men.” Those who do so will encounter great difficulties.

Now let us go back to the history of religion and see how many people became unhappy because they rejected the will of God in their lives and went their own ways instead of the ways of God. There is no quicker way of getting into all kinds of trouble than to abandon the divine commandments and withdraw from Jesus’ guidance.

When a Person Rejects God’s Will

Dr. Halford Luccock explains, “The worst and bloodiest chapters in history date from those times when men despised the commandments of God and put human statutes in their place.” How right he is!

Let us recall all the persecutions, wars, revolutions, cruelties, and inquisitions committed in the name of religion. What terrible consequences they bring when man forgets God and gives in to his own desires and lusts! How abominable to God must the quarrels among Christian organizations be! Jesus taught us to love, pray for, and forgive our fellow man, even our enemies.

When Religion Is Set as the Rule of the Game

Jesus proclaimed the supremacy of the divine commandments over human statutes. He said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The spirit of Christ has always been superior to the letter of the law.

In our time, difficulties and differences arise because people define their religion by rules and regulations. Keeping this order is more important for them than a healthy biblical rebirth. Instead of new life and new hope, they set their laws: “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.”

Human Traditions and False Doctrines

Worshiping anything other than the eternal Godhead is pure idolatry, and yet this is done by millions of people. Believing that a person can forgive our sins, and that he or she stands in God’s place is blasphemy. Who could take the place of Jesus Christ, our only Mediator, our only Savior?

The teaching that sin can be atoned for by good works is a belief of men and not the belief proclaimed in the Word of God. We do not find this teaching anywhere in the Bible.

The belief that sin can be eradicated by attending worship services, communion, confirmation, or by becoming baptized is contrary to the revealed Word of the Almighty God.

The belief that a person can receive the Spirit of God through an outward act is man's doctrine. God is not involved in this.

Are We Substituting Tradition for the Word of God?

Millions of people place traditions above the true Word of God, and many of these people attend Christian worship services. It is blasphemy to put human commandments at the same level as God's commandments. It is blasphemy to place a church's statement of faith above the authentic message of the Bible.

Apostasy—A Possibility

The apostasy of the church of the morning-time is one of the greatest stains in the history of Christianity, but apostasy is always a possibility, and it will always remain a possibility whenever and wherever people begin to put their own ideas in place of the Spirit and the commandments of God. We will achieve complete freedom only when we follow the Lord in spirit and in truth, as it is shown to us in His Word. ■

W. D. Oldham

Not Just Once a Year

Did you really understand your obligation to God and how much thanks you owe Him?

We were on our way home from the Thanksgiving service. "I didn't like it. I think it's all exaggerated," my brother-in-law said. "If everything I have is a gift from God, what about my own contribution?"

I asked him to clarify his statement. "I think about my income, for example," he continued. "After all, I have to work hard to earn money. Why should I still thank God? He didn't give me my money. I got it from my employer after I worked hard for it. It's strange that Christians think they're getting everything from God."

"I hope you don't think Christians are so simple-minded that they don't know where their financial income comes from. But they still have God to thank," I said.

"Well, I'm curious about that," he interjected.

"We thank God for the past harvest, and also for our home and clothing. He certainly didn't build our house or sew our clothes, but He has made us humans so intelligent that we know how to design and manufacture clothes and build homes and structures. You think you could earn your money all by yourself, but you couldn't do that if God hadn't given you the necessary means. So you have reason enough to thank Him."

My brother-in-law had not yet looked at things from this perspective. Thoughtfully and silently, we went home. Shortly before we reached our destination, he said, "But then I would have to thank God every day for His gifts; one Thanksgiving a year would not be enough!" ■

H. Worm

Your Word

In your Word, o my Savior, I put my confidence;
Through it You grant me favor; give me hope, peace, and strength.
What God says will be lasting, His decrees will remain;
Though the world will be passing, God is always the same.

For by faith, I am certain that whatever my part,
That the Lord knows my burdens; I can flee to His heart.
For whatever God promised, He fulfills by and by;
It is fitting and honest on His Word to rely.

Let no tempter discourage me from trusting God's Word,
Which will comfort and flourish, will enlighten and guard.
It will teach me Your way, Lord, that my foot shall not err;
If I trust and obey, Lord, ev'ry day, ev'rywhere.

By Your Word I can dare to cast my net in the sea,
That the gospel may rescue and set many hearts free.
Give us fruit that the gospel may reach many a home
And turn sinners from evil. It's Your Word, not my own!

Let me pray as You taught us, as we read in Your Word;
Let us never lose focus to resist through God's Sword.
On my pathway to glory, let my hope be restored;
Teach me, Lord, not to worry but to trust in Your Word.

Dora Rappard