Biola Hour Highlights, 1974 - 11

Lloyd T. Anderson
Richard McNeely
Al Sanders
J. Richard Chase
Charles Lee Feinberg

See next page for additional authors

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Thanksgiving

By: Dr. Lloyd T. Anderson

One of the great passages which describes so beautifully the theme of Thanksgiving is found in Matthew 15:36. The perfect example is the Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to the Father. The Saviour had been feeding the multitudes with a few loaves and fishes. The Bible tells us that when He took them for distribution He first gave thanks. This should be a hallmark of every believer's life, that he is ready at all times to be thankful. Several other interesting verses come to mind as we think of the history surrounding this day. In Isaiah 63:13 we read, "Who led them through the deep, like a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble?" In I Cor. 10:1 we find the information by Paul, "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea." What transpired in the background of Israel reminds me in a very tangible manner of what occurred with the Pilgrim forefathers. We believe God ordered the steps of those Puritans. That band of exiles who tied up their boat on the wild, bleak New England coast, were the lineal beginners and progenitors of many people who live in this country. Additionally, they were the spiritual ancestors of every loyal American. At least six of the presidents of the United States were among the Mayflower descendants. Sir Winston Churchill, through his American mother, was a direct descendant too.

The Pilgrims were a despised company of separatists and non-conformists who were no longer in sympathy with the powerful English nation of which they were citizens. They qualified for the description Emerson gave, "Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist." The Pilgrims lived during the reign of King James I of Great Britain. They resided largely in Nottinghamshire, which is 140 miles north of London. They were forced to worship after the manner of the apostolic Christians following the day of Pentecost. They gathered in private homes, rather than in the magnificent cathedrals of England. One of their leaders, William Brewster, a graduate of Cambridge University and a private secretary to a distinguished British diplomat, was the village postmaster. William Bradford, who was destined in the course of life to be the governor of New England, was then only a boy of 17. When it became impossible for the Pilgrims to remain in their native land they sought asylum in Holland, which for years had been recognized as a haven of refuge for the Jews of Europe, notably from Spain and Portugal.

In 1607 the attempt of the Pilgrims to hire a ship failed dismally. The English captain, whose services they tried to enlist, turned them over to the police who consigned them to jails. In 1608 they employed a Dutch captain. At the strategic moment British police officers appeared. The captain was intimidated and most of the company was left behind. Finally, in 1609 the Pilgrims were able to escape to Amsterdam where they tarried for 11 years. Their company increased to over 300 people. After a period of time the Puritans felt that the Dutch influences in the city were corrupting their young people. They were also fired with a missionary
zeal to seek the new world known as America. They considered various objectives for colonization. Settlements in Guinea, Virginia, New Amsterdam, or at the mouth of the Delaware River were all contemplated. Finally, they began their nine-week voyage to what proved to be Cape Cod, although the majority of their number remained in Holland. The two boats containing the Pilgrims set sail from South Hampton, England. They were the Speedwell and the Mayflower. The Speedwell began to leak and had to return.

After the long voyage, on one momentous December day, the group landed at Province-town in the new world. There the Pilgrims fell on their knees blessing the God of heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, delivering them from all the potential dangers which constantly lurked. December 21, 1620 they began that unforgettable yet terrible winter at Plymouth. During the months of January and February some 51 of the 102 inhabitants died. At one time only two or three people were able to be up in service because everyone else was ill. On April 5, with only about 50 people remaining at Plymouth, the Mayflower returned to England. Elder Brewster declared, "It is not with us as with men whom small things can discourage, but small discontentments cause to wish themselves home again." The faithful constituted the vanguard of the Puritan founders of New England. Their intelligence has descended to us in literature and poetry to provide a glorious heritage.

One of their successors was Cotton Mather, the venerable preacher of New England's ecclesiastical history. Michael Wigglesworth was an early poet, the forerunner of those other truly great New England writers like Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Lowell, Bryan and Emily Dickinson. Edward Everett Hale, the clergyman and author of the powerful and patriotic story, "Man Without A Country," was also a descendant of the Pilgrims. There was Nathaniel Hawthorne of Salem and Concord, with his profound knowledge and depiction of the psychology of sin and guilt. Others to remember are Louisa May Alcott and Amy Lowell. The heritage of New England has come to us in the realm of philosophy and psychology. We remember Jonathan Edwards, the great spiritual preacher of the early days of New England. His sermons were so soul stirring that people trembled under conviction when he began to preach. Ralph Waldo Emerson continues to speak to us even today in all of his essays and beautiful poems. We recall Daniel Webster, that wonderful orator of American history. Other authors bring to mind Harriet Beecher Stowe with her Uncle Tom's Cabin and Roger Williams with his championing of liberty and conscience. Charles Parkhurst went from his pulpit in Lennox, Massachusetts to the Madison Square Presbyterian Church. There he waged his warfare unremittingly against the corruption of politics in New England.

It was this same Coast that brought into being the American system of higher education. Great schools were founded on the basic premise of teaching the Scriptures. We cannot help but consider Yale, Dartmouth, Colgate and ever so many others. Although they may not still ring true today, they had their beginnings steeped in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Horace Mann was America's leading educator in many respects. As a New Englander he was also a descendant from the Pilgrims.

The first American hymnbook was the Massachusetts Bay Songbook. As a matter of fact, many of our Christian hymns had a New England origin. Samuel Francis Smith, a Baptist minister in Massachusetts gave us, "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and "The Morning Light is Breaking." Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote "The Lord of All Being." Ray Palmer, author of "My Faith Looks Up to Thee," spent his boyhood at the Boston Park Street Congregational Church. Whittier, in the midst of a poem on an oriental theme, gave us the beautiful melody, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." A seminary student from Andover wrote a song to be sung at the graduation of his class. We recognize the familiar, "Lead On, O King Eternal."

The foreign missionary movement in our American churches originated in a haystack
prayer meeting on the campus of Williams College. The pioneer Christian missionaries in Hawaii, who arrived there in 1820, came out of the first mission board in our country, the New England Congregational Church. In the city of Plymouth there is still to be seen the house of that great Baptist missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. The first translation of the Bible into the dialect of the American Indian was prepared by a man in New England, John Elliot.

Interesting is the background of Thanksgiving. What a tremendous legacy we have been left. Our heritage is of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His blood atonement on the cross, His physical, bodily resurrection, and the promise of His coming again. Thanksgiving has been given to us because certain people were willing to take courage in hand and come to a new world. Let us be joyful in our praise for all the Lord has done.

Dr. Anderson is Pastor of
Bethany Baptist Church, West Covina, California.

Biola College
La Mirada, California
One of the blessings of studying I Peter is to realize that the apostle, through the Holy Spirit, is giving us God's view of how our lives should be conducted. This is especially needful in these days of advanced technology in every field of endeavor. Certainly reading through the entire epistle just in a short time will give one a new appreciation of the Lord in His Person and work. Such knowledge should challenge one to engage in a walk of holiness.

It is important that we understand something of the historic and dramatic background to appreciate the letter's message. Peter was a native of Galilee, which fact was readily discernable because of his provincial speech. It would be like those who are from the south of our own country. After the trial of our Lord, Peter was standing by the fire warming himself (Matt. 26:73). His very way of talking was discovered by someone standing nearby. He then was correctly identified as one of the disciples.

All of us seem to identify with Peter because he usually had his foot in his mouth. Often we go through many of his same experiences, making great boasts but occasionally finding we are not able to carry them out. Peter was also a great leader. After Christ's death he soon became the chief figure among the apostles. It was his suggestion to replace Judas Iscariot. Peter had grown a great deal spiritually between the Lord's resurrection and the time the Holy Spirit moved him to write this epistle. Earlier he had vacillated, even in the early church. Paul had to call him to task shortly after the council at Jerusalem due to some inconsistencies.

The book tells us that it was written from Babylon. Three possibilities occur for this term "Babylon." There were two cities by that name, one in the present site of Cairo which we are told by some was a city of great importance. The second was Babylon on the Euphrates River. A great number of Jews still lived in that area as a result of the earlier dispersion. There is yet a third view with tradition regarding it as symbolic of Rome. This is the viewpoint held by most Catholics. It is our general view that Peter considers it as Babylon on the Euphrates. Some have suggested that because Peter was always blunt and forthright, this was the location he definitely had in mind. These saints were probably much like the believers in Ephesus. They had the Asian culture and yet also had the Roman and Greek cultures extended to them.

The book was probably written about 64 A.D. This was a time when persecution was becoming a reality. All through the book we find a number of references to suffering. Tradition tells us that very early in the persecution brought by Nero, Peter, as well as Paul, was martyred for the sake of Jesus Christ. Believers in that day were known as evil-doers. The reason for this is that they failed to engage in the practices which were fashionable for their day (I Peter 2:12). There are many reactions which come to people when they are being persecuted. One of the first is to
fight back. Some Christians felt they should organize some kind of movement getting back at those who had wronged them. It was in July of 64 A.D. that the city of Rome was lit by flames for nine days. Desiring to lay the blame on someone, Nero picked these early Christians as the guilty ones who had set fire to the city. As a result of this great fire, Nero was able to build more palaces for his own selfish enjoyment. This entire epistle is characterized by suffering as its background. Probably up until this time the early believers were never harrassed by the government. The government had been their protector but now it became the antagonist. As a parallel, how would you feel, living under protection of a government if our freedom and liberty were suddenly snatched away? No longer could we engage in worship held so precious and important. A complete lack of security exposed Christians at any moment to slander, defamation of character, boycott, mob violence, and even death. Society was inhospitable and the world unjust.

There are a number of key words in I Peter. He opens the epistle telling his hearers they are "elected pilgrims" or "chosen pilgrims." In chapter two he calls them "newborn babes," "stones of the temple," and a "holy priesthood." The theme verse is 5:12, "I have written unto you briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God; stand fast therein." This is interesting because often we think of God as only being that which is operative in our salvation. Another word appearing a number of times is the word "call" or "calling." Having trusted Christ today, always remember that we have been called to a heavenly calling. This is different from that which the rest of the world experiences. There are five sections to the epistle. Section 1 is "God's Call to Salvation" (1:3-2:10). Secondly, we will see how to deal with the immediate problem of the government, the state and our submissive relationship to it (2:11-3:7). The third section indicates the individual believer's attitude toward his fellow believers which can be considered, "God's Call to Selflessness" (3:8-12). All through the book there is an undercurrent of trials and testings. The fourth division we can consider as God's Call to Suffering" (3:13-4:19). Finally, there is "God's Call to Service" (5:1-11).

There is no question but that the human writer is Peter. He introduces himself, by the Holy Spirit, not as a servant or a prisoner but as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Every one of these introductions in the epistles is important. Apostleship was more than a mere call to the ministry. It carried with it the idea of authority, sent directly by Jesus Christ. Because this is authoritative, the people are to listen and to behave in light of the exhortations given.

As to the people whom he addresses, we read from the 1901 version, "To you who are the elect, sojourners of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you, and peace, be multiplied." Note that interesting term, "elect." This refers to their holy calling, although on earth they may be exiled sojourners and pilgrims. It reminds us of the pilgrims who landed at Plymouth. They were not citizens of the United States but instead were exiled citizens of England. They had come to a country which was foreign to them. So it is with us, for our true citizenship is in heaven. Election originates with God who has sovereign foreknowledge of our condition and situation down here. This is an encouragement to these believers to realize that in spite of their circumstances God Himself guaranteed their salvation. The saints were sanctified by the Spirit, which means they were "set apart" for His own purposes. This is what Paul meant when he declared, "It is given unto us on the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). Jesus Christ warned His disciples that they would be hated of all men for His Name's sake. Yet there is a divine purpose in all of this. So Peter brings in the person of the Saviour, reminding his readers that it is "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." The end of persecution is that they might learn to obey the Word of God. This is certainly what we need too. There is
the cleansing nature of Christ's death as well as the full access to God's presence. Both of these aspects should remind saints, regardless of the circumstances in which they live, that God Himself is watching over them, caring for them and will bring them at last to the promised inheritance so clearly delineated in Scripture.

The first division of Peter's first epistle we have entitled, "God's Call to Salvation" (1:3-2:10). He first explains what the call to salvation is (1:3-12). Then he brings in a number of exhortations for our application (1:13-25). Finally, he speaks of how effective our calling should be (2:1-10).

Just as he did in the introduction, the apostle Peter brings in all three members of the Trinity as far as our salvation is concerned. This is important to people who are undergoing persecution. Regardless of our outward circumstances, God's salvation doesn't falter for a moment. The Lord is watching over us in the midst of every situation of life. Final glory will be revealed in Jesus Christ. Peter opens this great doxologic section by declaring, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who begat us again unto a living hope" (1:3). Later he reminds them that they are newborn babes (2:1, 2). Our Lord has made us His own children. Nothing can come across our path taking us away from His almighty hand (John 10:28, 29). What an assuring word to anyone going through depressing circumstances so often frustrating and even tragic. Notice that it is according to His mercy that He saves us. The mercies of God principally have to do with man in his misery. These are unquestionably uncertain days and man is living amid a very precarious situation. Without Jesus Christ any person would be miserable. This is why salvation is so important. We are not just anticipating "pie in the sky, by and by," but rather a practical deliverance and dynamic life as it is today. So, persecution is to have its maturing effect (James 1:2-5).

We have been begotten again by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul said this in I Corinthians 15:1-3, reminding us that there are four great truths to the Gospel to be believed. First, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; then He was buried; third, that He has been raised again the third day according to the Scriptures; and fourth that He appeared to men here on earth. Paul then gives a record of the number of appearances, one of which included an appearance to Peter.

Our inheritance in Christ is characterized by its incorruptibility. It will never become useless. How many things in our lives today could be placed in such a category? Our Lord Himself said that we should not lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth, where moths and thieves enter in and where rust corrupts the very treasures we hold dear. Our inheritance is also undefiled; it never becomes contaminated. There is a great deal of effort today in the area of ecology for so much of our natural resources have become contaminated. The promise of God is that our salvation in Christ will never see contamination. There is no smog problem in God's presence. Then, a third characteristic of our inheritance is that it doesn't fade away. This means it never becomes obsolete like last year's model. The fourth of these characteristics is that it is reserved in heaven. Isn't it great to have things that are reserved? You don't need to worry about the bank's closing or a universal depression. The whole concept of salvation isn't one of resting in being safe from the penalty of sin, but rather it is to be realized finally in the presence of God the Father.

The second thing the Father does for us is that He makes us secure. By the power of God we are guarded by "faith to salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." These persecuted saints needed to be reminded that regardless of their circumstances the Lord would bring them through. There are a lot of things worse than death. God never tells us that we have to live. All He tells us is that we are to be prepared to die. In essence, the apostle reminds them, "Look, don't worry about being dispossessed of your property. Don't worry about losing your job. Don't worry about
being the offscouring of the world and don't even worry about dying. All these things can be taken away, but your salvation is always secure. God's Word will come to completion." It is as if the Lord would put a fence around them. What a reminder to us that our assurance isn't based on how we feel about things, but rather on the power of God. Paul, in his great statement of Romans 8, marks out the same thing (vs. 38, 39). No wonder we can avow, "If God be for me, who can be against me?"

This salvation is one which is to be revealed in the last time. This is why we are kept. It is the whole prospect of glorification. There is the assurance of a greater day coming. This is why John testified, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

In verses 6 and 7 we see that the work of the Father is in stabilizing the believer. Have you ever wondered what the purpose of trials is? One primary thrust is always to prove your faith, bringing about a tempered life. Tribulation always works endurance (James 1:2). The word "endurance" comes from two words which mean "to live under." This is what God is really trying to get us to do. He wants us to be able to live under the pressures of life rather than seeking to escape them. God allows pressures to be brought into your life for the purpose of making you a more useful tool in the hands of a loving heavenly Father. There is not a trial in our lives but such as is common to all of us (I Cor. 10:13).

Since nothing can remove this salvation from us, we can realize more fully that the experiences of suffering have a positive effect in our lives. "To prove" here refers to working with metals. In purification, all of the dross and impurities must be removed. Remember, there is yet a future day of revelation. This is not the time when you and I are to be revealed as the sons of God, but that day will soon dawn. We can look forward to that blessed hour (Titus 2:13). No wonder the Word of God ends with these words, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Salvation doesn't depend only upon the work of the Father. We see very definitely the involvement of the Son. Jesus Christ becomes central to what Peter declares on this point (1:8-10). There are three things which speak to us of the worthiness of our Saviour in this passage. First is the fact that He is worthy of our love. Peter demonstrates this in the words, "Whom, having not seen, ye love." Here is One whom we have never seen, yet we know so much of His person that we have a deep and abiding love for Him.

Have you ever thought about Peter's experience with the love of Jesus Christ? In the last chapter of John's Gospel, as the Lord met the disciples, He had breakfast with them. The Word tells us that He turned to Peter and asked if he genuinely loved Him. There is a play on words recorded in the passage. The Saviour first asked Peter about love, using a word which principally means to serve the best interests of the object loved. Christ was asking, "Are you really interested in the things that pertain to Me more than anything else?" Peter thoughtfully replied, "Well, Lord, You know that I have a deep affection for You." It is true with us as well. We can have a deep affection for people without always doing that which is in their best interests. The second time the Lord turns to Peter and asks the same thing only to receive the same answer. In both instances Christ didn't rebuke Peter. In fact, He commissions him, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." Now, the third time, the Lord turns to Peter. On this occasion He changes His word and uses Peter's. He simply asks, "Do you really have a great affection for Me?" Peter's feelings were such that he had great sorrow that the Saviour even had to question his affection. He finally admits, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I have a deep affection for you." Here Peter's word
is that Christ is worthy of our agape love. His best interests should be served in everything we do.

The second thing is that God's Son is worthy of our faith, "Yet believing, ye rejoice." What does it mean when we talk about believing the Gospel or believing in Jesus Christ? Throughout the New Testament the word is coupled with that which brings about a change in behavior (John 20:30, 31). The first of Jesus' miracles took place at Cana of Galilee during a wedding feast. Belief is marked around the command of Mary, the mother of our Lord, as she said to the servant, "Whatever He says to you, do it." The same thing is true in John 5 where we read of the man who had been lying at the pool of Bethesda as a cripple for 38 years. Jesus told him to arise and take up his bed and walk. He obeyed the command. Throughout the Gospel of John in every instance of belief, there is a definite behavior that proceeds from it. Jesus Christ is the one in whom our belief must be firmly placed. It must be a belief that behaves. This belief also becomes the basis of rejoicing. This is what the Lordship of Jesus Christ is all about.

Peter exhorts his readers in the third chapter, "But sanctify Christ in your heart as Lord," not just as Saviour, but as One who is to be obeyed. The third thing about the worthiness of the Son is that our hope should be placed in Him (vs. 9, 10). This has reference to the hope of salvation. It doesn't mean that when we come to the end of our lives we only have "hope" that we are going to be saved. Our salvation is accompanied by definite assurance and confidence. In Romans 8 Paul reminds us that those who are justified are also glorified. God doesn't lose a single one in the process. This is what Peter means, "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." This is our hope which is a sure thing because of personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Our salvation has a number of qualities which trace back to Old Testament prophecies (v. 10). Those who prophesied sought and searched diligently "of the grace that should come unto you." When the apostles began to preach the Gospel, they didn't have a New Testament to open. Instead, they went to the Psalms or some other familiar portion where they would substantiate the truths of salvation. Never forget that the Old Testament is packed full of knowledge about salvation. Jesus told the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. These are they which testify of Me." Luke records in the last chapter of his gospel that our Lord began with Moses and with the Psalms and with all the prophets, interpreted to His apostles the things concerning Himself. He told them how He first had to suffer and die, and then that He would be glorified. How frustrating it could have been for these Old Testament authors who wrote these words not being able to understand them to their fullest. They were simply moved and compelled by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is also involved fully in our salvation (I Peter 1:11, 12). The witness of the Holy Spirit is prophetic. Many times in the New Testament we find the little formula, "The Spirit saith," and then Scripture is quoted. This is really true because the Spirit of God is the one who carried along these Old Testament prophets and bore out God's Word through them. They wanted to know, first of all, what would be the time of the Messiah's appearing. They were concerned about His sufferings and glory. It was like looking at a distant range of mountains. From many miles, ranges and peaks might all blend into one. Yet, getting closer to the scene one finds that there is a valley in between which separates them. This is the way in which these early prophets had to view things. They could see the glories of the coming Messiah, but somehow could not comprehend how the sufferings would fit into the picture. They missed the sufferings which were fulfilled at Calvary. Peter himself through this as we read in Matthew 16. Jesus had to rebuke him, "Get behind me, Satan, for you don't understand the things of God." How thankful we can be that we live on this side of the cross with the complete revelation of God's inerrant Word.
All these truths of the Old Testament were postponed as to their meaning (vs. 12). It was not to the prophets to know fully, but rather to us who live in the New Testament era. We can understand God's truth because of what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us.

There are some definite results which should accrue to our lives as a result of salvation. Peter writes to those who are going through intense persecution. We must apply these truths to the practical things of our daily existence. First of all, we are told, "Set your hope perfectly upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (v. 13). We should have an expectancy of hope. "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your hope perfectly upon the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter is issuing a call to mental discipline. We might not use this kind of speech today, but if we dressed as the apostle doubtless did, we would be wearing rather long, flowing garments. These often impeded one's progress in the matter of work and travel. So the extremities of them would be pulled up and together, tucked into a belt. As a result, they were less cumbersome. This is what we need to do mentally. Get rid of all those frayed edges so that we can get ourselves really organized to consider the things of God. It's not so much that we need to "shut off" our minds, but rather get them organized for God. We need to have minds exercised to discern between evil and good.

Next, we are told to "be sober." This has reference to seriousness and self-control. The word is often used of those who have lost their sobriety because of overindulgence in alcohol. Peter urges us to become disciplined in life. The command follows, "Set your hope perfectly upon the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So many have hope in a variety of things that can never help them for eternity. Our hopes, as pilgrims, are not to be tied to this world system but instead are to be anchored to that which God is going to bring about finally through His Son Jesus Christ. We are to look forward to the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Stand firmly on what God is going to do! Of Christ's kingdom there shall be no end. We desire that day, recognizing that all the ills of man are going to be cared for and set right. Circumstances may sometimes deceive us as to God's purpose. God never promised that knowing Jesus Christ would make for an easier type of life. It will, however, give us new power, sustenance, and resources that we never dreamed we could possess before. These people of Peter's day were going through persecution so that their faith could be tempered and proven. Mental and personal discipline are important. Our minds must be aligned to what God's truth tells us. We need to recapture the lost art of meditation.

It is also important to know God's time schedule which can provide a backbone to life. I'm not looking for a great number of changes in the world today, but I am looking at the great changes that God will bring about when Jesus Christ Himself becomes the ruler of this universe. He will finally be seen as King of kings and Lord of lords. Knowing these factors can make a great difference in the way we view the difficult situations of everyday life.

God has also called us to an exalted life (vs. 14-16). What really is your desire more than anything else? There must be a desire on the part of every believer to be a child of obedience. Obedience not only comes from having a loving attitude but also it is based on holiness. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, reminds them, "God has chosen us in Him before the foundations of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, having in love predestinated us unto adoption as children unto Himself." We are not to have an outward appearance of engaging in former lusts. We are not to be conformed to this world. Don't allow others to force you into their
little mold. Just because "everybody's doing it" doesn't mean that something is right. The idea of holiness has to do with separation for a particular use. If you are putting away money into a savings account, you are sanctifying that investment, making it holy. It is set apart for a definite use. Even so, we are to be holy, set apart for God's divine purposes. This is a very high standard which God has required of His people through the totality of time. All of the writers of the New Testament were addressing people steeped in an immoral society. One only has to visit the ancient Roman and Greek worlds to realize how much sin and degradation there was. In the excesses of vice the message and urging for holiness rings out clearly. If there is anything which marks what God's will is for the believer in the New Testament, it is that we might be like Christ (Romans 8:29).

The word appearing in the King James "conversation" is an old English term meaning behavior or the way you go about your daily life. What the Lord wants is that holiness should mark the life of the believer. Peter gets his inspired authority by quoting from the 19th chapter of Leviticus. As children of God we are to bear the image of our Father. We must walk according to the commandments of God. The more we meditate upon His person, as well as that of Christ, we have the guarantee that the Holy Spirit will take these thoughts and transform them into meaningfulness in our own lives. This is the way that we will be made like unto His Son.

Dr. McNeely is Professor of Biblical Studies at Biola College.
Several years ago a very delicate operation was conducted in a Houston, Texas hospital. A world-famed doctor opened up the heart of a coal miner. Because of the fact that an artificial heart was brought into use, the world became greatly interested in this scientific achievement. Diagrams were drawn of it and published in our newspapers. Pull color pictures were devoted to every step of the surgery in national news magazines. Perhaps no other individual in the course of history has had his heart so laid bare before the general public as this laborer operated on in the Lone Star State. Yet, in a spiritual sense, the Psalmist Asaph does much more than this as in the book's 73rd chapter, he opens up his heart personally. As we look into the yawning cavity we see some things that can help us understand why we face difficult problems in our existence. Perhaps the most difficult lesson we have to learn in life is simply stated, "Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?" All of us have to face this question at one time or other. The Word of God doesn't leave us to wonder but rather presents a positive answer.

Asaph was one of the chief musicians of Israel. This is the second Psalm which he wrote, the first being the 50th. It is the first of a series of eleven consecutive Psalms which have been ascribed to him. This chapter begins the third division of this wonderful book. It corresponds with the third book of the Bible, as each of the other four sections of the Psalms correspond with one of the first five books of the Bible. Leviticus has as its theme "Holiness unto the Lord." To summarize it more popularly, the problem Asaph faced, and which we need to consider is, "Why should we be holy when God seems to pay wages in suffering?" To find the answer, let's consult Scripture. First of all, we read, "Truly God is good to Israel." This is the Psalmist's first important premise, as well as his final conclusion. In the original, it would more properly declare, "Truly God is only good to Israel." Spiritually speaking, we can say that God is only good to those who by faith have put their trust in Him as Saviour. Sometimes this may be hard for us to remember. Everything that comes to us in life is sent for our good by God. Sometimes the Lord has to allow chastening, but ultimately it is only for our benefit and maturity. As is true with every promise in the Word of God, so here there are conditions which must be met and fulfilled. The last part of verse one tells us that God's goodness is to such as are of a clean heart. This doesn't mean just ceremoniously clean on the outside, but rather the seat of the emotions would be in view. It is not a case of merely going to church, or giving to the benevolences of the denomination. He means the purging of the heart from within. David frankly realized, "If I have iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The cleansing can only be by the Spirit of God (I John 1:9).

Next, we hear what a very narrow escape faced Asaph. Unfortunately, all too many of us have succumbed at this point. Don't think anyone is always on top. His feet were almost gone; his steps had well nigh slipped. Thank God, we have a High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. The Lord
promises His children, "Though he stumble, yet he shall not be utterly cast down." Underscore the word "almost" here in verse two. God constantly upholds us by His right hand (v. 23). So, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall."

The heart operation continues as Asaph clearly explains in verse three, "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Literally, he was boiling over with envy. How easily covetousness can quickly occupy a believer's heart and mind. The word "foolish" refers to all the ungodly, unregenerate people. The 37th Psalm carries a very similar message. "Fret not thyself because of evil doers" (37:1) has as a free translation, "Don't let yourself get into a stew because of the people of this world." It's hard when with Asaph we see the wicked prosper. We frequently read about individuals who have taken a small amount and parlayed a few hundred into a multi-million dollar operation. This catches our fancy and imagination. The Psalmist admitted his eye was fixed too much on one thing rather than on delighting himself in the Lord. They say that "Distance always lends enchantment to the view." Also, "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." It is always the other fellow who has the best job. How quickly jealousy can lay hold of our fancy.

There's something else about the ungodly. "They have no bands in their death: but their strength is firm." There is not much pain and suffering they go through. Perhaps through the help of the physician's drugs they glide into eternity with a false peace and without a struggle. They are not bound to their beds. There is nothing to hold them to a lingering death. The reason Satan doesn't molest them is that his prey is sure; they can't break the net.

The explanation continues, "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." We rarely get excited about suffering in the abstract, but when any problem comes to us personally we demand, "Why do I have to suffer?" Actually, trouble is the exception rather than the rule for most of us. We misuse and abuse our bodies and then we wonder why we have to suffer. A man who had been the cause of his wife's untimely death fell prostrate over her casket asking why God was so hard on him. Parents who have wayward children complain about the cross they have to bear when in actuality they themselves might have been the carpenters of that heavy burden from earlier years. It does seem paradoxical that those who plow the least come out with the most grain. Yet sometimes it works that way, totally illogically. Asaph recognizes their desire for superiority, "Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment." In olden days people used chains or necklaces to show their authority over others. There is no sin in wearing a necklace or other jewelry, but when it is worn to gratify the vanity of one's human pride, it's no longer an ornament. Evil is openly flaunted and shown off. Think of some of the current trends in television shows. Immorality and violence are the rule, not the exception. In the dress styles there's an open flaunting of nudity.

The ungodly do not seem to be affected by shortages, "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish" (v. 7). The rich man has everything to live with, but nothing to die for. One translation states, "They do even what they lust." Whatever they want they can have. As a boy, on a rainy day one of my favorite occupations was to get out the Sears-Roebuck catalog. Looking through it, as a child I would think of the many things I'd like to own if only we could afford it. The merchandise was divided between "good," "better" and "best," with prices running on an ascending scale. The people Asaph is talking about do not have to daydream; they can have whatever they wish.

Furthermore, the ungodly ". . . are corrupt, and speak wicked concerning oppression: they speak loftily" (v. 8). Plato said of Protagorus in his boast, "I have lived
sixty years and spent forty of it corrupting youth, and the other twenty as a corrupted youth myself." Oliver Goldsmith penned these incisive words fittingly true to this hour, "Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey; where wealth accumulates and men decay." One of our national news magazines recently carried an article with the rather dubious and paradoxical title, "Advance through Obscenity." The major thrust was the report that within five and no later than ten years censorship will be a thing of the past in both the United States and England. Just where are moral principles that once made this nation great?

The Lord isn't in the thoughts of the people at all. "They set their mouth against the heavens" (v. 9). Liberal theologians with their "God is dead" hypothesis, led many people astray. These evil, unregenerate people have so much pride that their tongue walks through the earth. If there were another Eden its innocence would not be spared the filthy trail of those who make pronouncements against the Lord.

Verse ten puts us in a parentheses, "Therefore His people (that is, the Lord's people) return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them." God's people are made to drink not only of bitterness in life but also they have to swallow every single drop. In Hebrew poetry, water is often synonymous with trials. Sometimes we wonder just how many trials and testings one person can take. As believers, we are made to drink from the full cup of bitterness, right down to the very last dregs. Unsanctified prosperity soon leads to practical atheism. These would ask, "Is there knowledge in the Most High?" What a terrible affront to the Lord. "These are the ungodly who prosper in the world." The very crux of this entire matter, preventing the wicked from being a stumbling block to our faith, are the words "in the world." You see, the prosperity of the ungodly is only here and now. That's all they will ever have. They will have to face reality sooner than they may think. We get disturbed because they seem to increase in riches and everything they do seems to make money. Again, it would seem only logical that a man who has a hard time in this life must therefore be evil while a man who has an easy time must be good. Unfortunately, life can't be rationalized in this way at all.

Asaph becomes very desperate, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (v. 13). Here he questions the holiness of God, when, after all, the Lord pays wages with affliction. From a human point, it does seem very unfair. Asaph confesses, "I washed my hands in innocency." Job's wife reasoned with him, "If you have integrity left, why don't you curse God and die?" Job stood firmly grounded upon the Rock of Ages responding, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

The Psalmist further testifies, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning." From the time he got up to the time he went to bed at night it was just one constant problem after another. He was really in a rut with no place to go except down.

There's an interesting story told of an ebony stick being carved in the hands of a master craftsman. It complained about the rough and cruel treatment it had been receiving. Then the musician explains, "I'm going to make of you a flute, and your music will charm the hearts of men and women throughout the world." This is similar to what God is doing with our lives. Some of those things hurt as the fingering holes are drilled. From our hard experiences our Saviour wants to bring honor, praise and glory to God Almighty. It's interesting to hear the realization, "If I say I will speak thus: behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children." In other words, he didn't want to become a stumbling block to others. James tells us, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (1:19). Asaph didn't want to bring reproach upon the Name of the Lord. We would do well to take a page out of his book. When difficulties come our way let's think twice before speaking once. Consider the suggestion, "Keep silent and be thought a fool; speak and remove all doubt."
Then, "When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me" (v. 16). The basic problem is properly diagnosed as self. Shakespeare has Julius Caesar declaring, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves." To speak might have alleviated one problem, but it would have only created another. When you are uncertain and perplexed, don't grapple. Take a firm stand on that of which you are certain, and seek the Lord's leading for your life.

The 17th verse gives us the turning point in the Psalmist's experience. Now he begins to comprehend what his real problems were. "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." The sanctuary was the holy of holies. This was the place where the commandments of the Lord were kept. So, we must consult the Scriptures if we want to understand the problems confronting us. There's much more to life than this brief scope of time in which we live. This is the reason why we need to go to the Word of God to understand His will.

Frequently at the door of a church service, people will say such things as, "That was a lovely message," or "Those were beautiful thoughts." One time I remember a woman told me that she came to church to listen to the organ and to look at the beautiful stained glass windows and hearing the choir sing she was able to forget all her problems. Well, if that's the only reason to go to church there are many other ways by which we can forget our problems without spending time in a building. It's not enough just to get temporary relief for our frustrations. What we need to grasp is the lasting solution. Do you feel better when you go to church or do you actually comprehend? Do you know whom you have believed? Are you persuaded that He is able to keep that which you have committed unto Him until the day of His return?

Reflecting the end view, Asaph now realizes, "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction" (v. 18). Their fearful elevation makes their fall more dreadful. They topple from the top of the ladder to the emptiness of the world below. The Psalmist's use of the word "Thou" shows us he again sees that God is still in control. Here in Southern California the community of Beverly Hills is often looked to as the quintessence of financial affluence. Yet, having money doesn't bring happiness nor does it guarantee satisfaction and contentment. The average income of people in Beverly Hills is $35,000 a year. There is one psychiatrist in this area for about every 50 people (the national average is one for every 1200 people). Money is no guarantee. "They will be brought into desolation as in a moment" (v. 19). Altamont, the learned French atheist, declared on his deathbed, "Oh, if only you had half the mountain that's upon my soul, you would struggle with the martyr for his stake. Hell itself would be a refuge if it could hide one from the frown of God." The Italians have the thought that the last robe an individual wears in this life has no pockets because there's nothing he can possibly take with him. Alexander the Great is not in Scripture yet he lived 356-323 B.C. The 8th chapter of Daniel refers to him as a "he-goat." What a come down from the world's acclaim. The wicked may die like lambs, yet they have their place with the goats. The historian H. G. Wells claimed much for the mind and human understanding, ridiculing Christianity frequently. Yet, when he died, he was utterly baffled and bewildered. In his last book, the title itself shows this, Mind At the End of Its Tether.

Things will not always be the same. Asaph looks forward expectantly, "As a dream when one awakeneth; so, 0 Lord, when thou awakenest, thou shalt despise their image" (v. 20). Providence seemed to the Psalmist to sleep. Actually, the prosperity of the wicked was a false delusion. This is an anthropomorphism which means a word used to typify God which is true of us as men. God doesn't sleep or slumber, although it may appear that way to us. The Lord is going to bring to pass that which He has promised. His mills, as an ancient divine observed, may grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. The Saviour "is not slack concerning His promise." The time will come when all
men must stand before God to give an account of themselves.

Coming up from despair, he acknowledges, "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins" (v. 21). He looks back at his foolish reasoning. His heart had turned sour, and he had poisoned his own life with such a shortsighted view of God's economy. It's so easy to become critical and cynical. Once we get set right in our own thoughts about self, then the Saviour can truly bless our service.

Asaph doesn't hesitate to characterize himself as a hippopotamus, "So foolish was I, and ignorant I was as a beast before thee" (v. 22). The word here is as a behemoth, a creature which can't even begin to reason. He had been behaving after his instincts only. Animals are wonderful creatures, but they lack the power of standing outside of themselves to consider all of the aspects of certain matters.

Verse 23 gives us the epitome of the Gospel message, "Nevertheless God is with me." There are few things in this life more profitable to our spiritual growth than in watching the recovery of a human soul. The old Scotsman said it, "I may tremble on the rock, but thank God, the rock never trembles underneath me." God isn't like a shadow which departs when the clouds come over. This is the very time when He is near at hand. God has hold of us in all of our trials and problems of life.

Notice verse 24, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." How we need counsel and understanding for this life. Too often we turn to men rather than, first of all, turning to the Word of God. I heard of the woman who was having marital problems so she consulted her milkman. He had already been married three times, and she felt that he might have some experience which would be helpful to her. How foolish some people may be. What a blessing is that little word "afterward." We can cheerfully put up with the present in view of the future. A preacher offered that his favorite passage from Scripture was the five words, "And it came to pass." Trouble never stays. It always "comes to pass."

As he begins his conclusion he testifies of the Lord, "There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." So often we're hypocritical when it comes to a study of God's Word. I think of the man in a certain church who was always boasting how much time he spent reading the Bible and how much time he devoted to getting close to the Lord. The pastor came over to visit the home one day and, wanting to impress the pastor, as he had sought to impress all of the others, he told his little boy, "Sonny, go get that book Daddy loves so well." You can't blame the child when he came back carrying a copy of the Sears-Roebuck catalog. Who is it, or what is it, that you desire? Is there anything else other than Christ?

Although the flesh may fail God is still there to give "the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (v. 26). It is wrong to tell people that if they accept Christ they will be at the end of all their problems. While in a sense that's true, yet we should be gracious and informative enough to tell them at which end they will be. Christianity is no insurance policy for a smooth life. There may be roses, but you can be sure there will also be thorns amid them.

Verse 27 cautions, "For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee." To forsake the Lord for false gods is spiritual adultery. Unfortunately, this is the narrative of the whole world. The promises of God are to those who are faithful, not to those who think they can serve God as well as the world.

The final conclusion winds up with the powerful assertion, "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works" (v. 28). It's good to get near to God. Drawing near to God isn't a single
act. It has to be a continuing process. Everyone likes to get letters from loved ones. When the mail comes that’s the first thing we ask about. And yet, how little time we spend reading God’s love letter to us, the Bible. There’s nothing comparable to being near to God. The reason why we need to have an understanding of all these experiences of life is that God may use us to glorify His Name to others. Are you able to declare the works of God? Do you have a testimony that says something to the world? Are you able to witness to others?

Dr. Sanders is Host and Executive Producer of the Day of Discovery television program.
As we consider the scroll in the hands of Christ (Rev. 5:1-10), we should remember that it speaks of a document made up of sheets of papyrus which are joined edge to edge until the length is reached required for the book. The scroll John sees was written on both sides, as full of material as possible. In the days when the apostle was living, papyrus, which comes from the little plant growing along the River Nile, was pounded out into a smooth writing surface.

The subject of the sealed scroll is that of redemption. The Lamb of God, still bearing the scars of crucifixion, steps up to receive it from His heavenly Father. In Revelation 5:9 the music is the song of redemption. While true redemption has its roots in the past, yet its final fulfillment lies in the future. It isn't confined only to our Lord's first coming to this world, born of the virgin Mary as a little baby. It is very definitely linked to His second coming as well (Luke 21:28). Redemption is still largely a subject for the future (Eph. 1:13, 14). All of creation groans waiting to be redeemed (Rom. 8:22, 23).

In order to interpret the scroll we must examine the Biblical laws of customs in Israel's history. Three things could be redeemed in the Old Testament economy. First of all, if a man had no money he could sell himself to someone as a servant. An individual who was a close relative could redeem him out of his servitude (Lev. 25:47-55). The one who performed this gracious act was called the kinsman redeemer. Second, if a woman's husband died and he had no unmarried relative to marry her, or if the living brothers of the deceased man chose not to marry the widow, as was frequently the custom (Deut. 25:5-10), then the nearest relative could marry her. This man was likewise called a kinsman redeemer. We have an example in Ruth 4 where Boaz married Ruth. Third, if a man lost his land through forfeiture or because he couldn't pay for it, a kinsman or a relative could buy it back, thereby keeping it in the family's name (Lev. 25:25). The scroll on which the family transaction was recorded was rolled up and sealed. This was taken to the court at the tabernacle. So, these three things could be redeemed: a servant, a wife, and land. How interesting to notice that at this point of Revelation chapter five these first two have now been accomplished. The church, which is the bride of Christ, has been caught up in the rapture. So we, His servants, have also been fully redeemed. We have by then received our resurrection bodies. The earth and the creatures of the earth, both vegetable and mineral, are still unredeemed. The world still groans under the pressures of man's sin. Christ is the perfect Redeemer. Every realm which came under the curse of Adam's sin, whether it was the servant, the wife, or the land, must also be delivered by the redemption of the last Adam, our Saviour.

Who has the right to the lordship of this world? Who can rule this universe? Man has certainly failed. Who can establish justice on the earth? Who can establish
righteousness? The answer to these questions is given in Revelation 5:3, "And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the scroll, neither to look on it." The failure to find anyone who qualifies to open the sealed scroll shows the moral inability of man. This is what the world fails to see today. The philosophy of the world is that we can get along without God because man can do anything he puts his mind to. Look at all our technology and wisdom. Yet, look again at this scene. Only Christ is worthy and powerful to handle this seven sealed book.

As an Israelite, John knew the significance of this seven sealed scroll. It spelled out the complete and final redemption of man and Israel. It is the title deed to the earth. Without anyone to open the scroll John bursts into weeping. What future can there be? The outcome of all creation depended upon the contents and the execution of what was found to be in that seven sealed book. Suddenly the problem is solved (5:5). Jesus Christ is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. He alone can loose the seals. Remember, one day He whose right it is to rule and to reign is going to set up His sovereign kingdom over this world. What a marvelous truth to anticipate. It will take place, you may be sure.

There are a number of things which should be noted from Revelation 5. First of all, there is the seven seal book, fully written and ready to be opened. Each closed seal indicates a finality and privacy. Second, we see all of creation's utter inability even to look upon this book. Third, we mark John's overwhelming sorrow at the apparent delay in God's longed-for kingdom since no man was able to open the seven sealed scroll. Then the Lion of the tribe of Judah is declared since He alone has overcome. He is ready to open the book. Sixth, we should catch a glimpse of the formal reception of the scroll by Christ from the hand of God. The mediator takes governmental power which is the burden of Old Testament prophecy. All our hearts and all creation's celebration thereby ensues. Seventh, we catch a glimpse of the worship founded not merely upon creation but upon redemption (Rev. 5:9). This is the message of the one great sublime, celestial theme, the redemption of the creation of God. It is the substance of the seven sealed book. There is never a number to God's heavenly host, the angels in glory. They are uncounted. They all sing the praises of the triune God.

This book now before us represents a forfeited inheritance. Originally the legacy was created for us, as the seed of Adam. We lost it in sin and transgression. Our usurper, the devil, took it from us. Such continues to this very day. According to the law and the customs of the ancient Jewish people, the sign of a forfeited inheritance was a sealed book. The fact that this is seven sealed emphasizes the encumbrances upon this inheritance. It is sealed until someone is able to pay the price for opening it. When that book of redemption is taken by One who is worthy, those seals are open and that intruder, the devil, is cast out. The judgment of God creates for us a new heaven and a new earth, giving us back the inheritance we lost in Adam when he fell into sin.

The vision begins with these interesting words, "And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll, and to loose its seals?" (Rev. 5:2). All of the moral and intelligent universe is now focusing their eyes upon that seven sealed book. The voice of the strong angel calls, "The time has now come." The only legal representative, the only qualified individual, the only Kinsman Redeemer who is worthy is Jesus Christ Himself. He steps forward to redeem the purchased possession. Even the angels, the principalities and powers, with all of the orders and ranks of heaven's glory, could not meet the qualifications to break
those seals. They all shrank back in unworthiness and absolute inability. All heaven turned silent. Not even one could be found in the whole realm of the spirit world who was worthy.

When the apostle John realized that there was no human individual, as well as no spirit being, who could open the seven sealed book, he wept openly. Here was man's only hope to regain his forfeited inheritance. The tears he shed represent the crying of all God's people down through the centuries. They are the tears of Adam and Eve, driven out of the Garden of Eden. They are the tears of the children of Israel in bondage as they cried unto God in their affliction and slavery. They are indeed the tears of God's elect down through the centuries as they cried unto heaven. John wept audibly for the failure to find the Redeemer. The earth seemed to be left to its curse, consigned forever to death. How sad that apparently the sovereignty of God's earth should remain forever in the hands of Satan.

Then one of the elders encouraged John, "Weep not." Notice, it is now an individual who himself had known what it was to be regenerated in his own heart. His message continues, "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah; the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the scroll, and to loose its seven seals" (5:5). He would lift the mortgage and redeem Adam's fallen race.

"The Lion of the tribe of Judah" refers back to Genesis 49 when Jacob was dying. He had gathered his twelve sons and turned to the fourth boy, whose name was Judah, to make him a promise. He said, "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as an old lion. Who shall rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:8-10).

Shiloh refers to the Messiah. In the last chapter of the book of Revelation, Jesus said, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David" (22:16). Before David was, our Lord and Saviour has always been. John the Baptist testified, "This was He of whom I spoke, He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for He was before me" (John 1:15). That same subject is discussed by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew. He told the Pharisees gathered around Him, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then, doth David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? If David, then, call Him Lord, how is He his son?" (22:42, 43). These people couldn't answer Jesus a single word. He gave them that declaration quoted from Psalm 110. He is the root out of which David came into existence. But why isn't Christ thought of as the root of Abraham? Certainly it could have been. The same would be true of Moses or Elijah. David is chosen because he was preeminently the monarch. The kingship represents God's purposes for His Son on the earth. He is going to rule over the whole creation. Abraham is of the promise; Moses of the law; Elijah of the prophets. David is of the king! The kingdom belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and the offspring of David. This is the only One who can step up to the throne and from the open palm of God take the seven sealed scroll.

John gives us the fascinating picture, "And I beheld and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). This is also an interesting expression. It is filled with eternal and unfathomable meaning. The original word isn't for a grown animal but for a little pet lamb. In the passover feast of Israel the people were not to go out and slay just any lamb. The sacrifice was to be chosen carefully from the firstlings of the flock. It was to be selected for its beauty and
perfection. It was to be placed in the bosom of the family for four days, until the children loved it and looked upon it as a member of the family. It was identified with the household, loved, cuddled, petted and caressed. John saw the Lamb slain, which in the original means violently slain. It represents the blood sacrifice and the victim suffering on the altar. Jesus, as that little pet Lamb of God, bore the marks of violence on His cross. In His hands are the prints of the nails. In His side is the terrible spear thrust. All over His body are the signs of His sufferings. The Lamb John sees is standing with blood poured out onto the earth. Here He stands in the midst of the throne, preparing to receive the sovereignty of God's universe. It is contained in the seven sealed scroll. He has identified Himself with you and me as our Kinsman Redeemer. He stands to take the purchased possession and to cast out the dragon, the devil. He stands in the majesty of the Lion, yet in the meekness and yieldedness of the Lamb. Through the eternal ages we will see Him as our great Lord and Saviour.

In Revelation, beginning with chapter four, we have a wonderful study of prophecy in the future. The scroll which is in the hand of the One seated on the throne, has been written on both sides. It has been sealed very closely. In a very real sense this fifth chapter is pivotal in the book of Revelation. We must have a clear understanding of these verses or it will be difficult to understand the rest of the book.

In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel had a picture of a scroll that is written within and without. It was spread open before him. On the other hand, Daniel had a scroll which was tightly sealed. After his message had been delivered, the Lord told His servant, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (12:4). Daniel was filled with the wonder of his subject. He knew just enough to realize that he didn't understand the meaning of this amazing statement. He longed for the revelation of the meaning of his own prophecy. What a lesson on the inspiration of the Bible. God had spoken; the prophet had recorded; but he was dependent on the Holy Spirit for a knowledge of what had been written. We, too, are dependent upon the Holy Spirit in order to understand the Word of God.

One of God's mighty messengers in Revelation 5 now proclaims in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll, and to loose its seals?" (5:2). Without a doubt this was one of the angelic hosts of heaven. There was no one in the heavens, on the earth, nor under the earth who was able to open the scroll or to look upon it. There may be those who possess great wisdom, either angelic, human or satanic wisdom, but this avails nothing. The redemptive work of Christ contains the only key to prophetic problems; it is the only light for the future. Knowledge of the future is a very part of God. I wonder if we are concerned about the spiritual ignorance of people around us. Does it cause us to weep that people are in error because they don't know the Scriptures? Have we shed any tears because defeat comes to us through lack of Biblical knowledge? Only as we enter into this divine love can we be of any use in the building up of the saints. "Without tears the book of Revelation was not written; neither can it without these tears be understood." God is speaking here; He is unfolding deep Biblical truth. We need to shed a few tears realizing where the world is moving.

The end of John's weeping comes at the place where all tears are dried up. He was pointed to Christ, where tears are always turned to joy. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. He can prevail to open the scroll and its seven seals. Revelation is a book of symbolic language. John was told to see a Lion, but when he looked in the direction of the Lion, instead he saw a Lamb. At the end of chapter three we believe that the church is taken home to be with the Lord. John stands representative of believers in heaven looking back from the other side. While he is
up there something is about to happen on the earth. The Lord is about to pour out His righteous judgments. Earthly promises are now to be fulfilled, (Heavenly promises, given to the church, have already been fulfilled.) The Holy Spirit isn't talking about a spiritual people in chapter five, but rather the physical descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel. Every word in the Old Testament which speaks of a kingdom is the promise to Israel and not to the church. Christ's inheritance is not only the church, which is the pearl of great price, for which He sold everything that He had, but it also includes Israel. This is the treasure hidden in the field, which He purchased with His own blood and which He hid again. Without the fulfillment of all of the earthly promises made to Israel, the full redemption is not yet accomplished. Any attempt to spiritualize these promises, trying to apply them to the church, is doing violence to the Word of God. Our Lord is not a God of falsehood nor hypocrisy. Romans 11:29 tells us, "The gifts and the calling of God are without repentance." In this precise connection, the announcement of the certainty of His promises to be the physical descendants of Israel, God thus binds His promises to a literal fulfillment. In Revelation 5 the church is already out of the way. The Lord refers to things that pertain to Israel and the earth. This will be true to the end of the book, except when the church is brought into the picture toward the very end. Without the fulfillment of all of these earthly promises made to Israel the full redemption is not complete. The people of Israel will now come to the forefront because this relates to prophecy.

It is important to keep in mind that much of what takes place in chapter 5 of Revelation has to do with the earth and the tribulation period. It deals in focalized fashion with the people of Israel. Israel has been temporarily set to one side (Rom. 11:12-15). Jesus Christ is the only one who prevailed to open the scroll and the seven seals. This means that He is the true Overcomer. He prevailed at the cross and was victorious over sin and death. The Redeemer, through the sacrifice of Himself, fulfills all the promises given to us in Scripture. Our Lord was exalted by the Father because of His work at Calvary (Phil. 2:5-11). He left heaven's glory and humbled Himself to the death of the cross.

In Isaiah 53:12 we read, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He hath poured out His soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." This is a picture of our Saviour who comes to the forefront in virtue of this new power He won in His atonement. The time of His intercession for the sins of the church is over as we read in chapter 5. Here He is presented to begin His future prophetic work. With the marks of His death upon His resurrection body, Christ is seen here clearly by the apostle John. He has the symbols of government with the force and ability to execute decrees of God's righteous judgments. "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed" (I Sam. 2:10). This is the coming Messiah. The same symbol is found in the Psalms (89:24; 112:9, 10). The horn is the symbol of power and of government. Since the Lamb is seen with seven horns it means that the meek and lowly Jesus, represented by the Lamb, is to receive the full government of God to accomplish all the purposes which have been eternally determined.

Among all the animals of sacrifice which typify our Saviour, it is the Lamb in Revelation 5 which is chosen. Isn't that interesting? He is not seen as the dove, the oxen, the bullock, or the goat, but as the Lamb. This is the most fitting of all the sacrificial symbols to represent the holiness of the Lord. His righteousness and especially His patience in suffering are characteristic of a lamb. His submission to the Father's will is of a lamb, without blemish and without spot (I Peter 1:19). In a coming hour Jesus will come as the Judge of the nations breaking them into pieces. He will return vested with all the authority of the
almighty Creator, nevertheless acting in full harmony with all that He was when He was dying on the cross.

With the taking of the scroll, action is about to begin. Once more we insist upon the importance of Christ's position in this particular scene. He is walking in heaven and comes to the throne. He sits no longer as a mediator, but in that hour stands as a judge. When the great moment of praise shall have ceased, He will tear the seals from the scroll and He will precipitate the tribulation hour of which most of the book of Revelation has to speak. The kingdom age of Christ will then become unfurled and events will rapidly begin to come to pass.

Once more we must point out the fact that the scene in chapter 5 before the throne is a vision of that which is to take place in the future. It will be at the close of the church age, and prelude the beginning of the great tribulation period. If you understand this, then the fifth chapter, as well as the rest of Revelation, will begin to make real sense. You will see why certain things begin to take place. There are positive indications which show that the scene is still in the future. There are negative indications that the scene cannot possibly have taken place in past history. Jesus Christ is now at the right hand of the Father where He is interceding for those of us who are members of the body of Christ, His church.

In considering the picture in heaven of the One who sits upon the throne (5:1-10), Scripture makes it crystal clear that the Person in view is certainly the Lord Jesus Christ. He steps up to the throne, whereupon God Himself is seated, and He alone is worthy to take this book which is secured with seven seals on the front and on the back. We are told, "He hath prevailed" (v. 5). The Greek word is the one for victory. This reminds us that our Saviour is the conqueror. We know He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. He prevailed in the day of temptation as well as at the hour of Calvary. He prevailed when He broke the bonds of death and was raised from the grave. He prevailed when He ascended back into heaven, carrying captivity captive and giving gifts unto men. He prevails at this moment, as well as when He will open the seals in a coming hour, which may not be too far away.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb, which speaks of redemption by the blood atonement. Both of these symbols appear in the Bible. When Christ will step up to the throne and take from the hand of His Father the seven sealed book, it will be one of the greatest acts in all the story of God's creation. He will lift the title deeds of forfeiture to give back to us our lost inheritance. The answer to the prayers of all the saints throughout all the ages will be realized. The judgment of God upon sin, the devil, and death and the grave will be realized fully. This is no time for weeping by believers. Lift up your hearts and lift up your souls to behold this One who steps up to the throne to receive the seven sealed book. He is both the Lion and the Lamb.

All of creation breaks into exuberance and triumphant joy. I am sure that none of us can wait to join that heavenly chorus singing these incomparable, wonderful doxologies (5:9-14). The cherubim and the 24 elders lead off the worship. They are joined by the hosts of heaven, the angels. The number of them in the Greek is innumerable, thousands upon ten thousands multiplied by tens of thousands and thousands of thousands (5:11). Literally, the angelic inhabitants of heaven would probably number in the trillions. The paean of praise rolls on and on, extending wider and wider to everything God has created. They all join together in the wonderful psalm of adoration. Just consider, friend, you and I will be singing with them.

Following the beautiful scene in the throne room of heaven, reveling in the tremendous portrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb who had been slain from the foundation of the earth, the picture now changes. In the first eight verses of
chapter six things are dark and dismal. God is the Lord of hosts, and He portrays events as they are and as they will be. It is for the worldly optimists to speak words of peace when there is no peace; to paint rosy pictures of human nature and a family of nations, when God says the climax of all events will end in a tremendous conflagration. War and desolations are to be common to the end. False leaders may deceive, but Scripture unveils the future to us so that we can prepare ourselves and seek to win others to Christ.

In this sixth chapter we find the beginning of the casting out of the dynasties of evil. This is the destruction of the powers of darkness and the bringing in of perfect light, life, liberty and everlasting righteousness. These seven seals of the scroll in the Saviour's hand encompass all of the story of God from the rapture of the church until the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. These seven seals unveil the whole proceedings of the Almighty after God's people, the church, have been taken out of the way. The dire events continue until the redeemed come back with Christ, being given possession of God's wonderful inheritance. In the opening of the first seal there is heard thunder and the voice of one of the four living creatures saying, "Come." In the King James version the translation is "Come and see," as though it were addressed to the apostle John. This isn't the picture since John is already there looking. Here God is casting out the powers and principalities of darkness. When the cherubim say, "Come," it is addressed to one of the agencies by which the full course of history will proceed to its final climax (6:1). There come across the stage of human history horses and riders known as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. It would be impossible for us today to realize the awe and reverence with which a mideasterner looked upon the strength and power of a horse. Several examples in the Old Testament would be worth looking up and studying for an accurate view (Job 39:19-25; Zech. 6:1-7). These great animals represented to an oriental mind conquest and battle. The four horsemen of Revelation 6 proceed across the history of the world state at the command of the cherubim.

The first animal (v. 2) is a horse of victory and its color is white. He that sat upon the horse is a conqueror. This was a typical scene of a victor in early days. When our Lord Jesus Christ comes again out of heaven (as we see Him portrayed in the 19th chapter), He comes riding a white horse.

The interpretation of these events depends on the understanding of other parts of God's prophetic words. In any literal sense, they must be viewed as what will yet transpire in the future (1:19). It is very significant that the church, which is so prominent in chapters two and three, is not really mentioned again until chapter 22, at the end of the book. She is there portrayed as the wife of the Lamb at the close of the great tribulation. Nowhere in the scenes of earth, which describe the end time, is the church even suggested as involved in the struggle during the time of Tribulation. The events which we shall now see pictured in the seals, trumpets and bowl judgments are a concentrated prophecy of the last half of the seven years of the book of Daniel (9:27). This is designated as a time of wrath, constituting the introduction to the second coming of Christ to the earth again. Evidence for this is presented as this exposition unfolds itself. One cannot help but notice the remarkable similarity between the progress of chapter six as a whole in Revelation and the description which is given by Jesus of the end of the age in Matthew 24:4-31. In both of these passages you have (1) war, (2) famine, (3) death, (4) martyrdom, (5) the sun and moon darkened, stars fall from heaven, and (6) divine judgment. The general features of Matthew 24 are obviously quite parallel to the events of the book of Revelation beginning in chapter six.

When all of heaven falls down to worship the Lord (5:1-14) we notice that the 24
elders "having every one of them harps, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of saints," lead in the group. This is the climactic and most meaningful moment in all history. The Lamb of God is now invested with the Kingship of the universe. He is to bring back the inheritance of Adam's fallen race. The devil is totally defeated and God's final judgment begins on earth. The harps of the elders symbolize the sign of the prophet (I Samuel 10:5, 6; II Kings 3:15; I Chron. 25:1).

Additionally, each one of the 24 elders will also have a golden bowl full of incense. This represents the prayers of God's people, the saints. In the bowl are the intercessions, pleadings, burdens, and agonies of God's people throughout all the centuries of human time. Our prayers are never lost, but rather are gathered in heaven. It is a definite part of God's elective purpose that His children should pray. The effectiveness of prayer is this great final consummating moment. Every prayer of every faithful individual is brought anew and afresh before God. It is amazing to me to consider some of the people who stand in pulpits of our land declaring that the things spoken by the prophets are not to be fulfilled. How different is God from that. The Lord remembers every promise He ever made. In this great, final, climactic hour we see in Revelation He will bring to pass every promise given across the centuries of time.

Everywhere in the Word of God angels are absolutely unnumbered. No human could ever begin to count them. We notice that when the 24 elders sing, their praise is directly to the Lamb. The angels, however, in keeping with their inferior stations of service, speak about Him and not to Him. It is also very astonishing that angels, as a rule, never sing. At the birth of Jesus Scripture says the heavenly hosts were saying, "Glory to God in the highest." Thus, here in Revelation 5 the angels are not singing but "saying" with a loud voice (5:12). There is a reason the angels never sing. Music is made up of major and minor chords. The minor speak of the wretchedness of fallen creation. The angels of heaven did not fall and consequently know nothing about music. The major key represents redemption, and no provision was ever made for a single angel to be redeemed. No, singing is a singularly and distinctive privilege and blessing reserved for believers.

Dr. Anderson is Pastor of
Bethany Baptist Church,
West Covina, California.
Q. "In Revelation 5:6, 8 who are the four beasts and the four and twenty elders?"

A. Many Bible students believe these four "creatures" are angelic beings. There is no reason, however, that they might not very possibly be created and redeemed men. Notice that they sing the song, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation" (v. 9). No angel could ever say this. Redemption has never been provided for angels. Some scholars suggest they are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Revelation 4:7 describes them as appearing like a lion, a calf, a man, and a flying eagle. Throughout church history the gospels have been pictured by these four symbols. These four are frequently depicted in stained glass windows and represent the four writers. In actual fact, however, no one knows for sure who they are. This is true also of the 24 elders who might be made up of the 12 tribes of the Old Testament and the 12 apostles of the New. The fact is their identity is not important. This is the reason their names are not given. Their function is important since they lead in the worship by the redeemed of the Lamb of God. He is the focalized center of all worship and involvement.

Q. "Will the tabernacle in Jerusalem be built before the Tribulation period?"

A. Doubtless the correspondent would have in mind the Temple in this question. We believe we are living in such late times of the church age that it is possible to soon see certain signs. Remember, "coming events cast their shadows before them." For instance, we know clearly from the prophetic Scriptures that Israel will be in her land at the time of the Tribulation. The latter days of Israel are after the latter days of the church. The Jewish age was cut off by the cross (Daniel 9:24-27). That there will be in the time of the Tribulation a temple in Jerusalem is very clear from Daniel 9:27. The Roman leader will confirm a covenant with the Jews for seven years. But right in the midst of that time he's going to cause the sacrifices and familiar worship to cease. The same future picture is given in Matthew 24:15, "When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place." This is a definite reference to the temple. In II Thessalonians 2:4 we find that the man of sin "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Certainly he couldn't sit in a non-existent temple. There must be a physical building during the Tribulation. Chronologically it will be after the church is taken away. In God's own time all of prophecy will be fulfilled. All we see now, as it were, are certain lights on the horizon. No teacher of the Word of God can tell you just how many of them will have to converge before the end of the church age arrives. They all are marvelous indications of the Lord's grace verifying and confirming His truth even before we are taken to heaven in the rapture. If we understand the dimensions of the temple, as
given in the Old Testament and the historian Josephus' record of the temple of Herod, it certainly was broader than just the area now occupied by the Moslem's Mosque of Omar. The area there is very earthquake ridden. The Lord is going to shake the Mount of Olives when He touches down upon it. Let's also remember that according to rabbinic law, since another religion has used that site as its holy place, the area is now defiled. No orthodox Jew would ever go there to worship again. There should be great interest in all prophecy, including that which is yet to be fulfilled.

Q. "Who is the one riding on the white horse mentioned in Revelation 6:27?"

A. This occurs at the first of the opening of the seven-sealed book. John, writing by the Holy Spirit, says of him, "He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him, and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." There has been some confusion caused by those who have interpreted this rider to be the same one who is mentioned in 19:11-15. The clear definition of this rider is given to us, "His name is called the Word of God" (19:14). This could only describe our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter six the rider on the white horse is none other than the anti-christ. He goes forth to conquer during the Tribulation period. It is not correct to view this rider as typifying Christianity which supposedly in that day will go forth conquering and to conquer. Such would not fit in at all with the rest of the breaking of the seals when one considers it. The second seal will be war, the third, famine, and the fourth seal, death. These are the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Again, the first is the Christ-imitator. He will sit in the temple of God pretending himself to be God. Behind all of this is the judgment of God being wrought out upon a Christ-hating world.

Q. "Did Christ die spiritually before He died physically?"

A. Keep in mind that although the Lord Jesus Christ was one hundred percent Deity, He also was one hundred percent humanity. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Therefore, He never was dead spiritually until He went to the cross. This is not true of you and me. We are dead spiritually the minute we are born (Ephesians 2:1). This doesn't mean physical death. These people are still in the world (Eph. 2:2). We are born into this world physically alive but spiritually dead. We must make a strong contrast between our spiritual death and when spiritual death came to Christ. It never was His portion in eternity past; it never was His portion as He walked here marvelously on earth. Spiritual death only became His on the cross. Sin is the cause of it. Our Saviour was not implicated in sin at all. He never had any sin in Him, even on the cross. But on the cross He did have sin on Him, "For He hath made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21). God laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). Jesus was forsaken by the Father (Psalm 22:1) that you and I might never be forsaken. He bore the whole load, the total avalanche of our sin upon Himself at Calvary. The physical and spiritual death of Christ were so close that they doubtless happened simultaneously.

Q. "Where is the actual site of Calvary? The church of the Holy Sepulchre is inside the walls of the current city of Jerusalem. In Hebrews 13:12 we read that Jesus died outside the gate."

A. The edifice you have mentioned is a beautiful structure. It was built by the mother of Constantine in the fourth century A. D. She wanted to memorialize these sacred spots in as magnificent a manner as possible. The location, however, is hardly suitable to coincide with the Scripture accounts. No one knows for a certainty where Calvary is located. It would seem from many indications that it could well be the area known as Gordon's Tomb and Golgatha. This site is several hundred yards away from the Damascus gate, the present wall of the city.
Q. "Is baptism essential in the sight of God to complete forgiveness of sin?"

A. The matter of the forgiveness of sin is at the very heart of the Gospel. We do not believe that baptism has anything whatsoever to do with forgiveness of a person's sins. It is an outward sign to the world of an inward change of heart. We believe that baptism is a Christian or church ordinance. John 3:16 does not tell us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him and is baptized might be saved. Such would be baptismal regeneration. This is not taught in the Bible. Scripture verifies that it is only salvation by grace through faith plus nothing (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Q. "Before the Rapture is there going to be a large war in which Israel will be involved, or will Armageddon, that final war, be the only really big war involving them?"

A. First of all, no one knows just when the Rapture will take place. We do know there will be wars continuing until the Lord comes again. We also know that Israel will go through a very severe time of testing. There doesn't appear to be very much hope of any kind of permanent peace in the Middle East. It is the children of Ishmael versus the children of Isaac who are fighting. Both, of course, are the children of Abraham. The Jews, regardless of what sort of troubles they have now, shortly after the Rapture will experience the kind of persecution such as they have never known through the centuries (24:21). Still, there is a glorious day coming. After the Tribulation the Lord Jesus Christ comes and is the rightful ruler. All things will be made right and the Jews will have their proper place among the nations, being brought back into fellowship with Almighty God.

Q. "Is there any Scriptural authority whatsoever for the use of instrumental music in worship?"

A. There are some denominations which do not allow instrumental music in their worship services at all. There are many verses in Scripture which speak of the use of instruments such as the 150th Psalm. This is known as the "Hallelujah" Psalm. Everything in the world is ultimately made for the praise of God (Romans 11:36). Even the natural creation is the scaffolding for the Lord's glory. Yes, we encourage the use of instrumental music.

Q. "What is the meaning of the phrase, 'Verily, verily,' which the Lord Jesus used many times?"

A. Another translation has it, "Truly, truly." A modern-day colloquialism would put it, "I tell you for a fact," or "It's the truth." Being used twice means added emphasis. It is put in the strongest possible way so that we can depend entirely on the truthfulness of what follows.

Q. "Does Exodus 20:7 refer to swearing?"

A. Yes, it certainly does, and unfortunately it is taken all too lightly today. Especially on television we find a relaxing of the rules of swearing. A Christian should be known by different speech. None of us was born saved; we were born again saved. Be sure to watch your language. Swearing means taking the name of God for other purposes than that of worship.

Q. "At the Rapture, many will be left behind who may have thought they were following Christ. Do we have a responsibility to these people? Shouldn't we leave a Bible and a handwritten message behind for them to read?"
A. Our primary responsibility toward these people is now, although there's certainly nothing wrong with leaving whatever message we feel might be pertinent for them. The event of the Rapture itself will be a strong testimony for those who are left behind. There is absolutely nothing wrong with leaving a Bible or a note for loved ones, so long as we do all in our power now to win them to Christ.

Q. "Is I John 5:7 in the original text? Can you recommend other verses to be used with people who do not believe that Christ is one with God?"

A. No manuscript authority believes that I John 5:7 was in the original text, nor can it be documented as ever appearing in the inspired Word. It reads, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." This is a wonderful testimony which may well be the reason it was introduced by one of the godly individuals who was copying the Scriptures centuries ago. This, however, is certainly not the only passage teaching that Christ is one with God. Consider just a few of these verses. John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." These are accurate expressions of Deity. John 1:18 points out, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). The Father and the Son are not the same person. They are one substance of Deity, one substance divine. Also, consider Matthew 28:19, "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This passage doesn't say "names." That's not an oversight but rather is purposeful. It was done intentionally to emphasize that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God. Three persons, yes, but no more than one God.

Q. "Can you explain the word 'perish' as it is used in John 3:16 and other passages?"

A. The specific passage about which you have asked is the golden text of Scripture. In the original Greek the word translated literally means "marred" or "lost." It does not mean to annihilate or to cease to be. There is a state of conscious suffering which will continue eternally. It is the inevitable result of sin. It is tragic that there are so many people, including preachers, who try to ignore this important word, or who seek to explain it away. "Perish" is one of the most awful words to contemplate in its concept.

Q. "What is meant by I Corinthians 13:8?"

A. This verse finds its context in the great love chapter of the New Testament. The Romans magnified power, the Greeks extolled wisdom, but the Apostle Paul under the Spirit of God showed forth for all mankind the glories of love. This is true love, "agape," which is deep and meaningful. It is an intelligent love, self-effacing, and self-sacrificing. It is the same word used in I John 4:8 and 4:16 of the love of God. God is love. The passage about which you have asked avows, "Love never faileth." There will never be a time when love is not needed. "But whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away." The meaning of "prophecy" here refers to the same which states, "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (I Cor. 14:3). There will be no need for teaching in heaven, it shall be done away with. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." "Done away," "cease," and "vanish" are not all the same word. As to tongues, you may have reference to the charismatic furor that seems to be so prevalent. Paul is simply showing the difference between what is permanent and what is transitory. Tongues faded out because they were given for evidential value.
People who came into the early church could see this tremendous revolutionary change from Old Testament Judaism into New Testament Messianic faith. The tongues here are specific languages, not simply ecstatic utterances. Where did languages first start? God had a means of communicating with Adam, and Adam had a means of communicating with his children and wife. The Lord gave them a language. There were not several but only one tongue (Genesis 11:1). It was because of sin at the tower of Babel that the diversified languages of the world were introduced. Men somehow foolishly pride themselves on multiplicity of language. They think this is an evidence of the genius of the human race. Don't you believe it! It is rather evidence par excellence of what happened when man sinned. When we are ushered into heaven we will again only speak one language. No one knows specifically what that will be.

Q. "What does the Bible have to say about reincarnation?"

A. It absolutely teaches against any such view of the future. Pagan religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism believe in reincarnation. We have a far greater eternity to which to look forward than any view of this type. Read such passages as I Cor. 15:51-58 and I Thess. 4:13-18. How foolish it is to think that we are to be reincarnated into some animal or even into another human being. No, when a person dies, if he is saved he goes to be with the Lord, ultimately to receive his resurrection body, and to be with Christ forever. The Bible is just as explicit stating that the unsaved, when they die, will not be reincarnated but instead their souls go to hades at this moment and ultimately they will be tried at the White Throne Judgment and cast into the lake of fire.