

January - March 2012

ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

WHAT ETERNITY HOLDS FOR YOU?



- WHAT ETERNITY HOLDS FOR YOU ?
- REJOICING AT GOD'S FESTIVAL
- DO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?
- THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

Live a Life of Truth

Lies, deceit, hypocrisy. These have become so commonplace in our time that they are accepted as "normal". Politicians are accepted to be liars, law enforcers are accepted as extortioners, and it is "extraordinary" when they are not. This is what our society has become, corruption is rampant in all levels.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that this is exactly what the world will be like in the latter days. But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come; for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Now why would the apostle Paul advise young Timothy to stay away from people who lives a corrupt way of life? Quite simple, corruption spreads and seeps into whomever it comes in contact with. One rotten apple in a basket is all it takes to cause rotteness to the rest of the apples.

In our generation, one of the easiest and often viewed as a harmless practice is telling a lie. When it doesn't harm anyone physically, its fine. Is it? The sad thing is that while it may appear to be harmless on certain occasions, he who forms a habit of lying will eventually harm himself and those around him. And from Gods perspective, a liar is evil enough that he who lies and practices it will not be allowed entry into His Kingdom (Revelation 22:15).

A liar is brother to a thief. Ask a thief if he stole something and he is likely to say "No, I didnt..." Of course, why would he confess? A thief will be keeping things that he stole and he is never going to admit that they are stolen. He will be even go so far as convincing himself and those around him that he owns the things he stole. The sad thing when one lies, is that one will have to support the lie with another lie, and more lies. A thief will never enter the kingdom of God just like his brother who is a liar (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Liars and thieves are evil people, their destiny is the lake of fire. For those of us who desires to live forever, we'd best stay away from such people and to start living a life built on the truth.

God dislikes thieves and liars. The apostle Paul knows this, thus, he encouraged the Philippians: Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard in me these do, and the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9). Tell the truth, avoid lies, in so doing, you will build Gods trust.

Rene D. Corpuz

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Publisher : Rene D. Corpuz
Editor-in-Chief : Eleno S. Mellomida
Editorial Staff : Winston S. Co
 Rene D. Corpuz
 Eleno S. Mellomida
 Melchor P. Arcinas
 Marilou G. Sanchez

Contributing Writers : Ferdie S. Padilla
Layout : Mel Joseph S. Diegor

PHILIPPINES

Church of God International, P.O. Box 2450
 MCPO Makati City, Metro Manila 1264 Philippines
 Phone : [632] 995-0294 Fax : [632] 995-0577
 Website : <http://www.cgiphilis.org>
 E-mail : info@cgiphilis.org
 Mobile : [63917] 811-6365

UNITED STATES

Church of God International
 P.O. Box 2525 Tyler, TX 75710
 Phone : [903] 939-2929
 Website : <http://www.cgi.org>
 E-mail : info@cgi.org

AUSTRALIA

Church of God International
 P.O. Box 171 Boonah, QLD 4310
 Phone : 011-61-7-5463-2949
 E-mail : h-thaupt@bigpond.com

CANADA

Church of God International, 1299 Oxford St. East
 P.O. Box 33034 London, Ontario N5Y 6L4
 Phone : [519] 741-0455
 Website : <http://www.cgicanada.org>
 E-mail : jphncolish@rogers.com

JAMAICA

Church of God International,
 P.O. Box 776 Kingston 19 Jamaica
 Phone : 1-876-925-2260

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WHAT ETERNITY HOLDS FOR YOU?

By Winston S. Co

ARE YOU READY TO SEE AND HEAR THE WONDERFUL TRUTH
ON THE PURPOSE OF THE CREATION AND OF THE PROMISE OF EVERLASTING LIFE?

The Bible tells us that God will grant eternal life and immortality to the righteous (Rom. 2:7) It follows then that the saints will continue to live forever..... for all eternity. Now, if the saints will live forever, what will they do with the endless time inherent with their status? Can we know?

The human mind, with its limited comprehension of things beyond the physical realm, has difficulty grasping and comprehending what it means to be in such a condition - living an eternal life. Thus, speculations which are merely based on human perception abound.

The only impeccable source of information about the eternal state is the Eternal God as the scripture says; "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure. Your throne was

established long ago; you are from all eternity" (Psalm 93:1-2). The prophet Isaiah wrote: "Thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity..." (Isaiah 57:15). Therefore, only God can make known what eternity is all about.

What Is Eternity?

Humans exist in a dimension bound by space and time. Eternity, which is synonymous to infinite, is too complex a concept to grasp and appreciate. We do know that God is eternal, and that eternal simply means being indeterminable by time. The scripture says so in 2 Peter 3:10; "for God a thousand years is just like a day." This passage though in no way portrays mathematical equivalence about time, it merely connotes that to God, time is indefinite; He has all of it, inexhaustibly.

Time, in science, is reckoned by changes in motion and event; a day is comprised of 24 hours, and 365 days constitute a year. We reckon our time matrix by the rotation of the earth around the sun. If the universe stood still, time would cease; to conceive how time relates to eternity is beyond the scope of science and human imagination. The human mind can be easily baffled and awed that there are 300 sextillions stars in the known universe which is also believed to be already 15 billion years old; even our modest earth is about 4.5 billion years old. Although these numbers may seem mind-boggling, yet they are still finite. Eternity is infinity and there is no way a human mind can comprehend that.

The words "eternal" and "everlasting" are used interchangeably; both can come from the same Greek work "aion" translated from the Hebrew word "olam." Thus, it is important to consider the context in which they were used and translated.

There is a distinction worth noting between the words eternal and everlasting. Everlasting is not synonymous to eternal. Everlasting suggests a duration that lasts forever - this period covers a beginning in time but without an ending. On the other hand, eternal connotes duration without beginning and without ending.

God alone is eternal. This is why He is called Eternal God (Genesis 21:33). The bible describes God as from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 90:2), and without beginning of days, nor end of life.

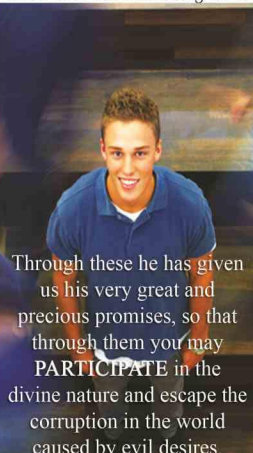
All other created beings are

more appropriately described as everlasting - signifying that an entity has a beginning, but has no ending. What is everlasting life like then? Everlasting life connotes life that does not cease; that is, to live henceforth and forever. Christians like us do have a beginning - our birth as humans- and by faith we CAN attain everlasting life; but how will this happen? And what is the process?

Attain Everlasting Life

How can mere mortal beings who are subject to wear and decay attain everlasting life? Mankind can hardly live up to 100 years old even with stupendous advancement in science and medicine. Why, even at the best of conditions mankind cannot even pass the thousand-year mark. This physical body is not designed to dwell in eternity.

In the book of John 5:24-29, Jesus said that everlasting life is



Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may PARTICIPATE in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2 Peter 1:4

the reward of the righteous and as such, everlasting life will be given at the time of resurrection. But before we can dwell in eternity, our physical composition has to change first - and this change will happen at the time of the resurrection. Paul eloquently declared this fact in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.

The physical body of flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; to dwell in eternity, one must be clothed and changed to a spiritual body - a body that is suitable to live in the spiritual realm- in eternity; and live forever.

How does this spiritual body look like, one may ask? Daniel knew and wrote the answer in Daniel 12:3. Jesus affirmed it in Matthew 13:43 and further explained it in John 3:5-8, saying that the saints born of the spirit are not part of the physical dimension that we know.

Paul said that our lowly bodies must be transformed into glorious bodies like that of Christ (Philippians 3:21). The apostle Peter categorically states that the glorified body is a participation of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Are we now starting to comprehend the enormity of the declaration? We are to participate in the divine nature with a glorified body similar to that of Christ and this glorified spiritual body will dwell in eternity. And what a promise this is!

Purpose of Eternal Life

What is it then like to live forever? What is the big idea of endless time? Is there meaning to an infinite life? What is the purpose of eternity? What goal would there possibly be? If there is nothing to aim for, what sense would there be to an everlasting life?

We seek eternity because God has put this hope in our hearts. It is God's desire that we aspire for it and He wants us to be constantly aware of it (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Eternity is not just a figment of man's imagination. Eternity is a huge reality that we must consider as a finite life is meaningless as King Solomon declared. The only thing that ever matters is life everlasting.

People associate eternity with idyllic bliss in idleness – as in enjoying a grand retirement for the rest of eternity. Would you like to be in a state of eternal idleness without meaning and purpose? No one would! People of substance do not go into retirement. Even when people retire, they keep themselves busy through means outside of business. Boredom and dullness can be worse than death. Living a trillion years in complete idleness and boredom cannot possibly be a gift from a loving God!

The Bible talks about eternity with excitement and anticipation - an everlasting life filled with meaning, purpose and glory. What eternity holds for us is something beyond human expectation. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; "that no man has yet comprehended what God has prepared for those who love Him." But now, it has been revealed to the church.

Are you ready to see and hear the wonderful truth on the purpose of the creation and of the promise of everlasting life? It has always been God's plan and wish to give you eternal life. It is the greatest gift only an ever living God can possibly grant.

Your Awesome Destiny

What will our stature be in eternity? Most Christians believe that to become spirit being is to become like angels. Although angels are spirit beings, they are created for a specific purpose; they are created as ministering spirits. The word *angel* means *messenger* and that is what they are and what they were created for. The Bible clearly says that the saints will not become angels in heaven. God has prepared something better and bigger for them.

The Book of Hebrews states that the world to come, referring to the future, will not be subjected to the angels, but to the saints who are to become sons and children of God (Hebrews 2:5-17). We will become a member of the divine family with Jesus Christ as our elder brother; Paul made it even clearer in Romans 8:14-17. We will be sons of God, heirs and co-heirs of Christ. For this reason, we can call God, our Father!

As Paul said in Galatians 4:1-7, we are indeed sons and heirs of God. Heirs of God mean inheritors of God's estate; co-heirs with Christ mean we own what Christ owns. Can you understand what this means? Apostle John in 1 John 3:1-3 made it crystal clear, without any doubt, that we are indeed literal sons of God with Jesus Christ as our elder brother. Will we be like angels? Definitely not! We are the Sons of God! Yes, you were created for this very purpose - to become a son and a daughter of

God. Now, consider what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:3-6. Make no mistake, the abundant Scriptures confirm this magnificent truth that we are the sons and children of God, and co-heirs of Christ - and for this very purpose we are created.

Excitement for All Eternity

What does eternity hold for the sons of God? After we have become spirit beings, and members of the divine family, dwelling forever in eternity - what are we supposed to do? Paul provided a hint of what the children of God would do in eternity. He declared in Romans 8:18-23 that the creation is in a frustrated state; meaning it is void, empty and lifeless. The universe is in a frustrated state because God who created it made it so. The whole creation now waits for the revealing of the sons of God. They are the ones whom God will use to beautify, glorify and bring life to the vast creation. This is the beginning of the eternal state for all the saved.

My dear friends, there will never be any dull moments in eternity. Your days will be filled with meaning and purpose. You will have powers and responsibilities beyond your imagination. As sons of God, you will continually do the will of the Father.

What a glorious time! What a wondrous truth! To live in an everlasting age and to accomplish much - for all eternity.

Do you now know what eternity holds for you? **AG**

The whole creation now waits for the revealing
of the sons of God.

[Romans 8:18-23]

Rejoicing at God's Festival

Now, there is no doubt
the Feast of Tabernacles
stands out as the
happiest time of the year
for God's people.

By Eleno S. Mellomida

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles : and they shall not appear before the LORD empty" (Deut. 16:16). The Feast of Tabernacles is one of the three and the third among the "times" that God commanded His people to observe; covered within the Feast of Tabernacles season are four Holy Days, namely the Feast of Trumpets, The Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles itself, and the Last Great Day.

By biblical reckoning, all these fall in the seventh month (Lev. 23:24-36). In its entirety, this season is labeled as the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus, all the other three festivals are covered by name only, even though each one has its separate meaning with regard to God's plan for mankind. In all probability, this is because out of the four festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles requires longer days to celebrate. It kind of "dominates" the entire season, but it doesn't follow that it is more important than the rest of the Holy Days "covered" by its name. Nowhere can you find a command that it should be accorded extra preference compared with the other holy days.

Now, there is no doubt the Feast of Tabernacles stands out as the happiest time of the year for God's people. The command to rejoice is part of the instruction on how to observe it. God's people will make extra preparation for this event. This is in anticipation of the grand fellowshiping as well as the other activities that are being planned for it. The practice to "highly regard" the Feast of Tabernacles is commonly observed by all churches of

God regardless of organizational affiliation. And this is easily understandable through the preparatory activities being planned for the next feast immediately after its celebration, and even during the festival itself.

The Other Holy Days

Some holy days seem to have lesser impact on God's people. One example is the Day of Atonement. Some think "lightly" of this festival. Others consider it "burdensome". By its nature, it is indeed taxing and burdensome considering the unusual physical constraints and inconveniences it entails. Abstaining from food and water for 24 long hours is exhausting and strenuous. But if we go by God's instructions, it "outweighs" the rest of the Holy Days in terms of emphasis God made on how it should be kept.

Notice: "And the LORD speak unto Moses, saying, Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people. Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be unto you a Sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your Sabbath" (Leviticus 23:26-32).

Notice carefully that God took

so much time to emphasize the command. More than that, it is the only festival where God directly pronounced a death penalty upon those who will refuse to strictly observe it. That does not mean however that the other festivals do not constitute penalties if violated. The Day of Atonement carries a bold warning which cannot be overemphasized.

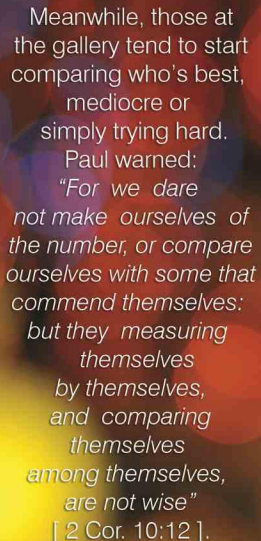
Guarding Attitudes

Always we get excited with the feast and make extra preparations for it. Somehow, in the course of these preparations and activities we encounter clash of opinions and as a result develop attitudes that somehow do not reflect what the millennium stands for. Some people ruin their celebration because of disagreement in their presentation. Some become vain in their quest to "serve", while others unknowingly tend to popularize themselves through their presentation. Meanwhile, those at the gallery tend to start comparing who's best, mediocre or simply trying hard. Paul warned: "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12).

One of the upcoming events pictured in the Day of Atonement is the binding of Satan; since he is no longer around to sow his diabolic influences, his attributes therefore are supposed to be non-existent already during the millennium. Incidentally, the millennium is being pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles, and if we still succumb to Satan's ways during the feast days, we are in a way symbolically patronizing his traits even at a time when we are

supposedly ruling with Christ. Quite absurd, don't you think?

A competitive spirit has no place in God's kingdom. James wrote: "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable,



Meanwhile, those at the gallery tend to start comparing who's best, mediocre or simply trying hard. Paul warned: "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" [2 Cor. 10:12].

gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:13-18).

Celebrate In a Temporary Dwelling

How then does the Feast of Tabernacles differ from the rests of the holy days? The truth is, the only difference lies in the geographical aspect of the festival. God's people are advised to temporarily move out of their homes and celebrate the feast in a temporary dwelling in line with the following command: "And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. **Ye shall dwell in booths seven days**; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths" (Lev. 23:41-42).

At present, following the "binding and loosing" principle laid out in the scriptures (Mat. 18:18-20), those who are tasked to organize the festival activities are to find a suitable location where the convenience of the majority of the members are primarily taken into consideration. Church members, together with their families are supposed to live in accommodations that symbolize temporariness. It is a reminder of the temporariness of life. God is like saying, as He did to Israel that "stay here for a while until I will bring you to your permanent dwelling", which is the promise land. Notice: "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (v-43).

The wilderness, where the temporary tents are supposed to

be "built", represents the world we live in. Hebrews 11:13 says, "These all died by way of faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off. And they were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that **they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**" Referring to His followers, Jesus said, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). The apostle John added: "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever. And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1John 2:15-17).

The physical earth will not vanish or evaporate. It is the system which is highly influenced by Satan that will be changed instead; it will be replaced by God's righteous system of governance which Jesus Himself will implement at His second coming. The resurrected saints will likewise rule under Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:4, 6); and peace, prosperity and happiness will be finally enjoyed by every citizen who will submit to this kingdom. Unlike all worldly kingdoms which rise and fall, the kingdom of God will stand forever. Listen: "And the seventh angel sounded. And there were great voices in Heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ. And He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Man's dream for a utopian era will ultimately find fulfillment; not out of his own initiative but by God who will start imposing His will so that

mankind will no longer live in misery and insecurity. (For a thorough understanding of this subject request for a free copy of the booklet: *"Where will the Millennium be Spent?"*)

A "Bothersome" Irony

Since the Feast of Tabernacles carries with it the command to live in temporary dwellings - dwellings built out of cheap materials which can be easily left behind because of its lack of value, does it follow then that convenient housing should not be the main consideration during the feast? Questions have been raised why in most cases our temporary dwellings do not exactly represent temporariness. Sometimes they are even more luxurious than our permanent homes. This practice has been adopted ever since by all churches of God. We try to choose the best accommodation possible and book it ahead of time. How then do we reconcile our traditional way of



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keeping the feast? Is it impossible to keep the feast, according to God's instructions to live in booths in the 21st century setting? How do we "justify" our current way of observing it?

John tells us how we can apply it in our everyday life instead. It is more than abandoning our homes. It has everything to do with how we look at the world and its present system. Are you still very much attached to the ways of this world rather than longing for its complete overhaul or total dismantling of its system? Earlier, the apostle John admonished us to refrain from "planting our feet" in this world. The foundations thereof are brittle. It is bound to collapse, and collapse it will upon Jesus' return (1 John 2:15-17). In short, there is a permanent and lasting dwelling place which God has prepared for the faithful.

The apostle Peter added: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. And the earth and the works in it will be burned up. Then, all these things being about to be dissolved, what sort ought you to be in holy behavior and godliness, looking for and rushing the coming of the Day of God, on account of which the heavens, being on fire, will melt away, and the elements will melt, burning with heat? But according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking for these things, be diligent, spotless, and without blemish, to be found by Him in peace" (2 Peter 3:10-14).

The Temporary Dwelling

Leaving your residential homes in favor of a temporary dwelling has no impact on real Christianity. They are immaterial. The spiritual implication supersedes the structural requirement. The willingness to

abandon" our present dwelling places and move in to a temporary dwelling for eight (8) days should be understood in the light of our firm resolve to view this world as a temporary dwelling. If all our efforts are largely dominated by worldly pursuits (Mat. 13:22), (wealth, fame and glory today - come what may in whatever way!), then we have not practically left our permanent dwelling place even if we are at the feast site for eight days.

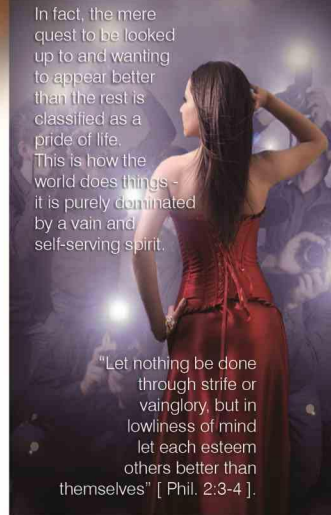
In fact, the mere quest to be looked up to and wanting to appear better than the rest is classified as a pride of life. This is how the world does things - it is purely dominated by a vain and self-serving spirit. Notice: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3-4).

The FOT as Temporary

The Feast of Tabernacles, which is also a shadow of the millennium, represents temporariness. By and of itself, the Millennium is still temporary. You will notice that the millennium, a thousand year - reign of Jesus and the saints, is not the "ultimate longing" that the heroes of the Bible were looking forward to. Referring to the patriarch Abraham, the writer of Hebrews said: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: **For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God...** But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: **for He (God) hath prepared for them a city** (Hebrews 11:9, 10, 16).

Abraham and the rest of the men and women of faith are looking to a city that is built NOT with human hands, but by God Himself. No physical human being will be there. Paul clearly said "flesh and blood

In fact, the mere quest to be looked up to and wanting to appear better than the rest is classified as a pride of life. This is how the world does things - it is purely dominated by a vain and self-serving spirit.



"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves" [Phil. 2:3-4].

cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50); And Jesus affirmed that "unless one is born of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

In contrast, the millennium is dominantly populated by mortals – the ones *left behind*, the survivors of the horrifying events leading to Jesus' second coming; it is merely a portion of a **time** run and governed by the God family. Most of the builders in the millennium are mortals under the supervision of the resurrected saints. In fact, the Feast of Tabernacles, which represents temporariness, will still be observed at that time; Zechariah 14 says so. People will be made aware of their temporary existence - they too will be looking forward to the time that Christians today are looking forward to - their final dwelling place as immortals; the city which God Himself built – the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, the final abode of the saints (Rev. 21).

The Essentials of the Feast

Is there anything more important during this festival other than merriment and rejoicing? What are

are the more important reasons to be joyful on this occasion? Remember, the rejoicing is not exclusively commanded during the feast of tabernacles only. God commanded His people to rejoice in all of His feast days (Deut. 16:11,13,15). Let's visit additional instructions which are not recorded in Leviticus 23:39-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13-16. Recall that the four festivals within the Feast of Tabernacles season fall in the seventh month.

The last part of Nehemiah 7:73 says: "...and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities." Chapter 8 reads: "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law".

And Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest, and the Levites who taught the people said: This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved... And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions,

and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written".

"So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner (Nehemiah 8:1-18).

Preparing for the Feast

Clearly, their rejoicing revolves around the reading and understanding of God's laws being expounded by His servants during the entire duration of the festivals covered within the feast of tabernacles season.

So, what are we supposed to prioritize during the Feast of Tabernacles? In retrospect, with all

God commanded His people to rejoice in all of His feast days

[Deuteronomy 16:11,13,15]

the plans and activities that crowded our schedules, did we take time for the more important aspects of the feast? Prayer, how often? Attendance and attentiveness, how diligent? These are the main activities that make our celebration joyful and complete. If we have prioritized what needs to be done first and foremost, then we truly have kept it, not only in the letter but in the spirit according to God's explicit instructions. And if wanting, then we know now how to keep the coming feast in 2012. **AG**

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*"Good Master, what good thing shall I do,
that I may have eternal life?"*

[Matthew 19:16]

DO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?

By Rene D. Corpuz

Deep in the recesses of our minds, many of us often wish and desire that our human lives would never end. Not surprisingly, such thought is common to us all, as if it was programmed there so that we would eventually find ourselves looking for something, or Someone, who can give us life beyond this mortal life. It is that desire that will lead us to the doorsteps of the One who can give us that life; it is that desire to survive that will lead us to our destiny.

The Reality of Life

Generally, there are two types of people in this world; those who have resigned their fate to oblivion, believing that life is only as far as their mortal, physical bodies will take them; and those who look forward to something greater beyond this life.

People who look forward to something beyond are those with many different ideas, perspectives, and theories of how to attain or obtain such a hope. Some may even attempt to indefinitely extend their degenerating physical bodies through scientific means. Most of us though place our hopes toward what our hearts are naturally born with - the inclination to seek that "higher power" which brought us into existence. Life could have only come to existence when brought about by the One already in existence. Even as babies naturally develop an instinctive attachment and a bond to the parents that brought them into this world, it is also our natural desire that our hearts seek the One that

brought us into existence. People who read and understand what the Bible says are the most fortunate; they have found the Creator while the rest of the world remains in darkness. In the pages of the Bible, we have found the Creator - the Source and Giver of Life.

Finding the Source and the Giver of Life, however is but a beginning. In the Bible, we find a very familiar question: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16).

Whether the Bible is reliable or not, is a discussion we can have some other time, but for now let me tell you this: the Bible gives us the answers to life's most important and significant questions. It also gives us the evidence to support the question: "Can we live forever here on earth?" The answer is a resounding "Yes! We can!" And the proof is embodied in the very personal experience of the very Son of God - His own death and resurrection to immortality.

What was the answer given to the young man who asked the question? He was told: Keep the commandments. "Is that it," he asked? "I've done all that. Is there anything else?" And herein lies the true answer to the question, there is much more. It's not quite enough to simply keep the commandments and think that we're set for eternity.

Read the entire discussion in Matthew 19:17-26.

Did you notice something noteworthy in what Jesus told His disciples? Eternal life and entering

the Kingdom of God are closely tied to each other. You can't have one without being "part" of the other. This is significant. You have to be part of the Kingdom if you are to be given immortality.

There shall be no "rogue immortal beings" in God's kingdom, and it is not in God's plan either to give immortality to someone who prefers to be "by himself". It doesn't work that way. If you desire to receive immortality, you need to freely desire to be a part of the Kingdom of God, you have to be a part of God's family.

Why do you think we were born into a human family, with its natural bonds, bound by blood? The reason is simple, and the lesson is clear; we are being shown from the very day that we were born, that we are always destined to be a part of a family that we have naturally loved from the beginning. You are either one of the Family of God to be given immortality and live forever, OR you are not, and therefore perish.

In Ephesians 1:3-14, the apostle Paul makes it very clear that God's plan from the very start is for us to become members of His Family. God prepared us in advance by being born into a human family which is bound by love, trust, faithfulness and commitment so that when we mature and come of age, we would fully understand that these shall be the same primary attributes of the future Family that we shall become part of. Ephesians 1:3 to 14 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the

heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory. [Ephesians 1:3-14]

The Price of Eternity

If becoming immortal means having to enter the Kingdom of God, how then can we enter it?

The apostle Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor will the corruptible inherit incorruption". Flesh and blood is corruptible, but the Kingdom of God is incorruptible. So how do we solve the dilemma? Paul continues, "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on

immortality" (v. 53).

Naturally, the next logical question would be: what do we need to do so that we can be transformed from this corruptible flesh into an incorruptible one?

In John 3:3, 5, we are given two simple conditions: We need to be born of water, and then born of the Spirit. Most Christians understand that being born of water represents baptism, and being born (or begotten) of the Spirit represents the infusion of and a resurrection by the Holy Spirit.

What most Christians do not seem to understand, however, is that baptism is not just about getting wet, and being covered with a body of water symbolizing the death of the old person. Immersion in the watery graves is only half of the ceremony. The symbolic rising from the waters of baptism, represents what we should do next – to live a godly life; "we also should walk in the newness of life..." (Romans 6:4). We need to make some real changes in our lives. We need to dispose of our old ways of life, of our unpleasant and sordid habits. If I may so emphasize, this is a significant half of the condition that we must be "born of water". Unless we make some significant and real changes in the way we live our lives, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself begins His preaching with "...the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1, 15, New King James Version).

In the Book of Psalms, there is an interesting song that David composed:

LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach

IF BECOMING IMMORTAL MEANS HAVING TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD, HOW THEN CAN WE ENTER IT?

against his neighbour.

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.

He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved. (Psalms 15:1-5, King James Version).

The tabernacle represents the Temple, and holy hill represents the Kingdom of God. Psalms 15 essentially tells us that our conduct, direction in life, our actions, words and thoughts have a significant bearing on whether we can enter the kingdom or be out of it. Backbiters, those who speak evil of others, and talebearers, have no place in the Kingdom. There are numerous scriptures where God, through the Writings of the Prophets and King Solomon, expressed displeasure against such practice or conduct (Leviticus 19:16, Proverbs 11:13, Proverbs 18:8, Proverbs 20:19, Proverbs 26:20, Proverbs 26:22.) It is intriguing that Satan, who is also described as a "devil", a "diabolos" in its Greek form, means a false accuser, or a slanderer.

Even as there are two sides to baptism, yet baptism is only half of the equation itself. We also need to be born, or in this particular instance, begotten, through the infusion God's Holy Spirit, and eventually be "born" through it. Is it possible for individuals to have gone through the waters of baptism and yet really "baptized" in the authority of the Lord? Is it possible to have gone through the waters of baptism properly and NOT receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Yes, it is.

In Acts 19:1-7, Paul encountered believers who were familiar with and were baptized by the baptism of John; yet they had to be baptized again in the name of the Lord Jesus, and after having laid hands on (an act of separation and presenting them to God the Father), were given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is a correct and a wrong form of baptism. The correct form is a person's full immersion in the water representing his symbolic burial; every other form is wrong. There is also a God-recognized authority behind the baptism that leads to the receiving of the Holy Spirit. While the baptism of John is in its correct form, it is not the kind that God recognizes as part of the process of the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Thus, those who went through the baptism of John needed to be re-baptized, under the name and authority of the Lord Jesus. Another interesting note is that even when the baptism is done in the authority of the Lord, an important part of the ceremony is the laying-on of hands of an ordained servant of God (Acts 8:12-17).

"But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had

simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is important and crucial to entering the Kingdom. It is our guarantee of being redeemed in due time (Ephesians 4:30, Romans 8:11).

These two conditions set by Jesus - that we must go through the waters of baptism, and then be filled with the Holy Spirit - are necessary requisites if we are to live forever and enter the Kingdom of God.

Cost of Discipleship

In order to be called or to consider yourself a Christian, one has to make a conscious choice to take the path or the life of a Christian, and not merely because one was born in a Christian home. To become a Christian is by choice, not by birth. It is a choice made by a "mature individual" who is willing to take the risks involved in being a Christian; to commit to make the changes in his life that God finds pleasing and acceptable. God needs to be sure that a person given the gift of immortality can be trusted to wield such enormous responsibility.

What Jesus requires of us He made plain and clear by what He told the disciples in Luke 14:26-33:

1. We must be willing and determined to leave everyone and everything behind when called upon (verse 26, 33; Mark 10:29-30).
2. We must be prepared and ready to undergo trials, tests, sufferings that will make the necessary changes in our flawed character into what God expects of us (verse 27, James 1:2-4, 2 Peter 1:4-11).
3. We must be determined to make the commitment to never look back and finish what we started (verses 28-30).

This is the price we have to pay: We need to fully commit ourselves to see it through till the end. Unless we are willing to make such sacrifices, the advice of the Lord is, better not be a Christian, BUT if we are determined, He also makes a promise to be with us till the end (Matthew 28:20).

To make a commitment is very much like entering into a covenant

with God, and in its spiritual sense, we are indeed entering into a covenant. The covenant is expressed by God in its very essence in Revelation 21:5-8, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son". Jesus essentially made the same promise (Mark 10:29-30). If you have noticed, you will not receive "eternal life" only, but along with it, you will become part of a Family.

A Covenant is a contract, an agreement between two or more parties; it has terms, conditions and corresponding payments or rewards, and a period of effectivity. A very important and binding part of the contract is the signatures of the contracting parties, and in its spiritual context, our signature is our going through the waters of baptism, while God's signature is the infusion of the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands is not part of our signature, it is God's. The administering servant or minister serves and acts in behalf of God - he does not do it on his own authority. And once we have sealed the terms of the contract, comes the time when we need to "implement" the terms of the contract. Our signature (baptism) and God's signature (the giving of the holy spirit) is not the completion of the contract, but only the beginning. What follows is the active enforcement of the terms of the contract; our actions, obedience and compliance guarantee that the "compensation and rewards" clause of the contract takes its full force. Our performance of the terms of the covenant binds God into executing His part of the covenant.

Being in a covenant, choosing the life of a Christian is like being in a relationship. There has to be commitment and compliance; there has to be trust; there has to be faithfulness and loyalty.

Do you want to live forever? Then you must be born again, for unless you are born of water, and of the Holy Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

And you do want to live forever, don't you? **AG**

THE UNIQUENESS OF GOD

By Ferdie S. Padilla

The very first command of the Ten Commandments reads **Exodus 20 : 2 - 3 (NIV) 2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods before me."**

God had to make it clear for all of us, that He alone is God and none else, and therefore He alone must be recognized as such. When God would challenge us to show Him someone who can be greater than He is, He is not bragging or being proud. He wants us to think for ourselves if indeed there could be someone else. He wants us to prove for ourselves beyond any shadow of doubt that He alone is God and that He is the only one worthy of worship.

As we read other books of the Bible, like Isaiah, we will find out that God is a very unique Being. He is the only One of His kind – yesterday, today and forever. He is incomparable to any being or creature that we see or come to know of. He is unique in many ways. In this article, we will point out some of those unique characteristics of God. When we do understand these things, we will gain a better understanding of why God had to declare that there is no other God but Himself.

Unique Things about God

Here are some of the unique things about God.

1.) He alone is from eternity to eternity. We read in **Psalms 93:1 - 2 (NIV) "1The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. 2Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity." If you search the**

Scriptures, this characteristic of Being from all eternity is never ascribed to anyone but God alone. This unique characteristic of God is actually mind boggling, to say the least. We are all accustomed to the concept of something having a beginning. Once we were not here. Then we came into being. We get married, and then we have children of our own. They came into being. They had a beginning as we all do. Businesses have a beginning. Our employment has a beginning. The trees that we see around us have a beginning. Everything we see, in fact, has a beginning. But God did not have a beginning. He simply **was** and is and **will be** - that's why He introduced Himself to Moses as the "I AM". We are also accustomed to the concept of something having an ending. Someday, whether we like it or not, we will all sleep in the dust of the earth to join those who have come before us. Businesses sooner or later will have an ending too (for example, they declare bankruptcy). The trees that we see around us will perhaps be cut down, uprooted by a typhoon or simply die because of old age. They will never be seen again. But God is different. He will not have an end. He inhabits eternity as poetically stated in **Isa 57:15 (KJV) "15 For thus saith the high and lofty One [God] that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."**

2.) He alone is Almighty. We read an interesting account in **Psalms 89:8.** This psalm asks a pointed question and gives an assuring answer.

Psalms 89:8 - 13 (NIV) "8 O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. [How is this might shown?] 9 You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them (like Christ did). 10 You crushed Rahab like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies. 11The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it [in other words, He created all of them]. 12 You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name. 13Your arm is endowed with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted." By His great might, He created the entire universe. Whenever we see the forces of nature bearing on us, be they earthquakes, powerful typhoons, tsunamis and the like, we are already awed and frightened by them, but the Creator is much more powerful than all of these physical forces. The universe itself is so vast that no one can really measure how big or wide or long it is. And yet, we do not see it crashing on us or the galaxies moving out of their proper places. The hand of God that sustains all of these things is mighty and strong. Again, we ask - is there someone else like God anywhere in Scriptures mentioned as mightily as He is or even mightier than Him? Angels are powerful beings but their might is very minuscule compared to God's. So the answer is: None! We are left with just One Mighty Being. And it is no wonder that He is also called the Mighty One of Jacob.

3.) He alone can make things happen as He said He would. The third unique characteristic of God is also related to the second one we mentioned. Since

He is almighty, He alone can make things happen the way He said things would happen at the time and place of His choosing so there cannot be a shadow of doubt that it was He who did it. We read this declaration in Isaiah 46:8 - 11 (NIV) "8 Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. 9 Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. 11 From the east I summon a bird of prey, from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do." Here God is saying to us in plain language that He alone can bring about events as He has planned. He backs this up by saying He alone is God and can and will do anything that He wants. There are a lot of events foretold in the Bible we now know as prophecies that happened exactly as God has said it would. And we can all verify these in history books. Perhaps, the most prominent example of this are the events foretold in Daniel 2. History bears out exactly the events as foretold. The rise and fall of four great empires happened as revealed to Daniel. To do this requires that one must have control of events, of time and circumstances. This requires might. Only God is able to do this. Can we humans or any other being bring about the execution of events to fulfill a really history changing event exactly the way we planned it? I don't think so. In the very first place, we hardly have control of many circumstances affecting our lives and those of others. That is why God declares that there is none like Him in this regard. His uniqueness in this is unquestionable.

4.) He alone can love us the way He does. This uniqueness has a very personal endearing effect on each one of us. His great love for us is simply unbounded, unfathomable

and defies logic; is very wonderful, and simply awesome. Words cannot really capture the essence, extent, breadth, depth and height of His love. This love transcends dimensional boundaries. He is spirit, we are physical. Yet, He sent His Son to become like us and to die for us. Who are we that He should do this? David has this to say in: **Psalms 8:3 - 5 (NIV)** "3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." There is this song sung by Elvis Presley entitled "Who Am I?" (words and music by R. Goodman). Part of the lyrics goes "When I think of how He came so far from glory, Came to dwell among the lowly such as I, To suffer shame and such disgrace, On Mount Calvary take my place, Then I ask myself this question, Who am I?" Here was the Son of God, very God in nature and yet chose to divest Himself of His glory, became mortal to suffer, to be spat on, to be beaten, to be insulted, to bleed, to die for me, for you, for us- for humanity. Only God can show that indescribable love. Could you think of another being capable of doing that? Imagine ourselves being a creator then becoming like the created to save them. Can we do that in all honesty? This wonderful love, illogical as it may seem, sets God apart above all of us. Some people do wonder why He would do it. The answer is actually found in Scriptures. **1 John 4:8 - 9 (NIV)** "8Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him [that is, granted eternal life]." God's uniqueness stems from the fact that His very nature is love. No one even comes close to the love that God has shown, does show and will always show us. To some, this love is illogical. But it's not illogical for God to

do this. On the contrary, it's the only logical thing for God (whose nature is love) to do this. He does things out of love. And we should be very thankful that He is like this.

Conclusion

If we do understand God's uniqueness, it would be easier for us to understand the essence of the first command. Obedience to it would then follow naturally. Nobody else is worthy of worship, adulation, praise, reverence, honor and respect but God. Certainly, idols do not even come close to these. They are of no help at all. What about certain men who claim they are appointed by God to be "saviors"? They are no better than any of us. We cannot even save ourselves from the death penalty of sin. We cannot even prevent ourselves from dying. But the God who is from everlasting to everlasting, who is mighty, who is able to achieve what He has purposed and who loves us very much can and will do save us. We cannot believe in the promise of eternal life unless the God who promised it is Himself eternal. We cannot believe in the promise of us being raised from the dead, from mortal to immortality unless the God who promised it is all mighty and to whom nothing is impossible. We cannot believe in the promise of us being kings and priests in His Kingdom unless the God who promised it is able to bring about the establishment of that Kingdom first. We cannot believe in the promise of us being born into His ruling family unless He recognizes us as His sons and daughters borne out of the great love a Father can only show. The true God as revealed by the Bible is the only One who has all of these. That is why we should honor Him, revere Him, worship only Him and love Him with all of our being. When people ask us where our faith comes from in the true God, we can answer them by saying we know He is eternal and He is mighty; He loves us so much and is able to do what He promised us. Our faith in Him is not without basis. **AG**



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