

Billy Graham's



"My Answer"

DEAR DR. GRAHAM: I have a friend who is very religious and says he believes the Bible is God's word. But he also believes that a book written by the founder of his religion is also God's word and fills in the gaps of the Bible. Could this be true? — D.M.

DEAR D.M.: No, this is not true. If God had given us only an incomplete revelation of himself in the Bible, then we might expect to discover something further about him from some later book. But God has given us everything he wants us to know. This is why the Bible declares, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book" (Revelation 22:18).

The real question, you see, is this: who is Jesus Christ? If Christ were merely another religious teacher, or if he were only another prophet, then we might expect "gaps" in what God has told us. But Jesus Christ is God's only Son, sent to earth to reveal God's truth to us. The Bible says, "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has

ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made this known" (John 1:17-18).

This is why the Bible tells us we do not need to look further. Christ has brought us salvation, and nothing must be added to what he has done for us on the cross. Christ has also brought us God's truth, and we need nothing else. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." (Colossians 1:19). If we want to know what God is like, we need only to look at Christ, for he is God in human flesh.

The Bible warns us about teachers who would come in the last times and teach things which were not God's truth. Be thankful for those who teach God's Word, but avoid those who do not understand that God has given us his truth completely in Jesus Christ.

History of Hymns

by William J. Reynolds

*"Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me."*

John Newton, an obscure minister in the Church of England, wrote this simple, unsophisticated hymn for the working people of Olney, a small village in the county of Buckinghamshire, where he served.

His congregation consisted largely of lacemakers from the factories in Olney, where the world-famous Buckingham lace was made.

Though he wrote the hymn when he was in his early 50's, the hymn reflects the fascinating story of Newton's life. His mother died when he was six, he went to sea with his father at 11, and at 16 he was in the British Royal Navy on a man-of-war.

Abandoning his early religious training, he became an aggressive atheist and delighted in shocking people with his profanity. First a crew member on a slave ship, he later became a ship's captain busily engaged in transporting slaves from Africa.

Throughout his early turbulent life, the memory of his mother and his love for Mary Catlett, who later became his wife, served as a strong and continuing influence.

The harrowing hours on a waterlogged ship on a stormy night in 1748, as he faced imminent death, brought about an extraordinary and genuine spiritual experience.

Six years later he abandoned the sea and became the tide surveyor in Liverpool, where he and Mary lived after his rather tumultuous life at sea. During this time he developed a deeper interest in spiritual matters and felt the Lord's call to the ministry.

Because of his lack of university training the bishops of the Church of England were unwilling to ordain him. Only the intervention of an influential patron secured for him his ordination and appointment to the parish church at Olney when he was 40.

Seventeen years later he went to London as minister of St. Mary Woolnoth Church in the heart of the banking district. There he remained for 17 years.

Never did he lose his bluff sailor ways, but his genial manner won him many friends and endeared him to the people to whom he ministered.

Newton preached almost to the end of his 82 years. When he was no longer able to read and was advised by his friends to give up preaching, he replied, "What, shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can still speak!"

The Upper Room

DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Thursday, March 4, 1982

Read Exodus 32:1-16

Thou hast been my help. . . My soul clings to thee.
—Psalm 63:7-8 (RSV)

WE hear a great deal about the nearness of God, that God is with us in every experience of life. But in both the Bible and Christian history there is also great concern for the absence of God, those experiences described as "the dark night of the soul." For all of us there are times when God seems distant, away on the mountain while we are wandering in the desert.

A great danger confronts us in the absence of God. When we no longer "feel" close to God, we may be tempted to make new gods out of the things that occupy our lives. Like the Israelites, we may think any god—even one of our own making—is better than no god at all.

The challenge of our faith, however, is to remember God's covenant with us and believe God will keep it. Moses dares to remember God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the covenant who delivered them out of Egypt. Remembering God's goodness in the past, Moses dares to claim God's mercy for the present.

When we experience the apparent absence of God, we, too, can cling to God's goodness in the past, daring to trust God in the present, even when we feel alone.

PRAYER: O God, in the dark nights of my soul help me trust Your goodness and mercy that I have seen in the past. Amen.

Dr. William J. Reynolds is on the faculty of the school of Music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He is immediate past president of the Hymn Society of America and was formerly secretary of the Church Music Department of the Southern Baptist Sunday school board. A lecturer, musician and composer, he has written several books on hymns and was general editor of Baptist Hymnal.



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