

BEYOND TODAY

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World's tallest trees testify to a Designer

Scientific laws and processes show the awesome mind of God in action.

Have you ever wondered how water containing nutrients reaches the top of the tallest trees? It's by relying on God-given processes and laws such as osmosis.

Briefly stated, osmosis is the process by which molecules of a solution pass through a semi-permeable membrane from a less concentrated solution into a more concentrated one. It is how water enters the roots of a tree making nutrients available to be moved to its uppermost branches and leaves.

Philosophers have long toyed with the questions of "Where did man come from and what is his role in the universe?" They, along with scientists, have worked on the premise that there is no God. In his book *A Quest for God* Paul Johnson states, "The existence or non-existence of God is the most important question we are ever asked to answer."

Few, it seems, desire the answer to this question. The apostle Paul wrote to the New Testament Church in Rome that humans beings "did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Romans

1:28). Even so, could the design features of the earth and all it contains have come about without the planning of a Master Designer?

Water – a building block of life

When studying the movement of water within a plant as a young man at forestry college in Cumbria, I learned in great detail how the plant kingdom functions.

One concept that helped me realise that the natural world order pointed to a Creator was the relationship between all forms of life. Whether microscopic, fungal, insect, plant or animal, all are part of one giant ecological system; all are interdependent. Thus, to survive all creation had to have come into existence at the same time.

All these life forms have a need for one substance – water. Water seems a strange compound, each molecule comprising two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen. Thus, a combination of two gases becomes a liquid. Intermolecular forces that come about from chemically combining these elements



A "young" (about 65 years old) sequoia in Glen Helen on the Isle of Man.

(Photo taken by the author.)

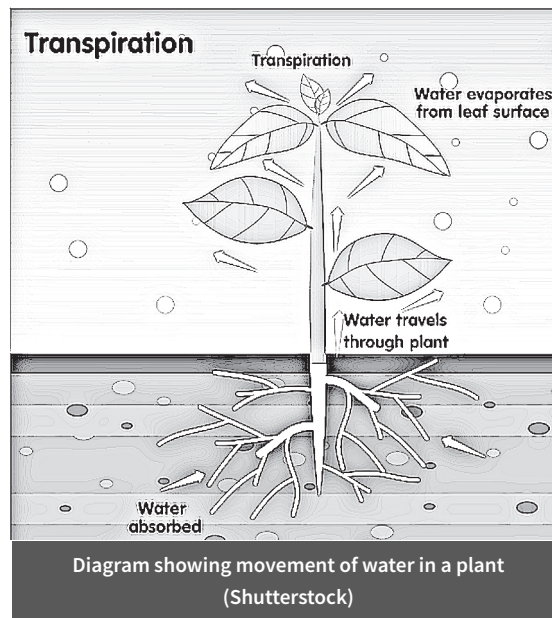
pull the molecules closer together, forming a liquid rather than a gas.

How the tallest trees thrive

The tallest trees in the world are redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*). These trees, found mainly on the American west coast, can easily reach heights of 300 feet (91 metres). One of these redwoods, the tallest recorded, is named Hyperion. In 2006 Hyperion stood at close to 380 feet (115.8 metres) tall. “According to redwood standards, Hyperion is quite young and still growing vigorously” said Steve Sillett, who climbed to the top of the tree to measure it in 2006. He thinks the tree “might be ‘only’ 600 years old, which is about 20 years in human time” (see tallest_tree_in_the_world at www.monumentaltrees.com).

Moving water upwards

Atmospheric pressure and a perfect vacuum could lift water through a tube to a height of 33.9 feet (10.3 metres). In practice, this rarely exceeds 26 feet (7.9 metres).



One of the tallest fountains in the world at Fountain Hills, Arizona, regularly sends a jet of water 300 feet plus into the air – nearly as tall as Hyperion. What does it take for man to send water this high? The answer is two 600-horsepower turbine pumps.

How does Hyperion do it? By a series of complex processes, including osmosis, that testify to the existence and amazing design of the Eternal Creator God. Traditional science believes energy from the sun causes transpiration (water loss through stomata on the undersides of leaves). This creates a vacuum which draws water up pipe-like cells in the trunk from

the roots, where water is drawn in by osmosis. Success requires that all of these laws and processes must have been in place when the first tree appeared and the tree itself designed to make use of them, or no tree would have survived.

To study further evidence of God’s existence, please request or download our booklet *Does God Exist?*

David Payne

Compelling evidence for a Creator

The Bible claims that God’s hand can be seen in the natural world around us. Can such claims be verified?

Many believers see God’s existence reflected in the creation around them with its myriad life forms and their interdependence on one another. The apostle Paul asserts: “What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20).

The bedrock of the theory of evolution is that extremely long periods of time were required during which life gradually evolved. However in the human family both male and female would have had to “evolve” simultane-

ously, or at best, during the time span of “threescore and ten years” rather than aeons of time, otherwise a lack of offspring would have terminated the species. Evolutionists have never provided a satisfactory explanation of how pairs of creatures evolved simultaneously.

Only life can beget life

In nature’s annual life-cycle, everything functions to perpetuate life. All around us we see the law of biogenesis at work – life begets life. What initially triggered this recurring cycle of life, if not a life-giving Creator God? “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” is the firm conviction of the Psalmist (Psalm 100:3).

In biological systems, new life is fully dependent on already-existing life. Kind produces after its kind from the cells, chromosomes and DNA of the parent. That is the scientific process we can observe all around us, the result of the Creator's edict: "Be fruitful and multiply" as recorded in the Genesis Creation account (Genesis 1:20-28). The pollination process in nature and the fertilising of eggs in poultry present a problem for evolutionists and atheists since both would have required multi-faceted, parallel developments across and within species. Albert Einstein is often quoted as having stated that if bees were to die out, human life would cease within a few years as bees have to be present to pollinate flowers.

Believers in a Creator God challenge unbelievers to give answers to the most fundamental of all questions: How could life have sprung from dead, inanimate matter. Where did matter itself come from if God is taken out of the equation?

Precise astronomical dimensions govern our solar

Evolutionists are left with the notion that first there was nothing, then matter and energy spontaneously produced themselves.

system, ensuring that Earth as man's home continues to function as a life-sustaining planet. The biblical patriarch Job was in no doubt about the Almighty's hand in creation when stating that it is God who "stretches out the north over empty space [and] hangs the earth on nothing" (Job 26:7). The scientifically proven fact that the earth is suspended in space is fully recognised today, but Job evidently knew it all along.

God dwells outside the physical realm

When Soviet astronaut, Yuri Gagarin, completed his Sputnik flight to the edge of space in 1957, he was reported to have said, "I didn't see God." At the same time the well-known atheist and president of the Free Thinkers of America, Joseph Lewis, declared that "the satellite didn't discover God in space" (German news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, article: "The Conquest of Space," September 24, 2007). True enough!

The Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament part of the Bible, state that the Creator of the universe isn't confined to space or any other geographical location. At the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon declared of God, "the heaven of heavens cannot contain You" (1 Kings 8:27). Man could travel to the ends of the universe, were it possible, and not ever see God with the naked eye or discover Him with the most penetrating astronomical instruments. The prophet Isaiah reminded the Israelites

that God "inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15). For mortals it is difficult to fully comprehend the magnitude of God's omnipotence.

The universe reflects a creative power at work

The Bible's statement that the universe had a beginning agrees with the general belief of astronomers that there was no universe prior to the so-called "Big Bang." The question the atheist dares not ask is what brought about the massive explosion they believe started it all – that started physical matter and time itself.

On the question of the origin of matter and what gives matter its awesome mass, as in the fission of atomic power and the fusion of thermonuclear explosions, the atheists offer no satisfactory answer. They are left with the notion that first there was nothing, then matter and energy spontaneously produced themselves.

To the question, how did the universe come about, the divinely inspired writer of the book of Hebrews has this to say: "The worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things that are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). In other words, by the edict of God. The way in which the material universe came into being is revealed in Genesis 1:3 where the Creator God said, "Let there be . . ." The universe with all it contains is physical and owes its existence to a spirit realm where the Almighty reigns supreme.

God's existence isn't governed by time. Time as we understand it may very well have begun ticking at the creation of the universe and, if so, had a beginning and is time-limited.

Equally, our own physical existence is restricted to a certain period of time as well – "three-score and ten" years, or thereabouts. "Before . . . You had formed the earth . . . even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" is the firm conviction of the Psalmist, as he described the Almighty's majestic craftsmanship (Psalm 90:2). God has always existed. His existence transcends time.

The Bible tells us that the universe cannot be measured (Jeremiah 31:37). To this day, astronomers don't know how large the universe is – most believing that it has been expanding since the time of the "Big Bang" explosion.

One of the greatest moments in space exploration occurred in 1969 when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon. Surely the answer to the question of the origin of the universe lies in his quote, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

For more proof of creation please request or download our booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

Gerhard Marx

Be careful of calling someone a “fool”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ warned us against hurling insults at others. As an outward sign of internal anger, it betrays murderous thoughts.

We live in an increasingly violent society. Whether it be fictional violence on television or in films, or reality in the news, or personal experience, many of us deal with this every day. To one degree or another, violence has afflicted all societies throughout recorded history.

Jesus Christ commented that there is a specific human behaviour that can lead to violence. He said that an angry thought can be a precursor to murderous acts. He also added that while the law of the land requires that those convicted of murder be punished, the law of God requires that the person who harbours an angry thought against a “brother” also be judged.

These days people seem to get angry at the slightest provocation – and we can be both victim and perpetrator! We might protest that we are not violent, but is that really the case? Have we been furious with someone, shouted at them, called them names, insulted them? Well maybe! Perhaps not to their face, only in our minds, or maybe in the safety of our vehicle – so that’s okay isn’t it?

That is not what Jesus instructed in His sermon on the mount. First of all He highlighted the law of the land; if a person commits murder they will have to answer for it in court (Matthew 5:21). Next, Jesus pointed out that the murderous act actually starts with an angry thought (verse 22). From Jesus’ perspective, it is in the mind that the crime is first committed and He points out that the court of heaven will take note of that starting point.

An escalating scale of seriousness

Before the act of murder is committed, Jesus mentioned three phases of anger in Matthew 5:22. Being angry with a brother “without a cause” puts a person in danger of the judgement. Saying “Raca” or “empty head” puts one in danger of the council. Saying “You fool” puts the perpetrator in danger of hell fire. Why?

Maybe we think we have good cause to be angry with someone. Perhaps we do. On the other hand, we could be overreacting and that overreaction could prove to be worse than the original cause. Of course there are instances where there is just cause, perhaps where criminal acts

have been committed, and these should be reported to the appropriate authorities. Even then we should guard our reactions and, with God’s help, harness violent thoughts.

In the New Testament, to call an individual “Raca” or “empty-head” equates in modern terminology to something like imbecile, brainless – in other words a calculated insult intended to demean a person’s intelligence and deny the other party’s self-respect.

“You fool” is a relatively mild expression in English, but to the audience in Christ’s time it would have indicated “moron”, “godless” or “rebel-against-God” – something that questioned a person’s moral standing before God.

Remedying hostile thoughts

Jesus was highlighting that behind an offending word will be an offending thought, which starts the whole process. The lesson for us is that we may not be violent in action or behaviour, but if we harbour angry or hostile thoughts towards others in the privacy of our minds then we are just as guilty before God as if we had literally carried out the intent of those thoughts.

If we harbour angry or hostile thoughts in the privacy of our minds then we are guilty before God.

We must remember that God is the judge and not us. The apostle Paul asked, “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4).

We must listen to our thoughts and learn to recognise the angry ones and then remove them completely from our minds. Our Saviour also said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

Summarised in Romans 12:2, this ongoing renewal of our minds is part of the transformation God requires of His people.

David Fenney

Are we stiff-necked?

Christians are called to a life of change as God moulds us. If we stubbornly remain as we are, we bring no credit to God.

Much of the New Testament is taken up with instructions on how to become more like Jesus Christ (for example, Ephesians 4:1-16). However, many of us are far more like the ancient Israelites whom God described as being “stiff-necked” on at least eight occasions. One example states, “And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation . . . Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord” (2 Chronicles 30:7-8). God found their stubborn attitudes in response to His loving guidance extremely disappointing.

Synonyms for stiff-necked include: rigid, resistant, unyielding, inflexible and self-willed. This describes many of us at the time we are called. God is like a master potter: “But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8). God wants us to yield in His hands. To do so we need to get rid of our stiff-necked traits.

Those called need God’s help to progress.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 the apostle Paul stated that God was calling the weak, base, and despised, the “things which are not” – the nobodies of this world. He was not calling the wise, mighty and noble. Why? So that the

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people being called couldn’t claim that they had done it by their own might. When God completes His work in us, credit will not go to the individual but to Jesus Christ who worked in him or her.

When Jesus selected His disciples they were not the wise, mighty or noble of the world at that time but of humble backgrounds such as fishermen and a despised tax collector. When Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, they were still weak in their faith, despite all their time with Him. The disciples fled (Mark 14:50) and Peter denied knowing the Messiah (John 18:17, 25-27).

After receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter and John per-

formed a miracle in which they healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate outside the temple, after which they were arrested. The following morning they were brought before the religious leadership and Peter addressed them. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realised that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Peter and John had changed and the credit went to their mentor, Jesus Christ.

Stiff-necked attitudes cause problems

In the early New Testament Church, Stephen, one of the deacons, gave a very powerful witness. This stirred up opponents who had Stephen arrested on false charges and brought before the council (Acts 6:8-15). Speaking before the religious leadership, Stephen picked up on God’s assessment of the people, “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:51-52).

Stephen said they were stiff-necked like their forefathers who had killed the prophets who spoke about the coming Messiah. They themselves had just been instrumental in having the Messiah put to death. The outcome was predictable. “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him.” Luke’s account adds, “And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7:58).

Saul to Paul: From firebrand to loving pastor

This young man, Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, is a good case study of the changes God requires of all He calls. On the occasion of one of his arrests outside the temple in Jerusalem, Paul was addressing an unruly mob. He declared, “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was jealous towards God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom

I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished” (Acts 22:3-5).

Paul had an impeccable pedigree in terms of his religious training. He was obviously an exception to the type of person God normally calls. However, God had a special commission in mind for Paul. He was on fire. He had a single focus and that was to destroy anyone of “the Way”, believers who would later become known as Christians. Saul was instrumental in having many of the saints shut up in prison and he voted to have them put to death (Acts 26:10). Saul was like a bull in a china shop – out of control and creating major destruction. How was God going to deal with this threat to the young church?

In Acts 9 we see Saul was “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” on his way to the synagogues in Damascus to round up believers, believing he was doing God’s will. Jesus intercepted and blinded Saul. It is interesting that Jesus says to Saul, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” The NKJV Study Bible states: “A young ox, when it was first yoked, usually resented the burden and tried kicking its way out. If the ox was yoked to a single-handed plow, the plowman would hold a long staff with a sharpened end close to the heels of the ox. Every time the ox kicked, it struck the spike... The point was that the ox had to learn submission to the yoke the hard way.”

Christ compared Saul to a young bull – self-willed and unsubmitive. In a Christian this is a weakness.

Paul’s change of character

Years later, Paul shows how much he has changed. When looking at the characteristics he was seeking in future elders, Paul wrote to his colleague Titus, “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, nor

violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1: 7-9). Paul specifically mentioned that he was not seeking people who are self-willed. A quick temper, overindulging in wine, being violent, being greedy for money can all be evidence of a lack of self-control. So it is not surprising that Paul is looking for people who display self-control, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23).

The example of Jesus Christ

In the garden of Gethsemane prior to Christ’s arrest, the apostle Matthew recorded, “He [Christ] went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’” (Matthew 26:39).

Here Christ provides us with this contrast between self-will and God’s will. He was willing to let go of His will to do the Father’s will. That is the challenge all Christians face. At the time we are called most of us have a major weakness – that of a strong self-will. If we are to yield as clay in the Father’s hands, we need to let go of our self-will and desire to do the Father’s will.

God calls the weak of this world. Yet we are to be transformed by yielding our self-will to God, the Master Potter. While self is still involved, we exchange it for self-control, which is the effort we exert to resist departing from God’s ways or falling into temptation. Like a muscle that strengthens with exercise, self-control becomes stronger as we apply it.

To assist in your spiritual growth you may wish to request or download the free booklets *Tools for Spiritual Growth* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

Dr Wayne Topping

Fruit and gifts of the Spirit

The Bible distinguishes between “fruits” that are to be produced by all and “gifts” that are specific to individuals.

God’s greatest gift to the world was to send His Son to die, so we could be forgiven our sins and be reconciled to our Heavenly Father. A second gift, this time of a seed of God’s very nature (2 Peter 1:2-4), is given to those who truly repent and are baptised in accordance with biblical instructions. Those in receipt of God’s Holy Spirit should all be producing the fruits listed in Galatians 5:22-23. To start with these may be the equivalent of small and “green” or

immature fruits. Over the years, as we submit more and more to God, these attributes should become more substantial, as the fruit starts to “ripen.”

Gifts of the Spirit, on the other hand, are distributed by God on an individual basis but are to be used for the benefit of all (1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-11).

To learn more of God’s gift of the Holy Spirit and how it works within us, please request or download our Bible study guide *The Power of the Holy Spirit*.



understand that Jesus Christ has put away our sin by the “sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

During the Days of Unleavened Bread which follow, putting out leaven signifies removing sin from our lives and eating unleavened bread symbolises taking in God’s righteousness, through Christ living in us to help us develop godly character – in effect replacing sin with the Bread of Life.

For more information please study our booklet *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

Q Can you please explain why we should use unleavened bread for the Passover service?
Reader from Hereford

A In the Old Testament, God commanded unleavened bread to be eaten with the lamb at the Passover meal (Exodus 12:1-10, particularly verse 8). In the New Testament, Jesus Christ’s sacrifice took the place of the lamb, but He specified elements of the Passover that must still be taken to teach Christians important truths about Himself and God’s continuing plan of salvation (Matthew 26:26-28).

The Passover sacrifice in the Old Testament foreshadowed Christ’s crucifixion. The New Testament Passover is a memorial of that event. By observing it, we “proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

The apostle Paul explained that in the context of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, leaven symbolises sin in its various forms, while unleavened bread represents the sinless life of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). At Passover the unleavened bread is broken, as Christ broke it that last evening with His disciples, to represent His broken body and His sinless sacrifice (1 Corinthians 11:24). Partaking of the Passover bread indicates that we

Q Why are oriental people not mentioned in the Bible?
Reader from Uxbridge

A The Bible’s primary historical focus is the people that God chose to be an example to the rest of mankind – the people of Israel – and other nations as they interacted with Israel. God set Israel apart and gave them His holy laws by which to live because of His promise to their forefather Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants physically and spiritually. The Messiah would be his descendant through the tribe of Judah and House of David (Genesis 22:15-18 and Revelation 5:5).

The apostle Paul writing to “the saints who are in Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1), that is to non-Israelites, states that through the blood of Christ historical divisions between Israelites and the rest of the world (called “Gentiles”) had been broken down (Ephesians 2:11-14). Now all peoples can come to God through Christ, regardless of race. Those who were “strangers and foreigners” can become “fellow citizens with the saints”, “being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Q In the context of your article on the Passover wine (Supplement May/June 2018, page 3) can you please explain Proverbs 20:1?
Reader from Hereford

A Proverbs 20:1 states, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever *is led astray* by it is not wise.” Other Bible translations use terms such as “errs or reels” (Amplified), “is intoxicated” (New American Standard Bible), “is deceived” (King James Version). The implication is that being *overcome* by alcohol is unwise, however there is no implied condemnation of drinking in moderation. The only prohibition against alcohol was for those who had taken a special vow (Numbers 6:1-4) and for priests while they were officiating either in the tabernacle or later on in the temple (Leviticus 10:8-11).

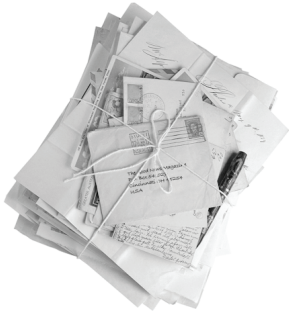
Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible say about truth?

All God’s words are truth: Psalms 33:4; 119:160; John 17:17. God’s commandments are included in “truth”: Psalms 86:11; 119:142, 151; John 3:21; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:4.

Christ’s followers will be teaching and obeying the same truth: Psalm 51:6; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 3:15; 2 Timothy 3:14-16; 1 John 3:18; 2 John 1:4;

We must be careful to avoid lies: John 8:44; Romans 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12; 1 John 2:4.



Letters From Our Readers

Literature leads to deeper study

Your articles are extremely thought-provoking and some are controversial to my mind. Nevertheless they are the basis for further Bible study and lead me deeper into God's word.

Reader from Surrey

These little booklets are so very informative for spiritually growing in faith. I have found them to be of great comfort in answering many questions and for helping others along their journey to greater faith in God.

Reader from Plymouth

I truly appreciate this literature and it is increasing my learning about the Bible.

Reader from Eastbourne

I have always read your magazine with great interest: intelligent, well-informed, but most of all, spiritually educational. My most grateful thanks.

Reader from Surrey

I find your publications answer many question I have and give clarification as I read through the Bible. The booklets are very enlightening.

Reader from Swansea

Reader seeks congregation

I thoroughly enjoy learning more about the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 really speaks about the world around me today. Thanks for all you do to help spread the word of God in a way

that all can understand. Is there a United Church of God congregation near me?

Reader from Newark

Editor's comment: We have sent you details of the congregation nearest to you.

Booklet requests

Could I please request study booklets on how to understand the book of Revelation. I would also be interested in doing your *Bible Study Course*. I enjoy challenges in God's word and thoroughly enjoy the reading material I receive from you.

Reader from London

I simply must know about hell, as there are so many confusing explanations on this subject. Thank you [for the booklet offer].

Reader from Cheltenham

Thank you for the valuable knowledge you are providing through your literature. Please produce facts regarding the cross, its historical background and other important facts.

Reader from Norwich

Editor's comment: We have sent you a copy of Jesus Christ: The Real Story which contains information on this subject.

Changing God's word

Many modern Bible versions change God's word (Revelation 22:18-19). In this way they destroy the Bible.

Name and address supplied

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