



## IS THE WORLD GETTING BETTER? (Part Four)

Despite the **evil** that is in the world today, we are **blessed** in many ways. Many things are better now than ever! There may be situations when it is necessary to talk about the BAD, but our emphasize here will be about things that are BETTER.



There was a time when multiplied thousands of whales were killed by the whaling industry. A whale, on average, provided 34 barrels of oil to burn in lamps. But in time a **better** way was found: the electric light bulb!

The blackness of night in a bedroom can be offset with a tiny electric nightlight, much safer than a burning oil lamp or candle as in centuries past.

One problem with oil lamps was the difficulty to light them. This became less difficult in 1826 when John Walker, a chemist, discovered that a stick coated with certain chemicals would burst into flame when scraped across a rough surface. He went on to invent the first successful friction match.

“Lucifer” (meaning *light bringer*) provided the name of another type of self-igniting match—“lucifers”—a term that persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but is now archaic.

**Quiz Question:** During a fierce blizzard, a woman is COLD and HUNGRY in a dark cabin at NIGHT. Inside the cabin there is an *oil lamp*, a *fireplace* with a few logs, and a wood burning *stove*—but she only has *one match*. Which should she light *first*? Answer: The match!

There were “many lamps” burning in the third-story room where believers met in Troas (Acts 20:7-12). The fact that a young man named Eutychus was sitting in a windowsill could imply the room was crowded. When midnight came, Paul was still preaching. Eutychus went to sleep, fell from the third floor, “and was taken up dead.” But in Paul’s embrace, he was brought back in, alive! Perhaps because of the “many lamps” burning, the oxygen level could have dropped, making the young man more vulnerable to falling asleep.

At a crucial time when the five foolish virgins had not brought enough oil to keep their torches burning, the five who were wise told them: “Go to those who sell, and buy for yourselves” (Matt. 25:1-13). How different it would be today. Instead of depending on dangerous fires to provide light, they could use flashlights. Instead of needing to buy *oil*, they could go to Walmart and purchase extra *batteries*!

More seriously, would our lives be better without batteries? Surely we can appreciate a battery to start a car, instead of using a hand-operated crank! Batteries provide power for watches and hearing aids. They provide power for remote instruments to



change the volume and channels on the television, lock and unlock the doors on a car, and open the garage door.

Years ago, I knew a couple who brought a woman from Borneo to the United States for a specialized medical procedure. (In Borneo she was in charge of a Christian orphanage and had never been out of that country.) They picked her up at the Los Angeles airport and brought her to their house. Upon turning into the driveway, when the man pushed a button, the garage door opened. Having never seen anything like this, she was amazed! Push a button **here**, and a door opens **there**!

When inserting a credit card for payment, I assumed it sent an electronic message “somewhere” to obtain approval. When I asked a post office clerk about this, I was told the message goes to St. Louis. One can make a purchase **here**, and it is approved **there**—often quickly. Electrical current can circle the Earth multiple times in a second, making transactions like this possible!

Things go faster at the checkout counter because of barcodes. They are *not* the “Mark of the Beast”!

A man who works for the gas company told me that natural gas for our area comes from Texas. Amazing! We turn a burner on **here**, and natural gas that has traveled from **there**, can heat our house or cook our food.

In California, two-thirds of the people live in southern California, but two-thirds of the rain is in the north. Consequently, vast amounts of water are brought from the north to the south, as with the Feather River Project. Water also comes across the desert and into Los Angeles from the Colorado River. Amazingly, a person in southern California can fill a glass with water **here**, and that water may have come all the way from Colorado!

A popular *bottled* water with the brand name Fiji actually comes from the Fiji Islands, having made a trip of over 5,000 miles to California.

It has sometimes been supposed that Fuji apples come from the Fiji Islands. Instead, they are actually a product from Japan, specifically from the town of Fujisaki.

More than 20 million Protestant and Catholic Bibles are printed annually by America’s largest Bible publishing companies. But many people are not aware that most of these Bibles are printed by Amity Printing Company in **China**. One can be reading a Bible **here** that was printed **there**!

It has been estimated that two hundred years ago, only one in ten people in the world could read and write. Things are **better** now. Today this has turned around so that only one in ten remains illiterate.

Moses and Joshua knew how to read and write (Josh. 8:32, 35), as did also Pontius Pilate (John 19:22), the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:30), Pharisee and Sadducee priests (Matt. 12:3; 22:31)—and others. But *most* people did not have literary skills.

When a letter was received by a congregation—as from apostles like John or Paul—someone who knew how, would “**read**,” the others would “**hear**” (Rev. 1:3; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; Rom. 10:17; James 1:22).

Many years ago, when the idea of a **computer** was being considered, inventors believed it would need to be huge, possibly requiring a river running through it to keep the parts cool. Now, a smart phone can serve as a phone, GPS, camera, calendar, and a computer capable of all kinds of things—yet small enough to be carried in one’s hand!

Methods of *communication* are more today—and **better**—than ever.

Paul wrote to believers in Philippi, “In the beginning of the gospel...no church *communicated* with me as concerning **giving and receiving**, but you only” (Phil. 4:15 KJV).



This “giving and receiving” verse has been used—*misused* in my opinion—to support a misguided “prosperity” teaching: that the Philippians communicated with Paul about how to **give** offerings so that **THEY** could **get**—get a big return on their money.

But, as the context shows, they wanted to *give* so **PAUL** could **receive** support for his ministry. “For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again unto my necessity.” His needs were met, “having **received** of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you” (Phil. 4:16-18). *They gave; Paul received.*

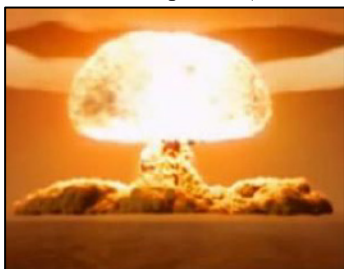
Today, communication so that a ministry can **receive** an offering, is much easier than back then. Contact can be made through email, telephone, a mailing address, on in person. An offering can be given by check, money order, or credit card.

In the Bible, two young men—Jonathan and David—worked out a plan of communication. While David hid in a field, at an agreed time Jonathan would shoot arrows a certain way. By this David would know if he needed to flee for his life (1 Sam. 20:18-42). How different things would have been if David and Jonathan had cell phones!

Though John the baptizer was the one who introduced Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” in prison he became so discouraged he sent messengers to ask Jesus: “Are you the coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matt. 11:2-4). Had John been able to make a phone call, as many prisoners today, he could have phoned Jesus and asked him directly.

For centuries, American Indians (and others) used smoke signals as primitive forms of communication.

A joke a pastor in Arizona told me many years ago comes to mind: Two Indians who lived on remote reservations would send smoke signals back and forth. The one sent a smoke signal and waited for a response. (This was back when Atomic Bombs were



being tested in the Nevada desert.) About that time a huge mushroom shaped cloud of smoke ascended high in the air. When the other Indian saw this, his smoke signal response was: “I don’t mind what you said, **but you don’t have to raise your voice!**”

Homing pigeons—known for their ability to find their way home over long distances—have long been used to carry

messages. Even in comparatively recent times—until the introduction of the telephone—they were used to send messages (written on tissue paper attached to a leg) between Los Angeles and Catalina Island, roughly 20 miles away.



It is generally believed that the saying “A little bird told me,” is based on Ecclesiastes 10:20: “A bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter.”

Because of communication satellites, we can watch events right as they are taking place, even on the other side of the world, right in our houses, via television.

**Thieves** have been around a long time (Exod. 22:2, etc.). To illustrate a point, Jesus said if a homeowner “had known what hour the thief would come...he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into” (Luke 12:39). Today burglar alarms and security systems provide a deterrent. Modern technology has made it possible for people to “watch” their homes with a cell phone, even when they are not home!

An alert system can summons help for a person who falls and is unable to get up, by pushing a button! Smoke alarms have saved lives. Today almost the entire country can dial **911** in an emergency. Help will be obtained regardless of race, creed, or color. An intruder could cut a phone wire preventing a victim from phoning 9-11. But a cell phone bypasses this problem because it functions without a wire!



Years ago, a pastor I knew owned a nice van. It functioned well for his family and also to transport people to and from church services. One day I noticed a warning sticker on a back side window: **Thieves beware. GOD is watching this vehicle.** Then I noticed on the other side: **Warning: This vehicle is equipped with a burglar alarm.** It seemed contradictory. When I asked him about it, he smiled and said, “I don’t take any chances with my van!”

Cars today have better safety features than ever before. Many have a backup camera which greatly reduces problems when backing up. Seat belts have saved lives. Doors lock automatically—things like that.

There was a time when a driver had to roll down his window, use his arm to let the driver behind know he was stopping. How much easier now—and safer—when braking, to have bright red taillights warn the driver behind! One wonders why it took so long for lights to replace hand signals.



Sometimes, when driving, we may not like to wait at a red stoplight. But there are other times—when the light is *green*—that we don’t have to stop at all. So it evens out. With *over 284 million* registered vehicles in the United States, having traffic lights make things better and safer for all concerned.

As with many businesses today, the front double-doors at the Palm Springs Post Office open *automatically*. This is especially helpful when one is carrying packages to be mailed. It is also *healthier*. Think of pulling on a door handle after a thousand people have touched it, many with germs on their hands!

The front door of the hotel where I stayed in Jerusalem (in 1983) was activated by an electric eye. For Jewish people who believed this was like “kindling a fire” on the Sabbath, there was a separate Shabat Entrance. While we respect people who sincerely hold beliefs like this, legalistic rules are often fruitless and, consequently, tend to discredit those who practice them.

Despite concerns about head injuries for those playing football, spectator sports today are relatively *tame* compared to some in earlier times.

The Bible records how Abner (cousin of King Saul) and Joab (son of King David’s sister), along with some other men, watched a bloody sporting event in which 24 men murdered each other!

And Abner...and Joab...met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down...And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and **play** before us. And Joab said, Let them arise...[there were 12 on one team and 12 on the other] and they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow’s side: so they fell down together (2 Sam. 2:12-16 KJV).

The word that is here translated “play” has the idea of *entertainment*. It is translated “sport” as when blind Samson was forced to perform before a Philistine crowd at Gaza (Judges 16:25 KJV). The *Pulpit Commentary* says this about the word “play”:

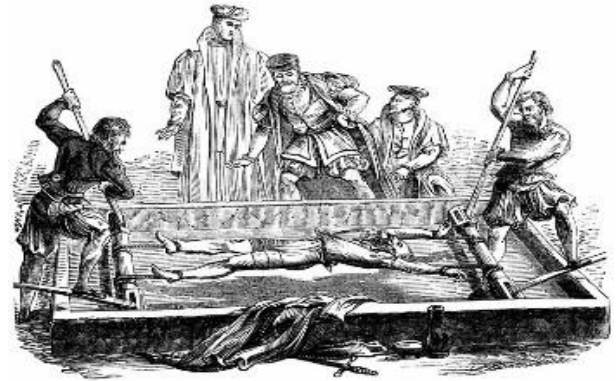
The word is grim enough, though intended to *gloss over the cruel reality*. On each side twelve of the most skillful champions were to be selected, who were to fight in stern earnest with one another, while the rest gazed upon the fierce spectacle...twenty-four experienced men each take the other by the [hair of the] head, thrust their swords into their opponents’ sides...nor can we conceive of a more murderous and savage proceeding.

This raises a question. How barbaric were people like Abner and Joab who would consider it “play” or “sport” to watch men stab each other and bleed to death? Later Joab stabbed Abner to death (2 Sam. 3:27).

In the days of Pagan Rome, blood-thirsty crowds gathered at the Colosseum to watch wild and hungry animals brutally tear people to shreds. Christians were among the most popular victims.



Looking back, it is difficult to understand how centuries later there would be people—*professing* to be Christians—who would use torture in an attempt to force people to accept the Catholic religion. One torture method used during the Inquisition was a rack which stretched the victim’s joints, often dislocating them. To intensify the torture, devices designed to burn, pinch, or otherwise mutilate hands, feet, or bodily orifices were used.



**Today, both Protestants and Catholics can rejoice that the horrible Inquisition, with its torture chambers, is long past.**

Though not the severe torture methods of the Middle Ages, laws were later used in England and early America attempting to **force** people into religious conformity.

John Bunyan (1628-1688) came from a poor background and had very little education. He followed his father in the tinker’s trade (mending kettles and pots). In 1655, a few years after experiencing a dynamic conversion to Christ, he began preaching with considerable success.



But because his ministry was not authorized by the established church in England, he was imprisoned in Bedford for most of 12 years. While there, he authored *Pilgrim’s Progress*, probably the best-known allegory ever written. When the sectarian law was relaxed somewhat, he was released from prison. The nonconformist congregation he established numbered as many as four thousand!

The Puritans of New England held strong religious views. They sought to “purify” the Church of England from errors it had brought over from the Catholic church. But they had blind spots when it came to accepting Christians whose doctrine differed from theirs.

In 1651 three Baptists—Obadiah Holmes, John Clarke, and John Crandall—walked eighty miles to visit an elderly friend, William Witter. At Witter’s home the four men had a worship service together. In the midst of it, a marshal and his deputies broke in, arrested the three visitors, and escorted them to the Boston jail. They were charged with holding a private church service and baptizing persons who had already been baptized as infants.

After ten days the three were brought to trial. The prosecutor was none other than John Cotton, the leading Puritan minister in Boston. The accused sat in the prisoner’s box and heard Cotton in his misguided zeal declare them to be soul murderers. Because they denied the saving power of infant baptism, he recommended the death penalty!

The judge, Governor John Endecott, decided to let them off with a fine. But if they did not pay the fine and leave Massachusetts immediately, they would be whipped. Friends of the three raised the money to pay their fines. John Crandall was released from jail without a fine, but Clarke and Holmes refused to let others pay their fines, believing they had done no wrong.

As Clarke was being led to the whipping post, a friend handed money to an official to pay the fines and he was released. But



Holmes continued to refuse to let anyone pay his fine. He was then stripped to the waist and given thirty lashes, as illustrated in an old engraving.

Incidentally, a descendent of Obadiah Holmes would later become President of the United States: **Abraham Lincoln**.

Immediately after the public whipping, two Baptists, John Hazel and John Spur, shook Holmes's hand in a gesture of comfort. For this small kindness, they were arrested and sentenced to pay a fine of forty shillings or receive a whipping. Hazel, an elderly and frail man, died a few days later.

Being aware of the horrible abuses **religious** differences had caused for centuries, our founding fathers wisely came up with a **better** plan: *religious tolerance*.

**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...** (*First Amendment, Constitution of the United States*).

The idea that people should be **forced** (by law or otherwise) to hold a religious belief, is not God's way.

At a revival meeting, some tried to pressure a man I knew (years ago) to go forward and accept Christ. When he refused, two of them even tried to pick him up and carry him forward! They had a lot of zeal, they meant well, but this man was so deeply embarrassed and offended, he never went back to church.

While God uses people to preach the gospel, it is still the **Holy Spirit** who convicts and converts. When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, it was those who "*gladly received his word*" who were baptized (Acts 2:41)—no one was *forced* into religious commitment. The LORD added to the church daily (verse 47). "Except the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psa. 127:1).

Things are **better** today because most Christians (regardless of denominational affiliation or lack thereof), believe we should **accept**—not **reject**—one another. It is all spelled out in Romans 14. If we are **right** and the other person is **wrong**, we cannot help him by making an enemy. Generally speaking, **cooperation** is more fruitful than **confrontation**.

The world is **better** today because the evil institution of slavery, for much of the world, is now a thing of the past.



At the time of Elisha, a godly man had died. His widow, unable to pay her bills, sought help from Elisha because: "...the creditor is coming to take *my two sons* to be his **slaves**" (2 Kings 4:1). How sad: having lost her husband, her two sons were about to be taken from her to be slaves.

In a time of severe economic oppression, people cried out: "We are forcing our sons and our daughters to be **slaves**, and some of our *daughters* are brought into **slavery** already. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards" (Neh. 5:5).

A man unable to pay a bill might be sold into **slavery**, along with his wife and children (Matt. 18:25).

With no respect for human life, sometimes captives of war (being so numerous) were sold by slave-dealers at ridiculous prices: "...a boy in exchange for a harlot, a girl for wine that they may drink" (Joel 3:3).

Sometimes a father would "sell" his own daughter into **slavery** (Exod. 21:7). The *Pulpit Commentary* says:

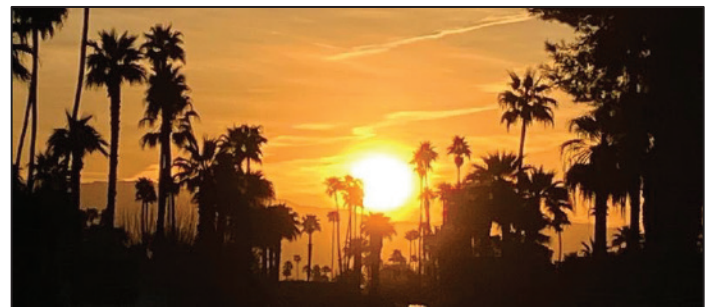
Among ancient nations the father's rights over his children were generally regarded as including the right to sell them for slaves... Many barbarous nations... made a regular practice of selling their daughters. Even at Athens there was a time when sales of children had been common... Existing custom, it is clear, sanctioned such sales among the Hebrews... in the case of females, usually they were bought to be made the concubines, or secondary wives of their master... or his sons.

**Fortunately, much of the world today has turned from the cruel institution of slavery.**

Was the world or this country better in the days of slavery? Was it better in the days of child labor? Was it better when travel was in covered wagons? Was it better when women could not vote or own property? Was it better when lights burned oil?

Conditions are not perfect, but in civilized countries, people have better food, better clothing, better housing, better healthcare, better education, better working conditions, better pay, better shopping, and better transportation than in the past.

We come now to the end of Part Four about things that are **BETTER**. (All four printed articles are available and will be sent **free** upon request.) Hopefully these scattered thoughts have been interesting and, more importantly, have provided reasons to look on the bright side, to be encouraged, and to rejoice!



**"The heavens declare the glory of God"—Psalms 19:1**  
(Palm Springs sunrise 3/22/2025)

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