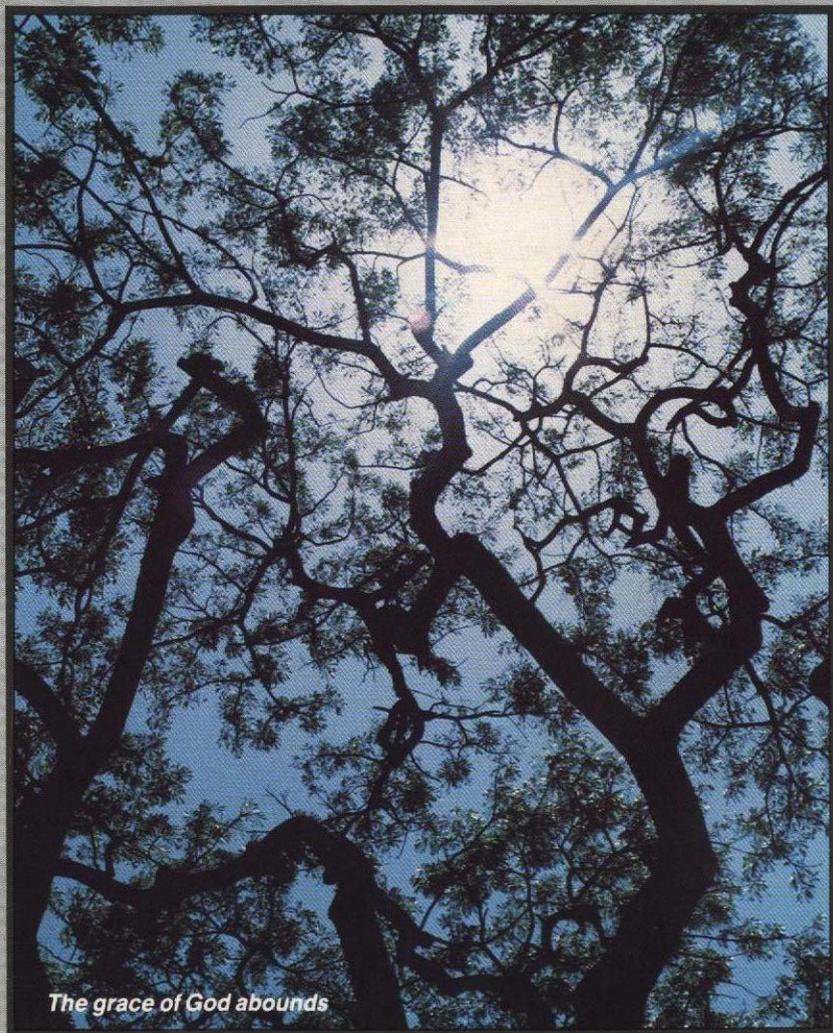


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The grace of God abounds

1990.12

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

We thank the grace of the Lord that the four-year theological course under the banner of the Southeast Asia Theological Training Centre was officially opened on 1 October 1990 held at the church in Adam Road, Singapore. Conceived by IA with the aim to train more English speaking preachers to support our ministry of evangelizing the truth in the English speaking countries, the Training Department has assumed the duty to run the full-time course in Singapore. The curriculum is designed in such a way that the courses for the first three years are conducted in Singapore, while the fourth and final year, comprising mainly practical preaching lessons, will be conducted in Taiwan.

The first intake is a humble one. We have only three students. From West Malaysia we have Brother Paul Chong Yong Fook of Petaling Jaya, Brother Chin June Cook of the Federal Territory and Brother Juperin bin Sumil of Keningau Church, a native Kadazan from Sabah. Both Brothers Chong and Chin are quite young. They are still in their twenties, while Brother Juperin is in his early thirties. All the three have resigned from respectable positions. They have offered themselves for Christ. We praise the Lord for their good spirit and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Although we have only three students in our first intake, the Training Department are putting their full effort into the job. The Department has recruited no less than fifteen lecturers as teaching staff for this batch of students over a period of three years. Elder Hsieh who heads the Training Department remarked that there are high expectations. During the opening ceremony, Elder Hsieh said

that more youths would join in the ministry if this batch fared well. The next intake will be in October 1991. So, let us remember them in our prayers and ask God to guide them through their four-year course of training.

In this issue, the main theme is still on salvation, a continuation of the last article written by our elderly deacon, Dn Voon of Ipoh, Malaysia. "Have you not read" entails the study of the three groups of people who opposed the Lord Jesus. Those people were the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The writer states that even today we can find people of such nature like the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees in our community. Are we aware of the fact? "Know the True Church" is based on a sermon by Elder John Yang delivered during the Spiritual Meeting held in Singapore recently. The article deals with the formation of the church, its development, downfall and the revival of the Church in the last days. "Be steadfast in the Lord" is an exhortation reminding us to be watchful at the end time, lest we should be taken unawares. It is not enough for us to only attend Sabbath services and pray. We must participate in church work and to hold on to Christ. "Can a deaconess administer the Sacrament of Footwashing?" was an interesting subject presented by Preacher Philip Chong at the 1st meeting of the ministers of the churches in Southeast Asia, conducted by the Southeast Asia Evangelical Centre, held at Singapore in 1987. The writer sums up that it is not proper for a woman minister to conduct the Sacrament of Footwashing. Otherwise, she should be given the permission to perform the other two sacraments in our church. What say you?

Singapore

December 1990

This article is a continuation of the last issue by an elderly deacon, Dn John Voon of Ipoh, Malaysia. Dn Voon has served the True Jesus Church for many years in his youthful days before he took up dentistry, a profession he has practiced for many decades and he is still doing it today. In the last issue Dn Voon wrote on salvation and the covenant of God. In this issue he deals with even greater magnitude on salvation.

Salvation Entails A Bundle of Blessings

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that loved him." (1 Cor 2:9). What are these things really?

When men covenant with Christ, they receive the heavenly citizenship, and as a share in all the benefits of the heavenly kingdom (Rev 1:6). They receive a bundle of blessings, including remission of sins in His blood (Mt 26:28; Heb 13:12), new birth and succour of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Rom 8:26, 27), ministry of angels (Heb 1:14; Mt 18:10), adoption of sons (1 Cor 1:9; Rom 8:14-17) and fruit of the tree of life (Rev 2:7), and countless other blessings. "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will ... which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved : in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness toward us in all wisdom and prudence." (Eph 1:5-8). "In whom also we were made a heritage", "in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your promise" (Eph 1:11-14). What shall we say then, to the above? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:32).

Jesus Himself said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." (Jn 10:27, 28).

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is." (1 Jn 3:1-2).

"Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation, which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will." (Heb 2:1-4). If believers do not give heed more earnestly to the Word, they drift away. And if they neglect God's salvation, they will not escape punishment. Paul said, "And working together with him we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain, for he saith, 'At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, And in a day of salvation did I succour thee: behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.'" (2 Cor 6:1-2). Believers today ought to be introspective and examine themselves.

How does one receive the grace of God in vain? If a believer truly recognizes himself as a citizen of heaven, having been reborn through the Holy Spirit, he would be looking forward to the benefits of heaven. But on the other side of the picture are duties required of him. What duties? That of military service (Eph 6:12), defence (Eph 6:13), rescue (Jude 23), evangelizing, supporting the weak (1 Thess 5:14) and of giving (2 Cor 8:1-3, 9:1-2, 7), etc.

If a man fails to perform any of these duties as a Christian, that man is he who has received the grace of the Lord in vain, falling short of the Lord's expectations. He is idle and unfruitful, cumbering the ground. The Lord Jesus once told a parable regarding such unfruitful citizens (Lk 13:6-9).

Salvation And The Cities Of Refuge

Scholars of Old Testament Law agree that in instituting the ordinance of the cities of refuge, it was God's purpose to preserve the life of the unintentional manslayer. In God's eyes, passing the death penalty on one who unintentionally killed another would be to shed innocent blood, thereby defiling the land. However, if a malicious murderer was not put to death, the land would likewise be polluted (Num 35:30-34).

Death was the ultimate penalty in the Law. Only one guilty of a mortal sin was worthy of punishment by death. The people of God knew that there was a true God who searched their actions and that when they came to a dead-end in fleeing death, they could only cry out to God for mercy, like Cain who went to kill his brother (Gen 4:8). From the dialogue between Cain and God, we see that he had the knowledge of 'a life for a life', that is, if anyone who found him could slay him without sinning. The curse upon Cain made him a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, having no peace or rest through his life, right up till the time he died.

"And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, '... when ye pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer that killeth any person unwittingly may flee thither ... that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation for judgment.'" (Num 35:9-12). "For the children of Israel, and for the sojourner among them, shall these six cities be for refuge; that every one that killeth any person unwittingly may flee thither." "And the congregation shall deliver the manslayer out of the hand of the avenger of blood." (Num 35:25). "Thou shalt prepare thee the way, and divide the borders of thy land, ... that every manslayer may flee thither." (Deut 19:3).

The law requires that murderer be put to death (Ex 21:12). The avenger of blood did not need to wait for the sentence to be passed in judgment; he could kill the enemy when he is found, without being guilty of sin. This is terribly awesome, and the provision of cities of refuge could perhaps compensate for its awesomeness.

When God gave the order for the setting up of refuge cities, the nation of Israel was still journeying on the east of the Jordan, before their crossing into Canaan. Yet God was already preparing for the treatment of innocent offenders. This gives us an insight into the righteous and loving character of God, which extends His love and justice to sojourner and citizen alike.

The plan of God for refuge cities had deeper and farther implications. "Wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly unto their heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it is refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us : in which we have as an anchor of the soul, and hope both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil, wither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." (Heb 6:17-20).

Christians ought to understand that we are sojourners while on earth. Our house is in heaven. The salvation of Jesus Christ is our shelter, that is, our city of refuge. The way to this city and refuge had already been told to us by the Lord : "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life : No one cometh unto the Father , but by me." (Jn 14:6). The Lord had also said, "Let not your heart be troubled : believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are my mansions, ... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go, ye know the way." (Jn 14:1-4).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation : but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," said the Lord Jesus (Jn 16:33). Since His salvation is of city of refuge, we who have entered salvation will not be condemned. The verse, "He that believeth on him is not condemned." (Jn 3:18) - How important it is! How precious it is!

Salvation And Judgment

The potency of the law is judgment. Only when there is law is there order, for the law prevents waywardness and disregard for authorities. The magistrates, being administrators of the law, decide between right and wrong, and pass sentences in accordance to it.

The Bible lays down certain principles for executing judgment. "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment : ye shall hear the small and the great alike; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's." (Deut 1:17). "God will judge the righteous and the wicked." (Ecc 3:16-17; 2 Cor 5:10). It is true judgment that God will differentiate the good and the bad.

The earliest examples of judgment are that of Adam and that of Cain. Man receiving judgment are often plagued with fear and sorrows. God in His justice cannot but execute judgment. But in His mercy He understands our weaknesses, thus He made aprons of skin for Adam and Eve, and set a sign on Cain, as gestures to comfort them who were punished.

Why is it that God still does things for sinners? Yes, even designing the plan of salvation for man right early, just like the anticipatory move of instituting the ordinances of cities of refuge and the year of Jubilee, et al, even before Israel's entry into Canaan. According to God's grace of salvation, man, though he has sinned and has sold himself as a slave of sin, can be redeemed and set free, for freedom is mankind's birthright.

The Bible records that God shall "judge the living and the dead" (1 Pet 4:5; Ecc 3:17, 12:14). It seems to present a problem when it says, "God will judge the righteous and the wicked", for why should the righteous face judgment? How can one who is dead be judged? Who shall be Judge?

Such questioning would involve issues like "the first resurrection" and "the second resurrection" (Rev 20:5), "the second death" (Rev 20:14) and the two books of judgment (Rev 20:12).

During His earthly ministry, Christ declared, "and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (Jn 5:27-29). This reveals that the Judge is Christ Jesus, the Son of God and that the dead will be judged after their resurrection. Though the names of the righteous have been written in the Book of Life, they may be blotted out, so even righteous ones will have to be judged after their resurrection.

Those who are resurrected into life are unquestionably believers who have obeyed the command of Jesus: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Those who are resurrected into judgment are evidently the unbelievers, according to the words of the Lord: "but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." (Mk 16:16; Jn 3:18).

In fact, the lives of believers have been hidden in Christ from the beginning, and counted as members of God's household. If, however, he sins, he would be dealt with according to the law and grace of God. It is unavoidable that an erring believer be interrogated, for Jesus had said, "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof" (Mt 12:36; Ecc 11:9, 12:14).

Paul had a severe view regarding those who partake the Holy Communion in an unworthy manner: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body. For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep. But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor 11:27-32). The Holy Communion is a solemn institution of the Lord, and a rule of faith in the New Testament. It is probable that believers be judged and punished according to this rule.

"For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God and

if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Pet 4:17). "The house of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim 3:15; Eph 2:19). "But Christ as a son, over his house; who house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end." (Heb 3:6).

What is "our hope"? How is "our boldness" like? The hope of all believers is the soon-coming of Christ, and the "meeting with Him in the air" (1 Thess 4:17).

Paul, in his defence before Felix, expounded on this great hope: "... having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust ... Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day." (Ac 24:15, 21; Rom 8:18-24). This hope was so firmly held by Paul that he could forsake all and offer himself wholly to the Lord's service. It was this same hope that gave Paul the power in all he said and did. Paul was often faced with adversity but the joy of the Holy Spirit could emit from him at all times in whatever circumstances. This is truly "the glorying of our hope" (Ac 16:20-34).

Speaking about the boldness of the believers: "Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." (Ac 4:13). This was the boldness imbued by the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the truth and the Word of Life. Signs, wonders and miracles also accompanied such men, who preached without fear of losing their lives (Heb 10:32-35).

The boldness of Christians generated by hope was an established fact in Church history. The work of judgment was in fact, at the same time fulfilled in believers. They are judged by the Holy Spirit when they receive salvation and through the conviction of the Holy Spirit repent of their sins. This then becomes a judgment also upon Satan, the king of this world. "And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (Jn 16:7-13).

Judgment has already been ordained, "for he cometh, for he cometh

to judge the earth ... the world ... the peoples" (Ps 96:13). Christ Jesus will be Judge on the Last Day : "For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son" (Jn 5:22), "and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man" (Jn 5:27). According to these words of Jesus Christ, God uses the Son of Man to judge men, an arrangement conforming to the highest standard of justice. Peter said, "But the end of all things is at hand : be ye therefore of sound mind ..." (1 Pet 4:7) which is equivalent to : "the hour of his judgment is come" (Rev 14:7). As we draw near the time of judgment yet another day, the cry for judgment grows yet louder : "... cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, does thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:9-10).

The world is now approaching the 21st century. From the newspaper, radio and television, we may observe that the happenings in all the world, clearly fulfill the prophecies of Jesus Christ (Mt 24). The evils that break out amongst the peoples : the fights, killings, enmities, bullyings, reproaches, betrayals, rapes, murders ... even when resolved before human magistrates, seldom represent judgments in equity, for "in the place of justice, that wickedness was there" (Ecc 3:16). If this wicked, stinking world does not begin to purge now, when shall it begin? The Apostle Peter said, "For if God spared not angels when they sinned ... and spared not the ancient world, ... when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes ... the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment." (2 Pet 2:4-9).

John, the beloved disciple saw in a vision, "... a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, ... the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened : and another book was opened, which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up their dead that were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." (Rev 20:11-15).

It was revealed to the Apostle John, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection : over these the second death hath no power." (Rev 20:6). Our Church's interpretation of "the first resurrection" is straightforward : it refers to the point of time when a person is truly converted, and received rebirth through the Holy Spirit. This accords with the Lord's statement : "And he (the Holy Spirit), when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (Jn 16:8). Of sin, because the Lord bears our sins; of righteousness, because He gives us eternal life; of judgment, because the Holy Spirit leads us into contrition for past sins, which amounts to self-judgment. Being born again through the Holy Spirit is the first resurrection - of Spirit life. The result of the judgment is : "And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." (Rev 20:15).

Salvation And The Year Of Jubilee

Of the many statutes and ordinances which God gave to the people of Israel, the Decalogue towers dominantly, being personally uttered by the voice of God atop Mt Sinai. The remaining liturgical laws, statutes and ordinances were communicated via Moses to the people, some of which touched on social welfare. We list two here :

- 1) The Sabbatical Year
- 2) The Year of Jubilee

The Sabbatical Year is a "year of release in which every creditor was to release his debtors among the Israelites if they could not repay the debt when the Sabbatical Year arrived. With the coming of the Sabbatical Year, the land must be allowed to rest and slaves must be set free (Lev 25:1-7; Deut 15:1-15).

The Year of Jubilee is observed after seven Sabbatical years : "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years, ... even forty and nine years. Then shalt thou send abroad the trumpet throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof : it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family." (Lev 25:8-10).

"If thy brother be waxed poor, and sell some of his possession, then shall his kinsmen that is next unto him come, and shall redeem that which his brother hath sold. And if a man have no one to redeem it, and he be waxed rich and find sufficient to redeem it ... But if he be not able to get it back for himself, then that which he hath sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubilee : and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession." (Lev 25:25-28).

"And if thy brother be waxed poor with thee, and sell himself unto thee; thou shalt not make him to serve as a bondservant ... he shall serve with thee unto the year of jubilee : then shall he go out from thee, he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return." (Lev 25:39-41).

"And if ... thy brother be waxed poor ... and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner with thee ... after that he is sold he may be redeemed ... And if he be not redeemed by these means, then he shall go out in the year of jubilee." (Lev 25:47-57).

A study of the ordinances pertaining to the Year of Jubilee shows that God is full of love, mercy and grace, even to the birds and the beasts.

Blessed are the ones with whom God covenants, for they shall be called His chosen. God is not only the Creator of all things, but is gracious, merciful and rich in lovingkindness. He often had regard for the poor and lowly among His chosen people. This is a glad tidings, which gives us an insight into the attributes of God. God-loving ones among His chosen understood this, like Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah, for when they learned that the time was near when God would turn again and re-establish His people, they prayed earnestly before God in contrition, pleading with God to save, according to His lovingkindness and truth.

Christians have heard Jesus' own proclamation and thus have knowledge of God's salvation, mercy and lovingkindness. When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent men to ask Jesus, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" Jesus answered, "Go and tell

John the things which ye hear and see : the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." (Mt 11:2-6). Clearly then, Christ Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father, was sent into the world to grant mercy, grace, and comfort to the poor, the sick and distraught, manifesting the goodwill of God. There is a statement of Jesus, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give your rest." (Mt 11:28).

The ordinance of jubilee fits in very well into the plan of salvation, especially the provision for the nearest kin to redeem a poor man's possession, and the automatic return of such possessions on the Year of Jubilee in case redemption was not possible. The generosity of Boaz as recorded in the Book of Ruth, in redeeming the possession of his nearest kinsman follows the pattern prescribed in the ordinance. It was a noble act, worthy of praise (Ruth 4:1-6). The appeal of the daughters of Zelophehad, to acquire the possessions of their heirless father was in accordance with the principle of the same jubilee ordinance God told Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right" (Num 27:1-11), and also, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph speaketh right" (Num 36:3-8).

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus "came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up : and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written,

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year (jubilee) of the Lord."*
(Lk 4:16-19).

The tidings of the Year of Jubilee is wonderful and delightful. The mystery of God's salvation is also hidden therein. "How beautiful

unto the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Is 52:7).

When believers receive salvation through belief and baptism, they covenant with Christ and are entitled to have a share in the Holy Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor 3:17). "For freedom did Christ set us free." (Gal 5:1). With what does Christ set believers free? "With precious blood ... even the blood of Christ." (1 Pet 1:19). "Ye were brought with a price, become not bondservants of men." (1 Cor 7:23). According to the jubilee ordinance, redemption is not effected simply by paying the price, but that the price be paid lawfully by a near kinsman. Is Christ Jesus our near kinsman? Is it lawful?

If one "believeth and is baptized", he covenants with the Lord, and so it becomes lawful. If a believer is born of the Holy Spirit, he is the Lord's kinsman. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For ye received not the Spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are children of God." (Rom 8:14-16). Once, in public, Jesus "stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, 'Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who his in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.'" (Mt 12:49-50).

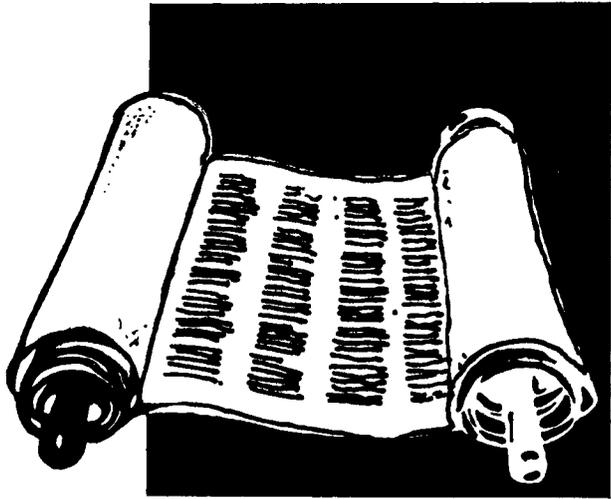
The principle of saving grace and that of jubilee ordinance accord with each other, and shed light of each other. The two, however, are employed separately, one being concerned with the spiritual lives of the multitude and the other, with the welfare of nation and society.

Moses announced to the people, "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there, that hath a god so high unto them, as Jehovah our God is whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that

hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut 4:6-8).

The ordinance of jubilee was not regarded or kept by the chosen nation, Israel (Neh 5:1-13), thus were counted unworthy to enjoy jubilee rest. For a time they became desolate, awaiting the glorious manifestation of the gospel proclaimed by Christ Himself when He recited the prophecy of Isaiah :

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year (jubilee) of the Lord."*
(Lk 4:16-19). ■



HAVE YOU NOT READ

During the Lord Jesus' ministry, there were at least three groups of people who sought to eliminate Him. They included the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Sadducees. In general, the Pharisees were the middle-class, non-priestly, zealous adherers to the Oral Traditions. Some Pharisees were also Scribes who were the Scholars of the Law. Both groups, Pharisees and Scribes, represented the forerunners of everyman-Judaism at the time of Jesus. The name Sadducees refer to the aristocratic party in the latter part of the second temple period. They held seats in temple administration, partook in worship rituals and accepted only the Torah (not the prophets nor the writings) as the sole authority of their faith.

Though the Sadducees and Pharisees were enemies in the Sanhedrin, the two were united in their hatred and determination to remove the Lord Jesus. Ironically, they were counted jointly many times: John the Baptist attacked both in sharp terms (Mt 3:7f), Jesus grouped both parties together when He denounced their doctrines. These groups were described in their questions to test His ability to handle the teachings of the Law (Mt 15:1). It occurred more than five occasions (Mt 12:3, 19:4, 21:16, 21:42, 22:31; Mk 12:10, 12:26), the Lord Jesus confronted them with the negative question - "Have you not read?"

Analyzing the four gospels would elucidate why the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees could not comprehend God's message. Five states of mind are identified by both the New Testament writers: indifference, obstinacy, complacency, self-glorification and a slowness of heart. Their mistakes are lessons for modern Christians.

Jesus compared the Pharisees and the Scribes to children in the market place (Lk 7:31-34) who called to one another "We piped to you, and you did not dance: we wailed, and you did not weep". John the Baptist came as an ascetic, they called him a demoniac. Jesus Christ did not fast and they called Him a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of the tax-collectors and sinners. God's word came to them through different mouths and in contrasting styles, yet they were not stirred. God invited them to the banquet of His kingdom, but they made excuses to decline the invitation: they rejected to share in the joy and glory of the Lord.

Although God's word is invaluable to those who are receptive, to an indifferent person, it has no effect. This is why God's salvation was brushed aside by many of the learned Pharisees and Scribes and the literalist Sadducees. Today, one may dutifully study the teachings of the Bible and attend religious meetings: like the Scribes, one may be literate scripturally (since one's tender age). But, has one neglected the essence, and paid more attention to the letters of God's word? Has one treated worship as a routine, rather than as an opportunity to assemble as a family to extol the Lord, to receive His word and to reflect how His word is applicable to one's life?

On numerous instances, the gospel writers exposed the obstinacy of these two religious sects. One such instance is when Jesus censured the Sadducees' erroneous doctrine of resurrection: "You are wrong, because you know neither the scripture nor the power of God" (Mt 22:29). Jesus saw through their pretences (they called Him teacher - verse 24) and their attempts to embarrass Him. Shrewdly, He quoted from the Torah, the only authentic form of scripture to the Sadducees, to tell them that this doctrine has existed as early as the Patriarchal period. Being the conservatives of the Law, the Sadducees knew that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They had not felt obliged to believe what Moses had not expounded nor developed:

what seems lightly mentioned is also lightly regarded. They had only chosen to accept what they liked to believe.

Likewise, many may adhere to certain biblical teachings and reject or distort those which are not to their liking (2 Pet 3:15-16). There are, for instance, the rationalists who disbelieve in miracles, dispute the virgin birth and dismiss the Christian doctrine of eschatology. A few sad stories similar to "Pharisees and Sadducees" were evident even in the True Church. They initially pursued spiritual advancement through prolonged prayers. But, after some time, they shunted away from ordinary church worship and finally fell prey to false prophetic messages that led them away from the Common Faith. According to Peter, such people will meet a destructive end (2 Pet 2:1ff).

The third factor that blinds the Pharisees, Scribes and the Sadducees is complacency. They were contented to have partial rather than the complete Truth. With the exception of some who were genuine in their quest for the Truth, namely, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and the anonymous Pharisee who invited the Lord to dinner, the majority, however, were happy with their status quo.

In fact, the complacency of these religious leaders led them to reject Jesus Christ, the true light of the world who would enlighten every man (Jn 1:9-10). The light came to His own chosen people, but they did not know Him. His kinsmen did not pay Him respect (Jn 9:31ff). They called Him mad, a physician who could not even help himself. "Could there be anything good out of Galilee?" they mocked without realizing that He is the Messiah whom their forefathers had longed to see.

As in the Church today, are we not just like them? For example, when a youth first begins to deliver the message of God in the pulpit, would his instructions receive much attention? Would the long-serving believers be just as complacent to look down on this person thinking that as they have believed in the Lord longer, surely they know more than this mere youth. After all, they have known every aspect of the Church, have served on the Church Board for many years, and have read the Bible many times. No, they are wrong: in the Church, one should learn from the mistakes of the Pharisees and Scribes, and not

be complacent. The knowledge of the Bible is limitless. Complacency stagnates one's faith, and exposes one to the danger of backsliding.

In John 5:39-44, Jesus Christ pin-points yet another failure of His generation: they would rather receive glory from one another than to seek glory from the only God. On one hand, they claimed to search the Scriptures for eternal life. Yet, they preferred worldly glory, fame and social status. The latter have blinded them from the true glory of God through the Lord Jesus. They loved to be addressed as rabbi in the market-place, accept honourable seats at synagogues and in the Sanhedrin, be the guest of honour at dinner feasts. In so doing, they fail to accept what the Lord would offer them: humility in this life vis-a-vis glorification and rewards in the kingdom of heaven.

Some may indeed try to excel in biblical scholarship in order to earn recognition as an authority amongst their peers. Such self-glorification offended and disappointed some Christians of the True Church who therefore advised against such biblical research. While such dissuasion may be rated extreme by the general membership, there remains a few who insist on the importance of spiritual cultivation over and above bible knowledge, when the two should go side by side, as both are equally important to one's spiritual sustenance.

The Bible is one of the most researched book ever. It is supported by thousands of exegetical commentaries, historical, archeological and geographical studies. Factual findings from these publications will help one to interpret, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, many difficult biblical passages such as that to the Lord's of cursing the fig tree (Mk 11:12-14, 20). If one does not know the pattern of the fig, namely, the leaves emerge after the fruits are formed, one would regard the curse as merely a show of the Lord's power: how unreasonable of Him to curse the tree when it was not the season to bear fruit.

The slowness of heart is another factor that prevents one from grasping the essence of God's message. On the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:25), the Lord lightly reprimanded the two disciples as being foolish, and slow to believe all the prophecies concerning Him. The same was true of the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees: their unbelief

was also caused by their slowness of heart. They might have heard the Lord explained; they sought but could not find, because they were slow to receive.

One may become slow in heart during some stage in one's journey of faith. One's ears may be listening to the words of God through the mouth of the preachers, one's eyes may be travelling along the lines of a biblical passage during daily bible-reading, one's lips may be speaking in the spiritual tongue during daily prayers, but one's mind is not receptive, one's heart is slow. The words of God become just voices, the biblical passage just ink and paper, the spiritual tongue just muttering the unknown. There is no interaction with God in this spiritual void.

Such individuals like the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees, both of old and modern times, Ezekiel paints vividly : "As for you, son of man (meaning Ezekiel), your people who walk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, 'Come, and hear what the word is that comes forth from the LORD.' And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it : few with their lips they show much love, but their heart is set on gain. And lo, you are to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. When this come - and come it will! - then they will know that a prophet has been among them." (Ezk 33:30-33).

As the Lord often says, "Let he who has ears hear, let he who has eyes see." But let no one claim not to have read or to have heard concerning His word, for He will come with the negative question "Have you not read in my Scriptures?" and will expect the answer "Yes", and one will be found guilty! ■



Sabbath was made for man

The Bible says, "Now it happened that He (Jesus) went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went, His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, 'Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' But He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him; how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?' And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" (Mk 2:23-28; Mt 12:1-8). The Pharisees regarded Sabbath as more important than man, just as they viewed the physical temple of God to be more important than man. The Lord Jesus said, "The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth." (Jn 4:21-24). Jesus said that the worship of the Father is neither in the mountains (Mt Gerizim, Deut

27:12, Jos 8:33), nor in Jerusalem (Mt Zion, Is 2:2-3; Ps 132:13, 14) but in the heart. What does this mean? The prophet Isaiah prophesied before the Lord Jesus came to the world, "Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made. And all those things exist,' says the Lord. 'But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit. And who trembles at My Word.'" (Is 66:1-2). Under the New Testament, the Holy Temple of Jerusalem is no longer the dwelling place of God. God does not dwell in temples made with hands of men (Ac 17:24). Instead, God shall dwell in the hearts of men. Jesus referred to His body as a temple (Jn 2:19-21). Paul said, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1 Cor 3:16, 17, 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16). When the Spirit of God dwells in the heart, the body shall be called the temple of God. Such a temple is more glorious than those built by men.

A. Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath

Not only is man more important than the physical temple, he is also more important than the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath because God treasures man more than the Sabbath day itself. Hence, man ought not be like the Pharisees in judging others with respect to the Sabbath. Why did the Pharisees rank Sabbath above man? They were under the law, not under grace (Rom 6:14). Paul explained it this way : "But the scripture has confined all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you all are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized unto Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all on in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:22-29). After we have believed in

Christ Jesus, we are no longer under the law of Moses but under grace; being sons of God and no more slaves. As the Bible says, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we may receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Gal 4:4-7). Furthermore, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15). God's heart towards a slave and a son is different. A slave fears in a way a son does not. Thus, we can say that a slave exists for the sake of the inheritance while this inheritance was made for the sake of the son. A slave is to serve while a son is to inherit; there is a difference. The master regards the slave more highly than days but the son would rank higher than the slave. The Pharisees in regarding themselves as under the law of the Sabbath were hence like slaves in the sight of God. Jesus Christ is even higher than both the temple and the Sabbath. He is in fact Lord of the Sabbath. Being the Son of God, He is not under the law but under grace and is the heir of God, being Lord of the Sabbath with God. The Bible tells us : Now to Abraham and His Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds" as of many but as of one, "And to your Seed" who is Christ. We who are baptized have put on Christ and as one with Him. So, we who are unto Christ are sons of God and heirs with Christ. We are to be Lord of the Sabbath with our Lord.

B. God's View of Sabbath

The prophet Isaiah said, "Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts. My Soul hates. They are a trouble to Me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you may make prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of you doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Reprove the oppressor. Defend the fatherless. Plead for the widow."

(Is 1:13-17). God does not disdain the Sabbath Day, but the people who vainly observe the Sabbaths. These people put on a pious front, offering futile sacrifices but deep within, their hearts are full of evil and bloodshed. Such was the case of the Scribes and Pharisees and the Jews. They waited to rebuke Jesus regarding the Sabbath so as to get rid of Him. Though they viewed such fault-finding as being fervent in Sabbath observance. God regarded these with disdain. The Sabbath that God approves of is that of doing good, seeking justice, freeing the oppressed and defending the orphans and widows. Jesus did all these good works on the Sabbath. He healed the sick, proclaimed the Truth of justice freed the captives of evil spirits, defended the helpless and inflicted and rebuking the hypocrisy of the rulers of the synagogue. He defended the powerless disciples, citing the case of David eating the forbidden shewbread - since David's act was not reckoned as sin, the disciples ought not be judged sinful. In other words, God does not hate the Sabbath but the evildoers who keep the Sabbath wrongly. God delights not in observance days void of spirituality but in the deeds of the goodness performed by those who observe the Sabbath in true spirit. Therefore, it is undeniable that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

C. Man is more precious than the Sabbath

We should not be like the Jews who place the importance of the Sabbath over that of man. Since the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa, man should be placed higher than the Sabbath itself. We ought to understand further the things to do on the Sabbath - to do good, pursue justice and defend the orphans and widows. We obtain God's delight by so doing. Failing which our Sabbath observance would be meaningless because God has no pleasures in vain sacrifices, no regard for meaningless assemblies and futile prayers. More importantly, we must not harbour evil intentions or commit evil. For "He who would love life and see good days; Let him refrain his tongue from evil. And his lips from speaking guile; Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. And His ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Pet 3:10-12). Also, "When they fast, I will not hear their cry" (Jer 14:12). And again, "Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise

you since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you and in part I believe it ... Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment." (1 Cor 11:17-18, 33-34). Hence, the Sabbath of evil-doers is detestable to God. However, are we to despise the Sabbath just because we, men, are more precious than the Sabbath and the Lord of the Sabbath together with Christ? Absolutely not! Prophet Isaiah said, "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight. The holy day of the Lord honourable and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord. And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Is 58:13-14). The prophet had earlier proclaimed that God held the Sabbath with disdain whereas now we see God instructing the observance of Sabbath. There seems to exist a conflict. But in fact, Isaiah was not being contradicting. God detests the Sabbath observance of evil-doers but delights in the keeping of the Sabbath by the righteous. Therefore, honour the Sabbath granted us by God (Ex 16:29; Ezk 20:12). Sabbath is for the benefit of man; it is a holy day to have communion with God, as recorded in the Scriptures : surely My Sabbaths you shall keep; for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you ." (Ex 31:13). Also, "Hallow my Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God." (Ezk 20:20). Sabbath, hence, is the day for our sanctification and to know that our Lord God is holy. Peter said, "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Pet 1:15, 16). So, through the Sabbath instituted by God, we have fellowship with Him (1 Jn 1:6-7), that we may obtain the glory of God as in a mirror and so be transformed into the same glorious image, that we may be perfect like the Father (Mt 5:48) and partake of His divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Since the Sabbath is made for us, ought we not rest from all works, turn from our own ways and engage in the affairs of the Lord? We should not find pleasure in worldly affairs but delight in God. Thus,

God shall make us ride on high places, nourish us with the riches of the spiritual Canaan (the Truth) and we shall receive the spiritual blessings from above. Knowing all these, we should all the more honour the Sabbath, filling this day with the word and grace of God and manifest the glorious liberty as sons of God (Rom 8:21). If we all know that even fragments of leftover food ought not be wasted (Jn 6:12), how much more ought we cherish the God-given day? If we despise and waste the Sabbath for the fact that we are together with Christ as Lord of the Sabbath, we are in fact corrupting the Truth. For this, we shall be judged just as the serpent was judged for twisting the commandment of God in tempting Eve (Gen 2:17, 3:1-6). Undoubtedly, we are more precious than the physical temple (church building), nevertheless, we must not abuse the building given by God, as the Lord Jesus said, "Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise." (Jn 2:16). He also said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" (Mt 21:13). We ought to understand the words of Jesus in not allowing judgments with respect to the Sabbath, as advised by Paul, "let no one judge you" (Col 2:16, 17). We ourselves also should not judge and so shall not be judged (Lk 6:37). Instead, we should preach that Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath and that "Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath", so that the earth may be full of this knowledge, as waters cover the sea (Is 11:9). ■

Know The True Church



I. What Is The Meaning Of A Church?

1. The Greek word "ekklesia" is made up of two words "call" and "out" is commonly used in the Greek society as "congregation" (Ac 19:32, 39-40).
2. In the spiritual sense it means a congregation, called out by the grace of the Lord, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, consecrated from the rest of the people (Ref : Ac 20:28; 1 Cor 12:13; Rev 5:9-10).
3. The word "church" means the church set up in various places - the elect of God including churches set up in the houses of the believers (Ac 8:1, 9:31, 14:23, 16:4-5; 1 Cor 16:19).

Apart from this, it also includes the saved ones redeemed by the Lord and the chosen people of God of the past, present and the future in heavens and on earth. (Ref : Eph 1:23, 3:10, 21, 5:23, 25-27, 32; Heb 12:23). The former one is called the "physical church" while the latter is called "the church without physical form".

II. The Prefiguration Of The Church.

Prefiguration is but a shadow and not the true material form (Heb 10:1).

1. Eve : Adam, before he sinned, prefigures Christ (1 Cor 15:45). Eve was made from a rib taken from Adam. This prefigures that Christ

would shed blood from His side for the formation of the church, so that the church and the Lord would become one body, sharing the glory together (Ref : Gen 2:21-25; Jn 19:32-35; Ac 20:28; Gal 3:27; Eph 5:25-32).

2. The Israelites : They were the elect of the Old Testament (Deut 14:2). God sent Moses to deliver them out of Egypt and led them across the Red Sea. In the wilderness God guided them with a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire to the promised land, Canaan, and apportioned to them with possessions (Ref : Ex 3:7-10; 1 Cor 10:1-12; Josh 21:43-45). This prefigures that all those who believe in Jesus, baptized into Christ, obey the Holy Spirit, observe the commandments of God, shall enjoy the spiritual Canaan - the heavenly possession (Ref : Jn 3:16, 5; Gal 3:27-29, 4:5-7).

III. The Establishment Of The Church.

1. Christ sacrificed His life to fulfill salvation (Ref : Rom 3:23; Heb 9:27, 22, 10:2-7; Mt 20:28; 1 Cor 15:1-4).

2. The Holy Spirit descended to establish the church (Ref : Ac 20:28, 1:3-9, 2:1-14, 37-47; Gal 3:27-29).

IV. The Development Of The Church.

1. The process of development : Since the descent of the Holy Spirit in which the apostles received mighty powers and the three missionary journeys made by Paul, the gospel was spread to the Roman empire (Ref : Ac 1:8, 4:4, 7:54-8:13, 13:1-3, 28:16-31).

2. The basic gospel preached : The gospel then preached testified that Jesus was Christ with His resurrection as an evidence. Also, the descent of the Holy Spirit truly testified that the Lord has resurrected. (Ac 2:32-33; 1 Cor 15:1-8).

The gospel of salvation was preached based on the following :

a. Believe that Jesus is the only Saviour (Ac 4:12, 16:30-31) :

Believe that He had died for our sins, was resurrected on the third day and on the Last Day will return to execute judgment (Ref : 1 Cor 15:1-4; Jn 14:1-3; Mt 25:31-46).

b. To repent :

In the aspect of belief (Ac 19:19, 26:20) and the moral aspect (Ac 2:37-38; Lk 3:7-14).

c. To receive the correct mode of baptism (Mk 16:16; Eph 4:5) :

i) The efficacy of baptism

For the remission of sins (Ac 2:38, 22:16).

To be saved and be justified (Mk 16:16; Rom 5:9).

To be in Christ (Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 12:13).

To become children of God (Gal 4:5-7; Mt 3:16-17)

ii) The correct mode of baptism

In the name of the Lord Jesus (Ac 2:38, 8:16, 19:5).

With the head bowed (Rom 5:5, 8; Jn 19:30).

To dip the whole body in the water (Jn 3:23; Ac 8:38; Col 2:12; Zech 13:1).

d. To receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:4-5) :

i) The importance of receiving the Holy Spirit

To obtain eternal life (Ezk 37:14; Rev 22:17).

As an evidence that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16; Mt 3:16-17).

As a guarantee to inherit the heavenly possession (Eph 1:13-14).

Enable us to have the power to work as well as walk in the truth (Ac 1:8; Ezk 36:26-27; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 12:4-11).

ii) The evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit

It does not mean that when one believes, he has receive the Holy Spirit (Ac 19:1-2, 1:4-5).

It does not mean that when one is baptized, he will have the Holy Spirit (Ac 8:15-16).

The apostles reckoned tongue speaking as an evidence of having received the Holy Spirit :

On the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:4)

In the house of Cornelius (Ac 10:44-46)

The believers of Ephesus (Ac 19:6-7; ref 1 Cor 14:2)

e. **To obey the commandments of the Lord (Mt 28:20), including :**

i) The Sacrament of Foot-washing (Jn 13:1-20).

ii) The Sacrament of the Holy Communion (Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-31).

f. **To keep The Ten Commandments (Mt 19:16-19; 1 Cor 7:19; Jas 2:10-11), including :**

i) The observance of the Sabbath, to keep it as a day of holy convocation (Ex 20:8-11; Rev 11:19, 15:5).

g. **To pursue after holiness (Heb 12:14; 1 Thess 4:17, 5:23; 2 Thess 2:13)**

h. **To love God and love our fellow men (Mt 22:37-40; Jn 13:34-35; 1 Cor 13:1-13; Mt 28:31-46)**

3. To rely on the Holy Spirit in all matters (Zech 4:6; Phil 4:13) : To rely on the Holy Spirit in preaching, in performing miracles (Ac 1:8, 4:17-22, 5:12-16), to be moved by the Holy Spirit to offer money and self (Ac 2:44, 4:32-37; Phil 1:5), to be in one accord and propagate the gospel (Eph 4:1-6; Ac 2:46-47, 15:19-29). To rely on the Holy Spirit in choosing and sending workers and in decision-making (Ac 20:28, 13:1-3, 16:6-10, 15:28-29).

V. The Fall Of The Church.

1. The Apostolic Period : During the apostle period, Satan had already perverted the gospel (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Cor 11:4, Jude 3; Mt 13:24-30; 2 Cor 1:13-14).

2. The Roman Catholic Period : The Roman Empire persecuted the church till the period of Emperor Constantine in 312 AD. After that the church appeared to have developed somewhat but, there were "birds making nests" in it (Mt 13:31-32, 4, 19; Mk 4:14-15).

3. The Protestant Period : Martin Luther saw the need to reform the church and ardently started the work of church reformation. But until today the beliefs of the Protestants have not been restored to that of the apostolic days. On the contrary, they have drifted further away from the Bible, preaching heresies (Mt 13:33-35; 1 Cor 5:6-8; Ezk 23:1-4, 11, 31, 38).

VI. The Revival Of The Church.

1. Prefiguration of the rebuilding of the church (Amos 9:11) :

Temple building - Captivity - Rebuilding. This part of the history of the temple is a prefiguration of the process by which a church will experience (Ref : Ezra 1:1-5; Jer 25:8-12; Is 2:2-4).

2. Prefiguration of the seven festivals :

These seven festivals can be categorized into two groups, namely:

The first group is the first four festivals, dating from the 14th day of the first month to the 6th day of the third month.

The second group is the last three festivals, dating from the 1st day of the seventh month to the 21st day of the same month.

This is a prefiguration of the work of God in two major periods (Ref : Lev 23; Jas 5:7; Joel 2:1).

3. Prefiguration of the seven parables :

The seven parables of the Lord implied teachings and prophecies (Mt 13:34-35). The first to the fourth parable were fulfilled from the Apostolic period to the Protestant period. The fifth to the seventh parable will be fulfilled during the descent of the Holy Spirit of the Latter Rain to the time of the second coming of Christ (Ref : Mt 13:44-50).

VII. The Prospect Of The Church.

1. The descent of the Holy Spirit of the Latter Rain :

The early rain (autumn rain) - winter - the latter rain (spring rain) - summer. Rain (symbolizes the Holy Spirit) falls in two periods. It denotes that the work of the Holy Spirit comprises of two periods, whereas now it is the period of the latter rain (Joel 2:23, 28-32; Jas 5:7; Zech 10:1; Mal 4:5-6; Ezk 47:1-5).

2. The spiritual knowledge shall increase (Dan 12:4; Rev 22:10; 1 Cor 2:10-13; Jn 16:12-13; Eph 4:13) : Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual knowledge shall be unified before the second coming of the Lord and the believers will share the belief of the Lord, one faith and one baptism (Eph 4:1-6; 1:10; Jn 14:16-17, 26).

3. The rebuilding of the True Church shall be successful (Ref : Rev 19:7-8; Eph 5:26-27; Rev 21 - 22)

VIII. To Be Steadfast In Faith And To Serve The Lord Faithfully.

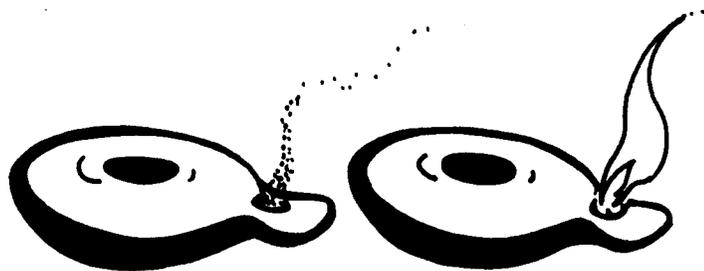
1. Steadfast in faith (1 Cor 15:58; 1 Pet 5:12; Rom 8:35-39)

2. Serve the Lord faithfully (1 Cor 4:1-2) :

To be grateful to the Lord and to live for Christ (2 Cor 5:14-15; Rom 14:7-8).

To realize the gifts we have received and to serve the Lord with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul and with all our might, and to await for the second coming of the Lord (Ref : Rom 12:3-8; 1 Pet 4:9-11; Judg 9:8-15; Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:11-27; 2 Tim 4:6-8). ■

By John Yang



BE STEADFAST IN THE LORD

The standard of morality has declined to its ebb. More and more people are heading towards the disastrous end. Sins such as sexual immorality, drug abuse and murder were peculiar in the adult world, but not anymore. They are common among the young. As statistics have shown, the prevalence and seriousness of these sins have caused much social unrest. In such decadent generation, many of our brethren have also been intoxicated by the corruption of this world. Their life styles are moving them farther and farther away from God. Worse, they may involve themselves in sinful activities such as underground movements and womanizing, which will result in their spiritual death. This article, with its main focus on the youths of the Church, emphasizes the following issues: What are the underlying reasons of backsliding? How can the youths stand firm in the Lord?

In the Old Testament period, anyone who disregarded the law of Moses was punishable by death on the testimony of two or three persons. For believers in the New Testament period, the punishment will be more severe, if we contemptuously treat the son of God, by defiling the sanctifying blood of the covenant (Heb 10:28, 29). The Bible teaches that God's grace will be upon those who obey His word. Within this ambience of grace, we can exercise freedom of choice. However, any action that exceeds His commandments will be re-

garded as profaning His blood. Also, if we persist in wilful sinning after having received the knowledge of the truth, the grace of God will be withdrawn. Then we can only expect the fearful judgment of God (Heb 10:27). Therefore, to remain steadfast in the Lord is vital.

The question is, are we steadfast in the Lord? Many of us may contend that we do not belong to the condemned group. After all, we attend every Sabbath service and we pray everyday. With complacency, we assume that we will not fall into the judgment of God. However, the Bible warns those who think that they are standing firm to be careful, lest they fall (1 Cor 10:12). Human observation can also bear testimony to this: many past fervent workers and regular church-goers have since left the church. Of course, such workers might have departed because of other factors. Over time, they might have lost sight of the real purpose of serving God and gradually paid more attention to their own personal achievements. They failed to abide by the biblical principle: as their proficiencies, bible knowledge and responsibilities increase, so must their faith progress. By forgetting this, they gave ground for the devil to work in them. Besides this category of people, there are others who have also left the Church. It is pertinent for us to analyse the reasons for their downfall.

Although we are part of the regular church congregation, we may reach a point where we feel that church services are monotonous. We may find it difficult to be motivated by the message. We attend these services, because it is expected of us. The Bible reveals that these unpleasant feelings are generated from our impure hearts. Examples include pride (Jas 1:21), faithlessness (Heb 4:2), hardheartedness (Heb 3:7, 8) and unreadiness to accept attacking words (Amos 3:1). Instead of letting these feelings grow, we should ask God to transform our inner character to absorb His words. We must prepare ourselves before attending each religious service (Jn 4:24). In a religious sense, church attendance is more than just for self-edification. As members of the community of faith, we will realize the full benefit of church attendance, if our responsibilities extend to helping others and establishing a good rapport with our brothers and sisters, through regular communication and mutual support.

Many of us join in the Sabbath service because we acknowledge this

commandment of God. But, as we are living in a world where sinful enticements are generally increasing exponentially, being a once-a-week church-goer can endanger our spiritual life. This, coupled with the decline in traditional values and moral integrity, increases the risk even further. As time goes on, we will pick up unchristian social norms. We may start smoking, drinking, swearing, the list is endless. Slowly but surely, we will develop a pattern of life that we feel comfortable with and that conforms to the surrounding decadent environment. Unwittingly, we have allowed the deceitfulness of sin to creep into our hearts. Therefore, to hold on to our status as "Sabbath Christians" without conforming to the world is neither possible nor biblical (Rev 3:15).

As illustrated above, to attend only Sabbath service is clearly insufficient. The Bible clearly states: "To encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'TODAY', lest anyone of us be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb 3:13) and "We should ALWAYS come together to encourage one another, and all the more as we see the day drawing near." (Heb 10:25). We should improve our fellowship with our brothers and sisters and join in activities that are centred around spiritual cultivation. Besides formal church services, we should frequent informal bible studies and family services to encourage one another. In particular, we should associate with those younger brethren and set good examples in prayer and moral integrity (2 Tim 2:22).

While we actively participate in church functions, we should not segregate ourselves from the world. After all, we have the duty to bring to the Lord. But, if we are not careful, constant involvement with outside friends, especially those who are influential, may lead us away from God by making us a party in their social activities (1 Cor 15:33). To avoid this, we should ensure that our primary association are with our brethren. Social contact with others should thus be peripheral. However, even if such a precautionary step is taken, there is still one more point we need to bear in mind - We should not compromise our christian principles or test the divine limits. Whomever we socialize with, our curiosities must not lead us, for example, to dabble with drinks, drugs or pornography. This is dangerous. The more we satisfy our curiosities in experiencing

forbidden matters, the less barriers there will be to safeguard our spiritual lives.

In short, as youths of the True Church, we ought to prepare our hearts before we attend church services. Taking this one step further, we ought to participate in other church functions such as bible studies and family services. In all cases, we ought to guide and set good examples for our younger brethren. Finally, we ought to be careful in our choice of friends. Once we achieve these, we are on the way to being steadfast in the Lord. ■

A sister sits on a lone hillside and contemplates over God's great love for her ...

Lord, I thank You

*Lord, I thank you for creating the earth, the universe
so that I might know how great you are.*

*I thank you for creating all that has life and that which
has not so that I might learn of your almightiness.*

*I thank you especially for having created me so that I
could appreciate your beautiful creation,
And that I may try to glorify your Name through my life.*

God, merciful God, I will entreat you -

*I will entreat you not to let any tears be left on my
face when my heart is broken,*

*But that you might stretch out your tender hand to wipe
them away.*

*I will entreat you not to let my wounds be left exposed
and uncared for,*

But that you might pour down your love to heal them.

*I will entreat you not to ever let me wander away from
you Lord,*

*Should I fall, may you stretch out your almighty arm to
help me stand up again.*

God, Righteous God -

There remains one more thing I need to ask of you.

*Should I ever sin against you because of my weaknesses,
Give me your discipline so that I will not be as a sheep
without a shepherd.*

*And lead me always to walk on your path of righteousness
and never depart. ■*

The following article, "Should A Deaconess Administer Footwashing?" is taken from the 1st ministers meeting of the churches in Southeast Asia, conducted by the Southeast Asia Evangelical Centre, held in Telok Kurau Church from 23 to 24 November 1987. During the two-day meeting, there was a session specially allocated for truth research. This paper was presented by Preacher Philip Chong of GA Sabah to the meeting for review. In the article, Preacher Philip Chong pointed out that in our church there is no sex discrimination because once we are baptized into Christ we have put on Christ, "There is neither male or female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:28). But the point in issue is proper authorization of the church rather than anything else. Preacher Chong sums up : a woman minister is not proper to conduct the Sacrament of Footwashing. Otherwise, she should be given the permission to perform the other two sacraments also; unless we view the other two sacraments as more important which cannot be asserted.

CAN A DEACONESS LAY HANDS ON BELIEVERS OR ADMINISTER FOOTWASHING SACRAMENT?

In considering the official function(s) of a deaconess in relation to the duties of the church, it is both necessary and appropriate to first consider the validity of the official title "deaconess".

The word "deaconess" occurs only once in the English Bible in Romans 16:1 according to the RSV and none in the KJV. The Greek word translated "deaconess" here is "diakonos" which occurs about 30 times in the NT. It is in Romans 16:1 that it has been concluded that there existed an order of women bearing that title in the apostolic age, though it would appear from the early church history that there was indeed such an order a little while later. Pliny the Younger, writing as governor of Bithynia to the emperor Trajan in AD 112, indicated that by that time there were deaconesses among the Christians. Similarly, Greek fathers like Chrysostom, Theophylact, Grocius and others regularly read 1 Tim 3:11 as referring to deaconesses (as the Chinese version renders) rather than to deacons' wives.

It would seem therefore that such an order as "deaconesses", as regularly ordained in the True Jesus Church, is in line with the practice of the apostolic church or the early church a little later.

Women who satisfy the qualifications listed in 1 Tim 3:11 and Ac 6:3 may properly be ordained deaconesses to assist in the works of the church.

Can a Deaconess Lay Hands on Believers?

Both the teachings and the practice of the laying on of hands are abundant in the Bible. The laying on of hands can be for any of the following purposes :

- 1) for blessing (Gen 48:14-20; Mk 10:16)
- 2) for healing (Lk 4:40, 13:13; Mk 16:18)
- 3) for ordination (Ac 6:6, 13:3; 1 Tim 2:7)
- 4) for impartation of gift(s) (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6)
- 5) for the reception of the Holy Spirit (Ac 8:14-17, 19:6)

The above purposes would call for special qualifications and authority on the part of the one who lays hands on others. Is a deaconess empowered and qualified for the task?

There is not one single instance in the Bible of a woman laying hands on another for any of the purposes aforesaid nor is there any biblical evidence that a deaconess is ever ordained to do the task. Early church history is silent on this matter. Paul, on the other hand, forbid women to teach or have authority over men (1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 14:34). To lay hands on men would infer and imply certain spiritual authority over men, contrary to the teachings of Paul. It is therefore good and proper that deaconesses refrain from laying hands on believers, as a matter of prudence.

Can a Deaconess Administer Footwashing?

Footwashing is a sacrament as much as baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments. Sacraments must be administered by the church, as instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ. The instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ were originally to the disciples (apostles) and later delegated (ref 1 Cor 1:17; Ac 8:12).

The True Jesus Church has in practice often delegated the perform-

ance of footwashing sacrament on baptized females to a deaconess (and sometimes even to a lay female member of the church). It seems that consideration of decorum and proprieties between the sexes is behind the practice, rather than biblical teachings. However, to administer the sacrament of footwashing is to do so on behalf of the Lord Jesus (Jn 13:15, 20) and to receive footwashing from the authorized person is to receive Christ in His instructions (Jn 13:15, 20). Consideration of sexual difference of the recipient from the authorized performer is irrelevant, as God does not distinguish the recipient of grace on ground of sex (Gal 3:8). The point in issue is proper authorization. Can a deaconess be properly authorized to perform footwashing sacrament?

There is not a shred of biblical evidence that a deaconess can administer the sacrament of footwashing or any of the sacraments. 1 Tim 5:10 refers to the good works of widows in the humble service of washing the feet of the saints (customary washing) and not to the sacrament of footwashing. If a deaconess can administer footwashing sacrament, it would follow as a matter of course she can also perform the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. There is no valid ground to allow a deaconess to perform the footwashing sacrament and to bar her from the performance of the other two sacraments, unless the other two sacraments are regarded as being more important which can not be asserted. The point therefore remains that a deaconess is not the proper authorized person to perform sacrament(s), a duty which only elders and preachers/deacons can be properly delegated to do.

Questions may then be asked as to what are the duties of a deaconess. A deaconess is to assist the church in the discharge of other duties just as the first seven deacons were appointed to assist the Apostles (Ac 6:1-7). A deaconess may serve church members, prepare and serve at tables, visit the sick and help divine works in a supportive capacity (Rom 16:1-2; Lk 8:1-3). She may also help look after the church or distribute the bread and the cup at the Lord's Supper. The Apostolic Constitution, Book iii, says "ordain a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministries toward the women". A deaconess is therefore more suitable in guiding and instructing younger women or in visiting them and in giving them necessary counselling (Tit 2:3-4). ■

MIRRORS OF SPIRITUAL NURTURE

Spiritual nurture is a life time process. It is also the very basis by which a person must work towards his own salvation. If the foundation of spiritual nurture is firmly established then fruits of labour will follow and the work of salvation of a person is considered complete. Faith without spiritual nurture is liken to one who builds his house on sandy ground. It will not withstand a storm. A person who only pays attention to divine work but neglects spiritual nurture might be rejected by God no matter how prominent his work may be. As such a prudent Christian will have to pay special attention to spiritual nurture first.

Spiritual nurture is the adornment of one's spirituality. A beautician who wants to beautify your facial appearance, needs a mirror to do her work. Similarly, a person who wants to improve his spirituality must also use a "spiritual mirror" for his work. An ancient Chinese adage says, "If we use bronze as a mirror, it can help us to dress ourselves properly; if we refer to history as a mirror, it can tell us the rise and fall of a nation; if we look at the face of a person as a mirror, it can reflect to us our gains and losses." Likewise, Christians today also require mirrors to help them accomplish spiritual nurture.

1. **God as a mirror :** If we use God as a mirror we can correct our thinking because the main course of spiritual nurture comes from the mind. The Bible says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance; from it flow the springs of life." (Prov 4:23). In other words, the words and deeds of a person reflect his thoughts. Therefore, before a person harbours in moral upbringing he must have the right attitude of mind and in order to have a right attitude, he must use God as a mirror before he can succeed. Man is endowed with evil thoughts from young. His heart is more wicked than anything on earth. He is self-conceited. He would regard everything he did as good and proper. However, the Bible states that only God can measure the hearts of men. David in his prayers

said, "O Lord, Thou has searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down; and art acquainted with all my ways." (Ps 139:1-3, 23, 24).

Now, If we wish to have the right attitude of mind to better our spirituality, we must emulate David through prayers to use God as a mirror to enlighten our thoughts and also to rely on the truth of the Holy Spirit to drive out the evils in our hearts so that our minds shall remain bright and upright.

2. **Man as a mirror :** If we use man as a mirror, he can help us to cultivate our words and deeds. The Scripture says, "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit" and "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." (Prov 16:2, 12:15). If we want to know our weaknesses, we must be humble enough and be prepared to accept others' criticism and admonition. The vengeance of David over the foolish man, Nabal, may serve as a good example. On one occasion, David was deeply humiliated by Nabal in the wilderness of Paran. Overwhelmed by his own wrath, David led a contingent of 4,000 soldiers purporting to kill Nabal. Nabal's wife, Abigail, learning a calamity was about to befall her husband, immediately went to meet David and persuaded him not to do any harm to her husband lest he (David) should be conscience-stricken later on. David realized this wrong-doing and sensed that this was God's intervention through Abigail from taking a vengeance into his own hands. Later on David praised the Lord greatly. About ten days later, God struck Nabal to death. The Bible says, "'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (Rom 12:19). Not long after when David became king, he had committed two distinct great sins by taking the wife of Uriah and in order to cover up his evil deed he had also killed Uriah. When prophet Nathan went to see him and rebuked him through a story, David immediately repented. He also asked God to make his heart anew so that the spirit in him would be renewed and strengthened. So, if we use man to be a mirror, he can correct our wrong-doings and then we can work our way to perfection. The author of the book of Hebrew exhorts us, saying, "But exhort one

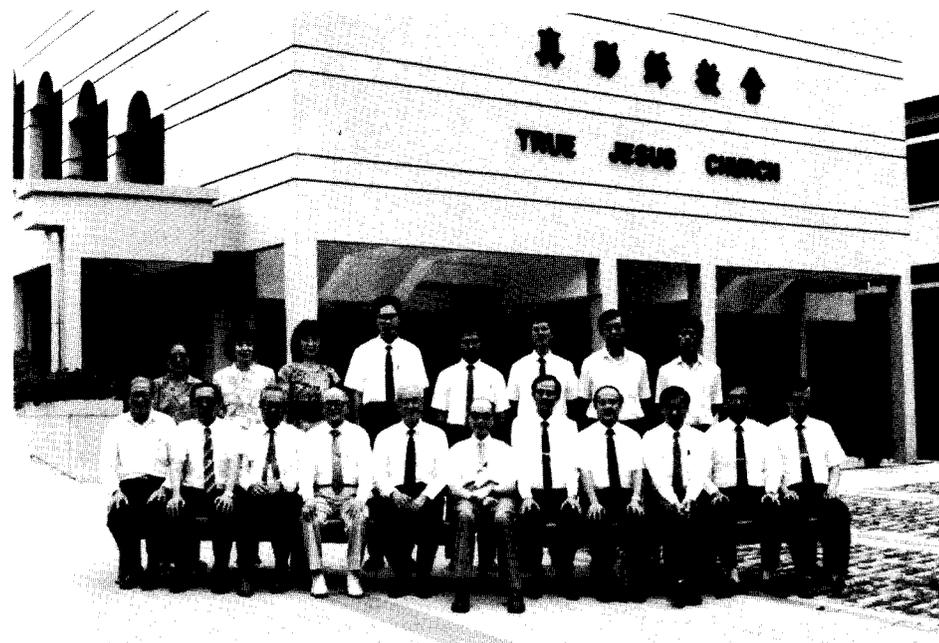
another everyday, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb 3:13).

- 3. The Word as a mirror :** If we use the Word as a mirror, we can clean our body and spirit. The goal of spiritual nurture is to bring about our body and spirit into perfection. To arrive at this end we have to rely on the Word for it is written in the Bible, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of souls and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb 4:12). This was why before the Lord Jesus departed from his disciples he prayed to the heavenly Father to sanctify them with the Word of truth. So, to pursue after sanctification, we have to rely on the Word of God as a mirror to put off our old nature which belongs to our former manner of life and we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds and to put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, we recommend that bible reading, attending services and prayers are tools by which we can sanctify ourselves.

However, we should not be like the Pharisees who like to use the Word of God to reflect others but not themselves. Elder James exhorted us to let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak and more importantly, be doers of the Word, then we shall obtain blessings from the Lord. On the other hand, if we are only hearers and not doing it then we are deceiving ourselves. It is just like a person who looks at his natural face in a mirror, the moment he goes away from the mirror he immediately forgets what he looks like. Here, we are reminded of the words spoken by the Lord to his disciples, "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it." (Mt 7:24-27).

Conclusion

In order to accomplish our work of spiritual nurture and for the betterment of our spirituality, we must first be God fearing; using God as a mirror, as an instrument to put right our attitude of mind. To do this, we must rely on the Holy Spirit by praying incessantly to God so that we may have closer and deeper communion with God. Then we must be humble enough to use man as a mirror to correct our words and actions. To attain this, we must live harmoniously with our fellow-people and to establish a good neighbourhood with them. At the same time we must thirst for the Word of God as a mirror to sanctify our body and spirit. To do this, we must be well-versed with the Bible and also to attend services regularly so that the Word of God may dwell in us richly. Finally, Paul says that the night is far gone, the day is at hand, let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, work our works to spiritual nurture and wait for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ■



Theological Students

Standing from left
No: 4 Paul Chong Yong Fook, Juperin
Sumil & Chin June Cook.

Department of Literary Ministry
International Assembly of
The True Jesus Church
11236 Dale Street
Garden Grove, California 92641
U.S.A.