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CONTENTS

Here Am I! Send Me	3
Blessed Is He Who Considers The Poor	5
Answers To Your Questions On Miracles	10
What You Need To Know About The Holy Spirit	16
Should Christians Observe The Sabbath?	24
The Truth About The 144,000	34
The Young, The Old And The Church	38
Mary, Mary and Mary	44
The Great Men Who Prayed For Others	48
The Four Elements In Spiritual Nurture	51
Bridle Our Tongues	56
Unity, Perseverance And Prayers	58
The Work Which Youths Should Do For The Church	63
May God Use Him	65

HERE AM I!

SEND ME.

Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest..... For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps'. I sent you to reap that for which you have not laboured; others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour" (Jn 4:34-38, NASB). When Jesus was ministering on earth, he used to go without food and sleep. Today, however, many believers are still seeking the pleasures of the flesh so much so that they

forget the urgency of God's final commission. If we look at the fields we will see that the grains have ripened and are ready for harvest, that is, the time is ripe and we must go forth to preach.

The Lord also said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (Mt 9:37-38, RSV). At present the church needs many more workers for its local and foreign missions. The Theological College of the True Jesus Church is entrusted with the task of preparing Young People to carry out this divine work. Do you hear God's calling?

Thousands of years ago, the

Lord asked, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" And Isaiah promptly replied, "Here am I! Send me." (Is 6:8) Have you ever said such words to the Lord?

In the past Abraham acted obediently without vacillation when he heard the call of God to offer his son (Gen 22:1-18). Supposing you have a son you love most and God has need of him, would you be willing to offer him readily?

When the Lord was about to enter Jerusalem he needed an ass; and because the Lord had need of it, the owner allowed Jesus' disciples to take it away (Mt 21:1-3). We should also act likewise. When the Lord has need of you or your son you should not hesitate to accept his call, rather you should be thankful to Him for having chosen you and given you this grace.

Life is so short that in a twinkling of an eye everything will come to naught (Ps 90:10). Are you ready to offer yourself while you are still young and robust? Or are you waiting till you are old and feeble before you commit yourself? If this be the case, you have not given your best to God. Read Eccles 12:1-8.

Paul was ready to lose everything, counting them as but refuse in order that he might gain Christ (Phil 3:7-8).

When Moses had grown up, he chose to share ill-treatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He suffered abuse because he considered this to be greater than the treasures of Egypt. He hoped for God's reward (Heb 11:24-26).

Do you choose to enjoy the pleasures and riches of this world or the everlasting reward in heaven?

I hope you will be able to give the same triumphant declaration of Paul at the appointed time;

"For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day....."

(2 Tim 4:6-8)

If so you will be rewarded for what you have laboured for the Lord.

BLESSED IS HE WHO CONSIDERS THE POOR

"Blessed is he who considers the poor!", says the Bible, "The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble; The Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; thou dost not give him up to the will of his enemies. The Lord sustains him on his sick bed; in his illness thou healeth all his infirmities" (Ps 41:1-3). Here King David broached the question of looking after the poor including the many blessings showered upon those who care for them.

The Command Of God

Since the time of Moses, God has already commanded the

Israelites to open wide their hands to the poor and the needy. In Deuteronomy it is written; "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.... For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Deut 15:7,8, 11).

When Jesus was ministering, the same command was given to His faithful followers. The Lord said; "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me" (Mt 19:21).

Honouring The Creator

The Bible cautions that those who mock and oppress the poor insult his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours Him (Prov 17:5; 14:31). The rich and the poor are both created by God; in the words of Job: "Did not He who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15). Since the poor are created by God, those who mock and browbeat them are insulting their Maker. On the other hand, those who are kind to the needy honour Him. Therefore, those who honour their Creator should show compassion to and look after the poor. If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (1 Jn 3:17).

The Virtue Of The Saints

Paul said, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children; walk in love..... as is proper among saints" (Eph 5:1-3). But the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love

God whom he has not seen family. We have then to look (1 Jn 4:20). Being kind to the after those of us who are poor or poor is one of the virtues of a else we are worse than the non-saint. Among the many scintilla-believers.

Examples are Dorcas, whom Paul wrote; "For Macedonia the Scriptures record that she and Achaia have been pleased to spent all her time doing good, make some contribution for the and helping the poor (Acts 9:37); poor among the saints at Jeru- and Cornelius, the first Gentile salem; they were pleased to do convert to whom the angel said; it, and indeed they are in debt "God has accepted your prayers to them, for if the Gentiles have and works of charity, and has come to share in their spiritual remembered you" (Acts 10:4). blessings, they ought also to be of

When James, Cephas and John service to them in material bles- accepted Paul and Barnabas as sings" (Rom 15:26-27). Notice partners, all they asked was that Paul considered the contributions the both of them should keep to the poor as a 'debt'. Un- their poor in mind which, accord- doubtedly, as long as the poor are ing to Paul, was the very thing with us, we are 'indebted' to look they were eager to do (Gal 2:10). after them.

Care For The Body Of Christ

There should be no division in word and not in deed. James once the body, but that the members said that if a brother or sister is ill- should have the same care for one clad and in lack of daily food, and another. And if one member one of you says to them, 'Go in suffers, all the members suffer peace, be warmed and filled', with- with it; if one member is honour- out giving them the things needed ed. all the members rejoice with for the body, it does not profit any- it. (1 Cor 12:25-27). If we have one (Jas 2:15-16). That was why brothers or sisters who are in John the Elder said, "Little difficulty, we should render our children, let us not love in word help. Otherwise we are no better or in speech but in deed and in than the non-believers. The Bible truth" (1 Jn 3:18). Take positive says; "If any one does not provide steps to ensure their well-being. for his relatives, and especially Begin with those suggested for his own family, he has dis- below:- owned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8). All **Do the necessary** The Lord God believers are members of God's commanded the Israelites saying;

How To Look After The Poor

"If there is among you a poor man.... you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your wine-press; as the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him" (Deut 15:7-8, 14). A practical way of actually helping the poor is to provide them with what they really need. The rich in this world should not be proud and place their hope on such an uncertain thing as riches, but on God, who generously gives us everything for us to enjoy. However they are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others. In this way they will store up for themselves a treasure which will be a solid foundation for the future. And then they will be able to win the life which is true life (1 Tim 6:17-19).

Do it willingly Giving aid to the poor is a virtue in itself and motive should be love. It is done out of a person's own free will and never out of compulsion. In the olden days, Paul encouraged the members at the church of God at Corinth to do as each has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). Any good deed done will be void of virtue if it is carried out under compulsion. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according

to what the man has and not according to what a man has not (2 Cor 8:12). Any donation to the poor must be voluntary.

Do it in time “As we have the opportunity,” said Paul, “let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). What is meant by ‘opportunity’ is that we ought to help the needy while we can before it is too late. A widow at Zarephath willingly and without delay made the prophet Elijah a little cake. In the end, the jar of meal was not spent, neither did the cruse of oil fail (1 Kings 17:8-16).

Do it whole-heartedly Though some people are willing to help the poor, they do not go all out for it. This is also wrong. The Bible asks us to be charitable. The Christians in Macedonia were noted for charity though they were not rich themselves. Paul testified saying; “We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches in Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints..... Now as you excel in everything — in faith,

in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us — see that you excel in this gracious work also” (2 Cor 8:1-4, 7). Following their example, we should similarly help the poor to the best of our ability. A pertinent promise at this juncture is; “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6).

The Advantages of Caring For The Poor

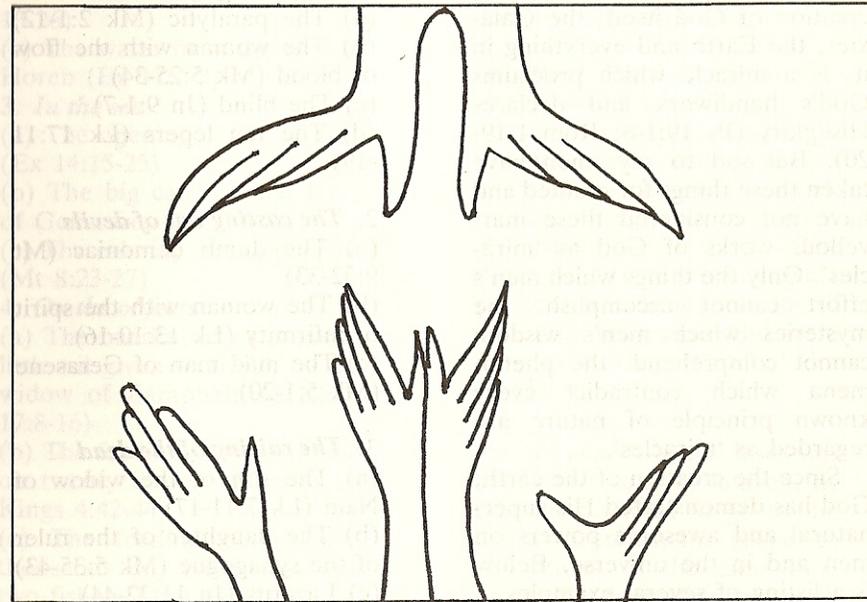
The giver Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Truly those who care for the poor will be blessed in abundance. Paul encouraged the church at Corinth by saying; “And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, ‘He scatters abroad, He gives to the poor; His righteousness endures forever’. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us, will produce thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor 9:8-11). God will bless those who give assistance to the poor. They will be blessed both physically and spiritually,

now and in the future. When Dorcas died, God resurrected her through the apostle Peter. This incident comforted the disciples and many believed in the Lord subsequently. (Acts 9:26-42).

The other example is Cornelius. God sent Peter to go and preach in the house of Cornelius. He and his household were the first Gentile to receive the Holy Spirit and to be baptised in the name of Jesus (Acts 10:44-48). What a great blessing it was!

The Bible declares; “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed” (Prov 19:17); and again it says; “A liberal man will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (Prov 11:25).

The receiver As far as caring for the poor is concerned, both the giver and the receiver will benefit for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. Under the test of service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by your generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you (2 Cor 9:12-14). The receiver will further thank and give glory to God for the help rendered them by the givers. They will always remember and pray for those who have helped them.



Answers To Your Questions

ON MIRACLES

What Are Miracles?

'Miracles' are the signs which show God's power. In fact, the creation of God itself; the Galaxies, the Earth and everything in it, is a miracle which proclaims God's handiwork and declares His glory (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:19-20). But sad to say, men have taken these things for granted and have not considered these marvellous works of God as 'miracles'. Only the things which men's effort cannot accomplish, the mysteries which men's wisdom cannot comprehend, the phenomena which contradict every known principle of nature are regarded as 'miracles'.

Since the creation of the earth, God has demonstrated His supernatural and awesome powers on men and in the universe. Below is a listing of several examples.

A. Miracles Performed On Men

1. *The curing of sickness*

- (a) The paralytic (Mk 2:1-12)
- (b) The woman with the flow of blood (Mk 5:25-34)
- (c) The blind (Jn 9:1-7)
- (d) The ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19)

2. *The casting out of devils*

- (a) The dumb demoniac (Mt 9:32-33)
- (b) The woman with the spirit of infirmity (Lk 13:10-16)
- (c) The mad man of Gerasene (Mk 5:1-20)

3. *The raising of the dead*

- (a) The son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17)
- (b) The daughter of the ruler of the synagogue (Mk 5:35-43)
- (c) Lazarus (Jn 11:32-44)

B. Miracles Performed On The Physical Universe

1. *In the heavens*

- (a) The sun stopped in its trek (Josh 10:12-14)
- (b) The pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Ex 13:21-22; 40:36-38)
- (c) The cessation of rain (Jas 5:17-18)

2. *On the earth*

- (a) The earth opened to swallow the rebels (Num 16:25-34)
- (b) The manna for the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex 16:13-26)
- (c) The water from the rock at Horeb (Ex 17:1-7)

3. *In the sea*

- (a) The opening of the red sea (Ex 14:15-25)
- (b) The big catch in the Lake of Genasaret (Lk 5:1-7)
- (c) The calming of the tempest (Mt 8:23-27)

4. *On the objects*

- (a) The handful of meal and a little oil given to Elijah by the widow of Zarahphath (1 Kings 17:8-16)
- (b) The feeding of the hundred on twenty loaves of barley (2 Kings 4:42-44)
- (c) The feeding of the five thousands on five loaves and two fishes (Mt 14:14-21)

Why Are Miracles Performed?

1. To prove that one is sent by God

(a) *Jesus* While the fore-runner of Jesus, John the Baptist, was in jail, he sent his followers to ask whether Jesus was the Christ. At that time Jesus proved that he was the Saviour sent by God by the miracles which he had performed (Mt 11:2-6). Elsewhere Jesus also testified that he was sent by God by the works he did (Jn 5:36; 10:37-38).

(b) *Paul* The Church at Corinth, looking only on the physical appearance of Paul, did not believe that Paul was an apostle chosen by God. Under these circumstances, Paul had to tell them, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor 12:12).

(c) *The church* When Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, he told his disciples to go to the world to preach the gospel to all nations, at the same time promising them that 'signs will

accompany those who believe'. These signs include the healing of sicknesses, the casting out of devils and the speaking in new tongues (Mk 16:15-18). Thus, if the church has no power to perform miracles, she will not be able to convince people that she is the True Church established by God (cf Mt 10:1; Lk 10:7-19; 1 Cor 12:9).

2. To lead people to believe in Christ

(a) *Jesus* When the Lord was preaching on the earth, many people did not believe that he was the Christ. The Lord was able to make people recognize him and confess that he was the Saviour through the miracles and wonders which he wrought. For example; an official and his whole family believed in the Lord because his son was healed by him (Jn 4:46-53), and when the palsied man carried by four persons to the Lord Jesus, was healed and could walk, the multitude believed in him and gave glory to God (Mk 2:1-12). Many who saw how the Lord raised up Lazarus from the grave, believed in him (Jn 11:39-45).

(b) *The apostles* Since the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the

Lord's disciples obtained power to preach the gospel, to perform miracles and to baptise in the name of the Lord (Acts 1:8; Mk 16:20). Peter called the lame man at the Beautiful Gate to rise up immediately and walk, so that many people came to acknowledge and believe in Christ (Acts 3:1; 4:4). Through the hands of the apostles the Lord wrought many miracles and wonders among the people (Acts 5:12-16). Even the Samaritans, on seeing the miracles performed by Philip, listened to him with one mind, believed in Jesus Christ and were baptised into the Lord (Acts 8:5-13). The Proconsul of Paphos believed because he saw the miracles which Paul performed (Acts 13:6-12). Paul said, "Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:18).

The Bible does not guarantee that those who can perform miracles and wonders and those on whom miracles are performed can definitely be saved and received inheritance of the Kingdom of God (Mt

7:21-23; Jn 5:14). But in these period of disbelief, as Jesus said, "unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe" (Jn 4:48). Especially in these

last days, men's hearts are filled with worldly desires, it will be very difficult to make them believe the gospel and turn to the Saviour, unless we pray that the Lord will work great miracles.

3. To strengthen the disciples' faith

(a) *John the Baptist* John had in certainty declared to his disciples that Jesus was the Saviour prophesied of in the Scriptures. Furthermore, when he saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus, he recognised that Jesus was indeed the Messiah sent by God (Jn 1:19-37). However when he was imprisoned, his faith began to waver, and he thus sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether or not he was the Messiah. To dispel John's doubt, Jesus did not use any other reasoning in his reply except that he had the power to perform miracles, and thus strengthened his faith in the Lord (Mt 11:2-6).

(b) *Thomas* Thomas did not believe that the Lord had resurrected, but was able to understand more deeply that Jesus was the Saviour, the True God after Jesus had

appeared to him — a miracle in itself (Jn 20:24-28). After believing in the Lord for a long time, we may still have doubts concerning the Word

which we have received.. However, miracles and wonders will move others so that they will believe more fully in the grace of salvation, to be staunch and unmoving (Heb 2:3-4; Acts 14:3).

How Are Miracles Performed?

1. Through the name of Jesus

The Lord instructed that the performing of miracles, casting out of devils and healing the sick must be done in His name — Jesus (Mk 16:17). The disciples reported to Jesus saying, "Lord even the demons are subject to us in your name" (Lk 10:17).

The first miracle wrought by Peter after the Lord has ascended into heaven — calling the lame man at the Beautiful Gate to rise and walk — was performed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 3:6-8, 16). Calling on the name of the Lord is to invoke the power of the Lord Jesus. Therein performing miracles, the phrase 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' must be uttered and, of course, succeeded by

the main clause which describes the manner by which the divinely invoked power should act e.g. heal the sick or cast out the devils.

2. Through faith

The Lord said to his disciples who could not cast out the devil, "... if you have faith, ... nothing will be impossible to you!" (Mt 17:20). Thus, if we desire God to hear our prayers, to work miracles, we must have unshakeable faith. When the two blind men pleaded with Jesus to heal them, Jesus asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said, "Yes, Lord." The Lord said, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes immediately opened (Mt 9:27-30).

When Paul was preaching in Lystra, he called a lame man to rise up and walk because he saw that he had faith (Acts 14:8-10).

3. Through reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit

Jesus said that he cast out devils by the Spirit of God (Mt 12:28). The devil is not afraid of men. So if one is not filled with the Holy Spirit, one certainly cannot cast out devils or perform any other kind of miracles. The Bible bears record that with only a few words, Paul was able to make the magician blind instantly because Paul was filled with

the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:8-12).

Healing the sick and the working of other miracles are the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:2-10). Without the Holy Spirit, one will not be able to cast out devils even though he may call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, because the devils will not obey. On the contrary, one may be overpowered and harmed by them (Acts 19:13-17).

4. Through earnest and persistent prayers

The Lord has the power to perform miracles at any time, but sometimes he delays deliberately. When the Canaanite woman pleaded with Jesus to heal her daughter, the Lord did not immediately hearken to her pleas. It was only after she had shown her sincere faith that he commended her for her faith and healed her daughter (Mt 15:21-28).

Elijah prayed three times to raise up the dead son of the widow and seven times successively for rain to descend (1 Kings 17:21-22; 18:42-43).

The Lord instructed his disciples that they had to fast and pray in order to cast out devils (Mt 17:21). Thus if miracles are to be wrought, prayers must be earnest and persistent.

When Miracles Have Been Performed, - What's Next?

1. Must be prepared against the wiles of Satan

Miracles can awaken those who sleep unknowingly in the hands of Satan so that they may believe in the Lord and draw nearer to God. Every-time God stretches forth His hands to save, Satan will not stay quiescent. When Jesus cast out the demon from the dumb boy, Satan made use of the Pharisees to mock Jesus, saying that he cast out demons by the power of the Prince of Demons (Mt 9:32-34).

When the Lord wrought miracles through the apostles, the High Priest filled with jealousy and hatred had the apostles arrested and thrown into prison (Acts 5:12-18).

When Paul healed the crippled, the people stoned him until they thought that he was dead (Acts 14:8-9, 19). Thus, when working miracles, do not be complacent but be mindful and prepared against the aggression of Satan.

2. Must give glory to God

Miracles are performed through the grace and power of

God, and not through one's sincerity and might (Acts 3:12). All praise and glory must be accorded wholeheartedly to the Saviour. A fine example was Paul, who did not accept the honour and reverence given him by the people of Lystra (Acts 14:11-15). The material gifts of those who received grace must not be accepted just like Elisha refused to accept commander Namaan's gifts (2 Kings 5:15-17; Mt 10:8). Moreover, one must not become proud nor despise fellow-workers just because the Lord has wrought miracles through one's hands. Always remember that we are merely vessels (cf Is 10:15).

Conclusion

Miracles aid greatly in spreading the word. Many people believe in the Lord and love the Lord because miracles were wrought on them. However to establish a perfect church and to lead believers to complete salvation, it is more important to acquaint them with the full Gospel rather than to have their faith grounded merely on the experience of miracles. Furthermore, believers are encouraged to rely on the Holy Spirit to live a life which is holy, God-fearing and filled with love for all men.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

What Is The Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God Himself (Jn 4:24; 2 Cor 3:17). In the Bible the Holy Spirit is variously called the:-

Counselor (Jn 14:26)
Spirit of God (1 Cor 3:16)
Spirit of the Lord (Is 11:2; Lk 4:18)
Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3)
Spirit of the Father (Mt 10:20)
Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9)
Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7)
Spirit of the Son of God (Gal 4:6)
Spirit of truth (1 Jn 4:6)
Eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14)
Spirit of glory (1 Pet 4:14)
Spirit of wisdom and of revelation (Eph 1:17)
Spirit of judgment (Is 4:3-4)
Spirit of holiness (Rom 1:4; Neh 9:20)
Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29)

There is only one Spirit (Eph 4:4) and all the names are but titles of the same Spirit.

The Work Of The Holy Spirit In The Old Testament

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (Jn 15:26), just as Jesus also came from Him (Jn 13:3). The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters when the Universe was created. The creation which is sustained by the power of God, is also the work of the Spirit. Man, the most noble among the creatures, is the glorious master-piece of the Spirit (Job 33:4). Clearly, the Holy Spirit is the prime source of the creation.

He endowed the tailors of Aaron's garment with wisdom and knowledge (Ex 28:3); and vested the Judges with judicial authority and leadership in warfare (Judg 3:10; 6:34).

In the religious sphere, the Spirit inspired Eldad and Medad to prophesy (Num 11:26-29); and David to speak the Word of God (2 Sam 23:2). The prophets instructed, admonished and saw visions through the power of the Spirit. (Neh 9:20,30; Eze 11:24-25). Against the rebellious, the Holy Spirit turned Himself to become their enemy, and fought against them (Is 63:10).

The Work Of The Holy Spirit In The New Testament

Christians are born again and sealed as a guarantee of our inheritance, with the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Eph 1:13-14). He frees man from the law of sin, sanctifies him and finally resurrects him in the Day of Judgment (Rom 8:2; 15:16; 8:11).

He teaches man, strengthens the weak, empowers the disciples, gives comfort, peace and joy (Jn 14:26; Eph 3:16; Acts 1:8; 9:31; Rom 14:17). He even intercedes for man and bestows gifts upon him (Rom 8:26; 1 Cor 12:4-11).

The Personality Of The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has a personality. He is God and therefore is not merely an 'influence' or an 'active force' of God. The Bible portrays the Holy Spirit as a

'person' having discernment (1 Cor 2:10), a mind (Rom 8:27), a feeling of love (Rom 15:30), the ability to instruct and speak to man (Neh 9:20; Acts 8:29). He bestows grace and yet can be grieved (Heb 10:29; Eph 4:30). With respect to the workers of God, He ordains, sends, guides and occasionally prohibits them if necessary (Acts 20:28; 13:2-3; Rom 8:14; Acts 16:6-7). He also reveal mysteries to His Holy apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5).

The Types And Symbols Of The Holy Spirit

Dove — symbolising the gentle and peaceful nature of the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16; 10:16).
Guarantee — symbolising the reliability of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:14).
Fire — symbolising the forceful inspiration and the refining work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3).
Oil — symbolising the joy of the Spirit's indwelling (Lk 4:18; Heb 1:9).
Seal — symbolising the reality and power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; Dan 6:17).
Water — symbolising the abundant life a Christian experiences through the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38-39; Rev 22:17).
Wind — symbolising the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:8; Acts 2:2; Eze 37:9-10).

The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

Before His Ascension, Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the gospel and baptise those who believe; and to await the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). On the day of Pentecost, ten days after the ascension of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit descended.

God has assured man two great promises; to send us His only begotten Son and to send us a Comforter i.e. the Holy Spirit. While the Son is given to die for the whole world, the Holy Spirit is given selectively to those who profess Christ through faith (Gal 3:2,14; Eph 1:13; Acts 15:7-8).

John the Baptist testified to the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God, and that He alone would baptise with the Holy Spirit. This testimony is recorded in all the four Gospels (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). This means that Jesus has the sole prerogative to baptise with the Spirit. After Jesus had resurrected, He breathed on his disciples saying, "receive the Holy Spirit". Whereupon the disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit instantly because that was only a promise. Earlier Jesus said, "...if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go away, I will send him to you" (Jn 16:7). Hence, the reason Christ told them to wait in Jerusalem.

As promised, the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. Peter claimed that the phenomenon on that day was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel and John the Baptist (Acts 2:16-21).

What Is The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit?

In the Bible, to be 'baptised by the Spirit' is to be fully immersed in the Spirit as baptism of water means to be immersed in water. Though the Holy Spirit is invisible, when He infills a person His presence and power can be felt. Different phraseologies have been used in the Bible to describe it; "I send the promise of the Father upon you" (Lk 24:49), "the Holy Spirit fell on them" (Acts 11:15; 8:15-16), "the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8), "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38), "the Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 19:6), "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out" (Acts 10:45), "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13), "receive the promise of the Holy Spirit" (Gal 3:14) and "the Holy Spirit which he poured upon us richly" (Tit 3:6).

A person who has been baptised with the Holy Spirit exhibits outward physical manifestations whilst praying. This physical experience of his is both visible and audible to those around him at that time. Peter said, "... and having received from the Father

the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33). It appears from the records in the Acts of the Apostles that every instance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by such physical manifestations. In that book there are five instances where people received the Holy Spirit:-

Jerusalem

On the day of Pentecost, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to *speak* in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4).

Samaria

When the Apostles laid their hands on the believers in Samaria, they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon *saw* that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered to buy that power. (Acts 8:17-18). Though here there is no mention of the "speaking of tongues", it is nonetheless implicit because Simon 'saw' the Holy Spirit being given. There must at least be some physical manifestations before it can be seen.

Damascus

When Ananias laid his hand on Paul, he said, "... the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit". And immediately there fell from his eyes something

like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptised. Presumably he received the Holy Spirit then. Again there was no explicit mention of Paul speaking in tongue. But there was also no explicit mention of him receiving the Holy Spirit. It is indisputable however, that Paul did speak in tongues; "I thank God I speak in tongues more than you all,...." (1 Cor 14:18).

Caesarea

As Peter was delivering a message in the house of Cornelius the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles; for they *heard* them speaking in tongues and extolling God (Acts 10:44-46).

Ephesus

When Paul had laid his hand upon the Christians at Ephesus, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all. (Acts 19:6-7).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit then, contrary to popular belief, is not a mere feeling of joy or a conviction of guilt; or just a purely emotional episode urging the sinner to accept Christ. Since the day of Pentecost, the Spirit has revealed Himself vividly through physical manifestations in the believers. In no uncertain terms,

one can safely assert that the speaking of tongues is the only sure evidence that one has received the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Joel, second chapter, verse twenty-eight, the Holy Spirit is said to be 'poured' upon man. The same verb is used to denote the descent of the Holy Spirit in the third chapter, the sixth verse of Titus, which reads, "... the renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he *poured* out upon us *richly* ...". The Holy Spirit does not descend upon a believer in trickles but in a downpour. Hence, when a believer receives the Spirit, he experiences a dynamic force in him which is evinced by outward manifestations. This shows itself in the 'speaking of tongues' or even bodily vibratory movements.

The Importance Of The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit sets a seal on a Christian guaranteeing him of eternal salvation (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:22; 2 Tim 2:19). At the Council of Jerusalem, Peter related how the Gentiles heard the gospel and believed, and that God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8). Peter was, of course, referring to the incident in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea. He maintained that by this God had affirmed their salvation. He

was absolutely certain that the Holy Spirit which had fallen on them was God's assurance of salvation for them (Acts 15:11).

The Spirit joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children; and if children, then heirs. We are God's heirs and Christ fellow-heirs, if we share his sufferings now in order to share his splendour hereafter (Rom 8:16, NEB). If a man does not possess the Spirit of Christ, he is not Christian (Rom 8:9, NEB).

The Effects Of The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

While water baptism revives our spiritual lives, the Spirit baptism imbues our spiritual lives with continued strength from above. Through the ministry of the Spirit our lives are being renewed continuously and we grow in spiritual maturity, conforming more and more to the image of Christ. So then water baptism is a once in a lifetime experience whereas the baptism of the Spirit continues as a long-term process.

Paul exhorted the Christians at Ephesus saying, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). Wine intoxicates and is capable of turning a man into a profligate. But he in whom the Holy Spirit constantly dwells, finds strength to lead a wholesome spiritual life in Christ – a life that is totally changed.

In A Christian's Life

A baby is born helpless and weak and therefore needs care and protection. Paul referred to the new converts as 'newborn babies' (1 Pet 2:2), who are young and weak spiritually. The Holy Spirit then works within them in four successive stages:-

Renews the spiritual life

'Renewal' means to discard the former self and to take on a new nature. The Bible says; "... leaving your former way of life, you must lay aside the old human nature which, deluded by its lusts, is sinking towards death. You must be made new in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature of God's creating, which shows itself in the just and devout life called for by the truth" (Eph 4:22-24, NEB). "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...." (Rom 12:2). The renewal begins with the newborn life of a Christian, and gradually it proceeds to the renewal of the mind, the conduct and the behaviour until he is changed by a total spiritual metamorphosis.

Strengthens The Spiritual Life

Ephesians 3:16 says, "That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through

his Spirit in the inner man". The 'inner man' here refers to the new life a Christian has through the washing of regeneration. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can the regenerated life be strengthened.

Enriches The Spiritual Life

John 7:38 states, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of flowing water" and "... the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). The Holy Spirit in a Christian who has undergone the baptism of the Spirit, becomes a fountain of spiritual life – a perpetual fountain not only in this present age but also in the age to come. Furthermore, he experiences a fuller and richer life. This enriched life is the product of the fruition of spiritual virtues (Phil 2:15-16).

Culminates The Spiritual Life

Having gone through the initial stage of renewal, the spiritual life undergoes a series of change until Christ is formed in that Christian (Gal 4:19). This remarkable change is achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). Ultimately, on the Last Day, our lowly body will be changed into the glorious body like that of our Lord (Phil 3:21).

In The Church

In Witnessing

Jesus said, "..... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Spirit gave them the power and courage to preach Christ and to witness for Him. Before the day of Pentecost, the disciples were timid and weak; unbelieving and faithless; selfish and ignorant; and even contended for high position. Although Peter boasted of his loyalty towards Christ, in the face of adversity, he faltered and thrice denied the Master. But there came a complete change in their attitude after the day of Pentecost when they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave them strength and courage to witness for Christ (Acts 4:13, 33); and eloquence to preach Jesus Christ (Acts 6:10).

In Working Miracles

During the Apostolic era, many signs and wonders followed the apostles' witness for Christ, so much so that they were asked, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7; 6:8). Miracles, signs and wonders are means to testify to man the truth of the gospel and the reality of the salvation of God (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:3-4). This same power resides in God's church even today.

In Service To The Church

The administrative work of the church must supplement the evangelistic work. The Bible says, "..... pick out from among you.... men.... full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty" (Acts 6:3). Those so entrusted must be full of the Spirit and wisdom so that they can carry out everything in an orderly manner according to the will of God (1 Cor 14:40; Rom 12:7-8; ref Zech 4:6; Ex 28:3; 31:3).

The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit

In Corinthians it is written, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). The 'manifestation' refers to the nine spiritual gifts listed in verses eight to ten. In a narrower sense, gifts are bestowed to edify the individual Christian. And in a wider sense, such gifts are for the edification of the entire church. When each member is edified, the whole church becomes edified as well.

The speaking in tongues is a gift of the Holy Spirit and also the evidence of having received the Spirit. The 'speaking of tongues' serves two functions:-

To edify the individual "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Cor 14:4). "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays"

(1 Cor 14:14). He who prays in tongues speaks to God. It does not matter if others do not understand him because he is speaking only to God. He who speaks in tongues in prayers utters mysteries in the Spirit and such prayers edifies him spiritually, increase his spiritual knowledge and enhance his virtues. So Paul said, "I want you all to speak in tongues." (1 Cor 14:18).

To edify the church One who speaks (delivers a message of sermon) in tongues, must have someone to interpret the message or sermon into a known language so that the congregation can understand and be edified. If there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church. This 'gift' is to be distinguished from the tongues used in prayers. Much confusion arises from failure to clearly distinguish the two. On the one hand, Paul said the "one who speaks in a tongue does not *speak* to men, *but to God,*" and on the other, he said, "..... if I come *to you* speaking in tongues" (1 Cor 14:2,6). In prayer, we always come to God alone and NEVER to men! (ref Mt 4:10). However, God needs no preaching, only men do. Anybody who assert that the 'speaking of tongues' serves only one purpose and that it must always be interpreted, will find himself entangled in a self-contradiction which can never be

reconciled. How can he come to God and to men all at the same time?!

Again contrast verse fourteen and verse nineteen. In the former, a person is said to "pray in a tongue", whereas in the latter that person is said to "instruct others in a tongue". The dual function of the tongue is once more brought into relief. Clearly then, if a person prays in a tongue, he edifies himself (he knows that he has the Holy Spirit who will intercede for him - Rom 8:26) (1 Cor 14:4). He comes to God in prayer and therefore needs no interpreter. But if he were to instruct others in a tongue, unless he interprets (or let another interpret - vs 27), the church may not receive edifying (1 Cor 14:5). In short, an interpreter is only needed when a person so gifted delivers a sermon in tongues for the benefit of the congregation. Otherwise, he may pray in tongues to God without an interpreter.

One final word regarding gifts; they are all given by one and the same Spirit and should therefore be held in equal esteem. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor the hand to the feet, 'I have no need of you'. (1 Cor 12:21). Although certain parts may be weaker and less significant, they are certainly indispensable (1 Cor 12:22). If this fact is well understood in the church, there will never be any jealousies, divisions or strife.

SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBSERVE THE SABBATH?

The Misconception

Basing on a misunderstanding of Colossians 2:16, Sunday-keeping Christians claim that the Sabbath observance is only under the Law. Unlike the Jews in the Old Testament, Christians are now under Grace and need not keep the Sabbath. Colossians 2:16-17 reads:

“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day — things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”

— NASB —

The laws ‘are a mere shadow of what is to come’ but ‘the sub-

stance belongs to Christ’. Since salvation has been completed by Christ Jesus on the cross, the shadow vanishes and with it the keeping of the Sabbath.

Among the various sophistical arguments for the abolition of the Sabbath, the one basing on Colossians 2:16-17 seems very convincing. If the argument is sound, it would appear that the Apostle Paul was against the observance of the Sabbath by Christians. But if this was not the actual belief of Paul, then it is certain that these people are distorting the truth in the Scriptures to fit their Sunday-keeping practice.

Did Paul Preach The Abolition Of The Sabbath?

When the Gentiles accepted Christianity, the early church en-

countered the problem of whether or not they should be circumcised. In order to resolve this controversy once for all, the Apostles and the Elders met at the Council of Jerusalem. After heated debates it was finally decided that circumcision was unnecessary for Christians (Acts 15:1-20). Paul emphatically declared, “Was any man called already circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God,” (1 Cor 7:18-19) He expounded that baptism which is ‘a circumcision made without hands’ had replaced the physical circumcision (Col 2:11-12). Because of this abolition, the cross of Jesus Christ has been the constant target of fierce attacks by the Jewish Christians, and Paul himself had been severely persecuted for his unrestrained opinions (Gal 5:11; 6:12). The Holy Bible records those events unreservedly.

Circumcision was a covenant made between God and Abraham (Gen 17:9-14), and was later incorporated into the Mosaic Law (Lev 12:3). However it was never part of the Ten Commandments. The observance of the Sabbath, one of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:8-11), was written on tables of stone by God Himself (Ex 31:18). Had Paul actually advo-

cated that the Sabbath was abolished, his persecution would have been much greater than what he had been receiving for advocating the annulment of circumcision. Yet, there is not a single verse in the whole of the New Testament stating or even indicating that he was persecuted for advocating the abolition of the Sabbath. The Bible does not even mention that the Sabbath has been replaced by Sunday. This fact alone leaves us in doubt as to whether all the Sunday-keeping Christians insistence on the abolition of the Sabbath may be valid after all.

When Paul and Silas had travelled through Amphipolis and Appollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And ‘according to Paul’s custom’, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, saying, “This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ”. Note it was Paul’s *custom* to keep the Sabbath; regularly as a matter of practice. We can be certain that Paul could never have suggested the abolition of the Sabbath when he himself observed it. Any assertion then that Paul preached the abolition of the Sabbath is not consistent with Paul’s own regular Sabbath

observance, otherwise it would appear that Paul contradicted himself.

Some ingeniously contended that Paul entered the synagogue on the three successive Sabbaths to reason with the Jews out of the Scriptures, but not to observe the Sabbath. However one must not ignore the important fact that Paul on numerous other occasions also entered a synagogue on the Sabbath. That his audience comprises not only the Jews but also the Gentiles would support the historical fact that the early Christians congregated and worshipped on the Sabbath. (Acts 13:42-44). And when they met in the synagogue on the Sabbath, of course, Paul had to preach to them. Clearly then, Paul's preaching in the synagogue was part of his Sabbath observance as a minister. The other records of his Sabbath-keeping habit are found in Acts 13:14; 18:4, and the one in Thessalonica is found in Acts 17:1-3.

Are The Ten Commandments Binding On Christians?

Sincere and pious Christians would never say that they would worship other gods; bow down before a graven image; take the name of the Lord in vain; dishonour their father and mother; kill; commit adultery; steal; bear false

witness; or covet other people's goods. We are quite sure that no true ministers will teach their believers to break these Commandments of God. But if someone teaches you that you need only to observe nine commandments leaving out the fourth one, would it not be foolish of you to follow him if he gives no scriptural support? It may surprise you to know that millions of Christians through sheer ignorance or religious bigotry today are flagrantly breaking God's Commandment by not observing the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Mt 5:17-18). The following statement is in a more serious tone: "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (vs 19). Beware therefore, of those who teach that the Commandments of God have been done away with.

There are two sets of law in the Old Testament, which must be

clearly distinguished. One is the Ceremonial Law which is a shadow of what is to come, while the other, the Moral Law contained in the Ten Commandments. It is not too difficult to understand that the Ten Commandments are binding on man, whereas the Ceremonial Law is only of a specific, temporal and spatial nature; binding only on the Nation of Israel. As the Ceremonial Law, the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us, was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross (Col 2:14), they are no longer binding on Christians who have been united with the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism. In the Old Testament times, the people were unable to keep the Ten Commandments fully because of the weakness of the flesh (Rom 3:20; 8:3). In the New Testament times, however, the Lord has given us the Holy Spirit to aid us in keeping and observing all the Commandments (Rom 8:1-4; Eze 36:26-27; Heb 10:15-16).

It is evident that the Lord intended the Ceremonial Law and its Ordinances to be transient in nature so as to foreshadow better thing to come. Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Christ completed the work of salvation. The ordinances which were against us were thus abolished (Heb 9:1-10), but the Moral Law as contained in the

Ten Commandments are still binding on God's chosen people in the New Testament as it were for the Israelites in the Old Testament.

Under Grace, the Christian is expected to keep the Ten Commandments even more perfectly (Mt 5:20-48). The Ten Commandments can be divided into two parts; the first four stipulates the duties of man toward God, and the remaining six, man's moral duties toward his fellowmen. It is only natural that any Christian who truly loves God will not break the first four commandments any more than he will violate the other six commandments if he loves his fellowmen. Jesus explained that loving God and loving man are the bases of the Ten Commandments (Mt 22:37-40). Love, man's moral obligation towards God and men, is embodied in the Ten Commandments. All Christians are morally bound by the Ten Commandments to love the Lord and follow Him. (Lk 4:16). One should never break the Ten Commandments and therefore the sanctity of the Sabbath must be upheld (ref Gen 2:2-3).

The Historical Background Of The Colossian Church

A brief background knowledge of the Colossian Church is perhaps necessary to enable us to

grasp the significance of the controversy surrounding the Sabbath. Notably, most of the Christians there were formerly heathens (Col 1:21,27; 2:13). When Paul was imprisoned, Epaphras, one of the early church workers came to visit him and reported of the heresies which had infiltrated the Colossian Church (Col 1:7-8; 4:12,13,18). Though personally unacquainted with the Colossians (2:1), Paul wrote them this letter denouncing the heresies, and exhorting them not to be deluded by persuasive arguments contrary to the truth.

While Church Historians un-animously believe that both the heretical sects; the Gnostics and the Jewish Essenes, stepped up their insidious activities during that time, they did not agree as to which exactly accounts for the Colossian Heresy. We may not label it precisely, and the prevail- ing syncretism of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism makes it unlikely that it was purely Jewish in origin. Some feel that it was probably a Judaistic form of Gnosticism, because the Essenes were not found outside Palestine prior to 70 AD.

Be that as it may, the issues raised certainly bear a striking resemblance to Essenism. The Essenes, a Jewish religious community, devote much of their time to the study of moral and religious matters, leading ascetic

lives of ceremonial purity even more rigorous than those of the Pharisees. They strictly practise celibacy, abstention from animal sacrifice, and preach the doctrine of salvation by works. Paul often labelled them as 'false teachers' (Col 2:16, 21,23). Here are some of their heretical teachings:-

1. The worship of Angels (Col 2:18).
2. The observance of the ordi- nances of circumcision, meat, drink, holy day, new moon and a sabbath (Col 2:11,16).
3. The advocacy of Asceti- cism (Col 2:20-23).

Paul called these heresies 'philosophy and empty deceit', according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ (Col 2:8). Paul warned the Colossian Church that Chris- tians are no longer under the Law, and that they should not allow anyone to judge them for not observing the ordinances pertaining to meat, drink, holy day, new moon and sabbath days. These ordinances have been abolished when Christ died on the cross.

The True Meaning Of Colossians 2:16

In the foregoing paragraphs, we have proven that Colossians 2:16 cannot be used as a ground

to support the belief that the Sabbath has been done away with. It is important to note that the correct interpretation of this verse will not only enable the Sunday-keeping Christians to follow the truth but also the Sabbath-keeping ones who retain Judaic traditions.

First of all, a careful analysis will show that the misconception of this verse; Colossians 2:16, resulted from reading it out of context. In verses eleven to thirteen, Paul expounded the Doctrine of Circumcision made without hands, or baptism. In verse fourteen he explained that when Christ was crucified, He cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and are hostile to us. In the King James Version it is stated that the Lord Jesus nailed to the cross the 'handwriting of ordina- ces'. The word 'ordinances', 'Hukkim' in the Hebrew language means religious rites and formalis- tics ceremonies in the Mosaic and Rabbinic tradition.

This word 'ordinances' occurs elsewhere in the New Testament:

(a) *Luke 1:6* And they (Zacharias and Elizabeth) were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and *ordinances* of the Lord blameless. (KJV) Here John the Baptist's parents were blameless in regard to religious ceremonies. No one can be blame-

less in keeping the Moral Law (Phil 3:6; with Rom 7:18-24; 8:3-4).

(b) *Ephesians 2:15* Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in *ordinances*; (KJV)

(c) *Colossians 2:20* Wherefore if ye be dead with the Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to *ordinances*,..... (KJV)

(d) *Hebrews 9:1* Then verily the first covenant had also *ordinances* of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. (KJV)

(e) *Hebrews 9:10* Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal *ordinances*, imposed on them until the time of reformation. (KJV)

Undoubtedly, the 'bond' (Greek - cheirographon) used in the Revised Standard Version, refers to the Ceremonial Law, which Jesus abolished when He died on the cross. But it would be ill-advised to suggest that the Ten Commandments, the binding Moral Law were abolished.

Colossians 2:15 describes how the Lord triumphed over the principalities and powers, namely not only the powers on earth and in heaven, but the carnal ordina- ces. Because of the Lord's supreme authority and power, the carnal ordinances could no

longer pose a threat to the believers under His Grace.

For Colossians 2:16; clearly we have to associate the 'meat, drink, holyday, new moon and sabbath days' with the ordinances or the ceremonial laws. The 'sabbath day' listed with all the other Mosaic regulations are related to the Ceremonial Law; the ordinances pertaining to the Sabbath, instead of the indisputable itself.

If we examine the ordinances relating to the Sabbath observance, we will find how the Jews were bound by regulations which were rigid and complex.

- (a) They cannot kindle fire in their habitation on the Sabbath (Ex 35:3).
- (b) They cannot gather sticks on the Sabbath (Num 15:32-36).
- (c) They cannot carry any burden on the Sabbath (Neh 13:15-22).
- (d) They can only walk a certain distance (about five furlongs) on the Sabbath. It is called 'a sabbath day's journey' (Acts 1:12).
- (e) They have to make offerings every sabbath (Num 28:9-10).
- (f) Any person who worked on the Sabbath and profaned it would be put to death (Ex 31:14-15).

All these ordinances relating to the Sabbath observance are

inseparable from the legalistic manner of eating and drinking which Paul referred to in Colossians 2:14, as 'carnal ordinances'. Thank God, Christ nailed them altogether on the cross. For this reason, no one can judge us if we do not keep these ordinances in our observance of the Sabbath.

How Should Christians Observe The Sabbath?

It is now very clear that Colossians 2:16 does not teach Christians not to observe the Sabbath but actually teaches them not to give opportunity for others to judge them by carnal ordinances attached to the Sabbath. Christians who are now no longer under the Mosaic Law but under Grace, should observe the Sabbath of Grace and be free from all the cumbersome restrictions and frightful punishments ascribed to the ordinances. Although the Sabbath of Grace is observed on the seventh day (Saturday), which is on the same day as the Sabbath of Law, its significance and method of observance differ greatly from that of the Old Testament Sabbath. Under Grace, Christians have to keep the Sabbath in the way God originally intended for man; freedom, joy and peace.

On many occasions, Jesus preached and healed the sick on the Sabbath day. His actions provoked the Jews (Lk 13:10-14;

Jn 5:10-18). Many of the Jews in His days, were so legalistic and bigotted that they went out and took counsel against him and sought to destroy him for healing on the Sabbath day (Jn 9:13-16, 24; Mt 12:14). The Lord answered them; "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath" (Mt 12:11-12).

On another occasion, after healing a woman with the spirit of infirmity, he was questioned by the ruler of the synagogue. Jesus replied, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (Lk 13:15-16).

Today many Sunday-keeping Christians have violated the fourth commandment and yet tried to pass judgement on the true Christians who observe the Sabbath of grace. The Lord Jesus certainly desires them to correct themselves, so that they can face the Lord on the Day of Judgement.

To reiterate the significance of Colossians 2:16, let all Christians remember that the Lord Jesus Christ has never abolished the Sabbath. He abolished the onerous ordinances and challenged the legal severity; the letter of the Sabbath observance,

advocated by the Pharisees and the Scribes. Let us endeavour to follow Jesus example; "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and He went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day" (Lk 4:16).

The Pharisees were always ready to pick faults with Jesus. When they failed to find fault in Him they picked on His disciples. One day they complained against the disciples who plucked corn on the Sabbath day; "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" (Mk 2:23-24). The Lord replied, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). This indicated that what the Pharisees mistakenly thought unlawful was in fact lawful. Due to the misconception of the Sabbath observance, the Pharisees were dictated by the Law that 'man was made for the Sabbath', a dictum antithetical to our Lord's; 'the Sabbath was made for man'. We must not allow ourselves to be dictated and enslaved by the strict Sabbatical ordinances.

The very word 'Sabbath' means rest, both spiritually and physically. One would fail to obtain true rest if he is still bound by the legal demands. And so the object and the meaning of the Sabbath are completely lost. The Lord did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, and to show Christians how the Sabbath

should be observed (Mt 5:17). Since the Son of Man is the Lord also of the Sabbath, all Christians should observe the Sabbath. In response to the Sunday-keeping friends' claim that the Sabbath is only for the Jews and not for the Christians, we would remind them that the Lord not only referred to the Jews but to all mankind when He said; "The Sabbath was made for *man*". When God had created the Universe and thereafter rested on Sabbath day, He did it not only for the Jews but for *'man'*, especially for those who would come to Christ, who will give them the Eternal Sabbath (Mt 11:28-29).

Is The Sabbath Merely A Shadow?

Many fail to grasp the typological significance and the basic difference between the words 'shadow' and 'substance'. To give a simple illustration; the Passover Lamb in the Old Testament foreshadows or prefigures the 'substance', which is Jesus Himself (1 Cor 5:7-8). When Christ sacrificed himself on the cross for us, the 'shadow' became the 'substance'. While the Passover Lamb is no longer used, the 'substance', which is the 'bread' in the Holy Communion, continues to be used in the church today. By the same token, we can safely hold that whilst the Sabbatical ordinances have been abolished, the Sabbath itself remains.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that the chosen people of God in the Wilderness could not enter into His rest because of their unbelief (Heb 3:16-19). Christians today must fully understand and keep God's Sabbath rest, so that they will not fall into the same disbelief as the Israelites. God gave the Sabbath to man because He wants His people to enjoy the physical and spiritual rest in this world as a foretaste of the Everlasting rest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Unfortunately, innumerable Christians are oblivious to the true Sabbath. Irresponsible church leaders are preaching against the Sabbath. They thought that since Jesus has come and given us rest, there is no longer any need for Christians to keep the Sabbath. This doctrine is not only foreign to the Bible but is also derogatory to the Lord's status as the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2:27). We must not only accept Jesus Christ as our Lord but also His Sabbath as well.

Conclusion

There is absolutely no doubt as to whether Christians should observe the Sabbath. The Holy Bible makes it very plain that God's Commandment includes the keeping of the Sabbath; which is as binding on all Christians as

any of the other nine commandments. The two prevailing extreme views can be summarised as follows:-

1. To most of the Protestants, the Sabbath has been abolished. The Roman Catholic Church declares that she has the authority to change the day of worship from the seventh day (Saturday) to the first day of the week (Sunday).

2. A group of Seventh-day Sabbath Christian sect maintains that the Sabbath should be observed strictly according to the Law with the ordinances. Some of them even believe that keeping this kind of Sabbath is a prerequisite of salvation.

These two views do not comply with the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation there is not a single reference to the transfer of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day. We can find no passage which sanctions the necessity of observing the day of the resurrection. Nor is there any indication that the Holy Spirit came on a certain Sunday. Those who preach or observe Sunday as a special day of worship risk worshipping God in vain, because they are teaching 'as doctrines the precepts of men' (Mt 15:9). They may be very enthusiastic in serving God on a day of their own choice, but "has the Lord any delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is

better than sacrifice." (1 Sam 15:22)

Let our Sabbath-keeping friends who are so very concerned with the Law and the ordinances, remember that for "freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). Christians are saved by grace through faith, and no man is justified by works of the Law. (Gal 2:16). A person can observe the Sabbath meticulously throughout his life, yet if he does not believe in the saving grace of Jesus he cannot be justified before God.

"Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom 3:31). "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" (Rom 6:1-2). That a Christian is saved by grace through faith does not mean that he can throw away any of the Ten Commandments. If he does so, he becomes a sinner, because 'sin is lawlessness' (1 Jn 3:4). He must not only keep the Sabbath because it is the mandatory fourth commandment of God, he must also keep it according to the Lord's teachings. On the narrow path to salvation, no Christian can afford to side-step to the right or to the left, "for the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7:13-14).

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE 144,000

“Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

(Rev 14:1, RSV)

In Rev 7:2, it is recorded that John saw an angel coming up from the place of the rising of the sun. The angel was holding the Seal of the Living God. He commanded the four angels not to hurt the earth, the sea and the trees, until they had sealed the servants of God on their foreheads. John also heard the number of people of the tribes of Israel that were sealed. It was one hundred and forty-four thousand.

Who Are They?

A view, commonly held by many Bible expositors, is that the church will be caught up into the upper air before the Great Tribulation but the rest of mankind will remain on earth throughout this period of woe. Of those remaining, these premillennialists believe that the 144,000 to be sealed, are specially chosen by God from

among the literal Nation of Israel.

However, according to the Bible, the “true Israelites” in the New Testament era are from the various races, nationalities and cultures of the world, not from Israel alone! Paul said, “For you were baptised into union with Christ and so have taken upon yourselves the qualities of Christ himself. So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and freemen, between men and women: you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of Abraham, and will receive what God has promised” (Gal 3:27-29, TEV).

In Revelations itself, it is stated that the 144,000 had been “purchased from the earth” (Rev 14:3, NASB). But Christ has “purchased for God with (his) blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9, NASB). Without more, clearly the premillennialists’ view is erroneous and not supportable by the Bible.

The 144,000 have the Seal of the Living God. This Seal denotes the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). They are those chosen by the Lord during the days of the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit. One hundred and forty-four thousand is twelve times of twelve thousand. Twelve being a complete number, the 144,000 will then represent the complete number of people whom God has predestined to be saved.

They Stood With The Lamb

The 144,000 and the Lamb stood on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is a type of the spiritual church. In Hebrews, it is written, “But you have come to Mount Zion.... the general assembly and church of the first-born...” (Heb 12:22-23). The Lamb represents Jesus Christ. As the Lamb stood on Mount Zion, the True Church of God will have the Lord with her.

The Sound Of Many Waters And Of Loud Thunder

John heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. That is actually the tremendous din made by the 144,000 during their prayers. The same phenomenon occurred when the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke in tongues. The noise thus created aroused the curiosity of the Jews and the proselytes in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-6).

A brief survey of the Bible would reveal that when the Holy Spirit comes upon a person, he will speak in tongues (Acts 10:44-46; 19:1-7). The “speaking of tongues” in prayer is spiritual communication with God. It cannot be understood by the ordinary man because that person who prays speaks mysteries in the spirit (1 Cor 14:2).

John also heard that the voice was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps. Prayers in the spirit can similarly be as melodious and pleasant as the sound of the harp. This is possible when Christians are perfect in spirit and their "glossalalia" becomes fluent.

The "new song" is the spiritual song as the unknown tongue is the "new tongue" (cf Mk 16:17). The spiritual song they sing is extraordinarily pleasant and the melody enchanting.

They Were Redeemed

The 144,000 were "purchased from the earth" (Rev 14:3). According to Paul, the Church was purchased with God's own blood (Acts 20:28). Jesus died for us on the cross. If we believe and accept the washing by His blood, our sins will be remitted. We shall be saved by the Lord and obtain the privilege of becoming the children of God (Acts 2:38).

They Have The Seal Of The Living God

Paul said that after hearing the gospel of salvation and believing in Christ, one may then be sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). This Seal signifies that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16).

They Were Holy

"It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they

are chaste" (Rev 14:4). Chastity implies holiness or purity. It certainly does not imply celibacy. If it were physical virginity these 144,000 would consist of males only because of the preceding clause "... these who have not defiled themselves *with women*...". Taking it in the spiritual sense therefore, it means that they are believers who have spurned the temptations of Satan and subjugated their carnality. As Paul said to the church at Corinth, "I betrothed you to Christ to present you (denoting the whole congregation) as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor 11:2).

Marriage is a holy union instituted by God and should be respected. God has never looked on those who were married as unclean and thus they are not excluded from the 144,000 (cf Mk 10:6-9; Heb. 13:4).

They Were Obedient

"These people followed the Lamb wherever He went" (Rev 14:4). They are absolutely obedient and loyal, even to the point of death. They are like Christ. If it is God's will, they will be unflinching, even if they have to bear the cross all the way to Golgotha (Rev 12:11; Phil 2:8). In their everyday life, they often make decisions but always with due reverence to Jesus as the highest authority.

They Were Honest

"And in their mouth no lie was found" (Rev 14:5). "The Devil is the father of lies" said Jesus (Jn 8:44). He also said, "Just say 'Yes' or 'No', anything else you have to say comes from the Evil One" (Mt 5:37 TEV). No lies were heard from their mouth; they were absolutely honest. Their hearts were not influenced by the devil.

The Bible said, "If any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body also" (Jas 3:2). Some are of the opinion that lying is a negligible sin which can be winked at. But Rev 21:8 says, "As for ... all liars, their lot shall be in the lake of fire and brimstone which is the second death".

They Were Perfect

"For they were spotless" (Rev 14:5). Jesus said, "You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). To be perfect like our heavenly Father is the highest goal of all Christians. The 144,000 attained it.

They Have The Name Of The Lord On Their Foreheads

The 144,000 have the name of the Lamb and the name of the Fa-

ther on their foreheads (Rev 14:1). The name 'Jesus' is the name of the Father which has been given to the Son. Jesus himself said; "..... Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me," (Jn 17:11, NASB).

Before the Ascension, Jesus commanded his disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). However, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples baptised the people in the name of Jesus instead (Acts 2:38). This was because they understood that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three distinct persons in one Godhead but the same Eternal God; not coexisting but the same being whose name is Jesus.

Plainly, to have the name of the Lamb and the Father on their foreheads is to have the name 'Jesus' there. It implies that they bear the image of Jesus; they are god-like (cf Eph 4:23-24).

Incidentally, the True Church of God, the gathering of all God's people, should bear the name 'Jesus'. The Psalmist declares; "..... in the name of our God we will set up our banners" (Ps 20:5).

You may join them

You too may qualify to be among the 144,000. Only, are you willing to conform to their standards?

THE YOUNG, THE OLD AND THE CHURCH

The young are important because they are the successors; like the runners in a relay race. The nation, society and family carry on from generation to generation and so does the church. Their faith then needs to be cultivated. They have to be given proper guidance and training in order to mould them into virtuous and useful Christians. This work, of course, must be carried out by the senior members of the church. Outside, their work is to evangelize, while inside, they must nurture the youths. The church regards both the young and the old as equally important. Both have their strongpoints and their weakpoints.

The Young Their Strongpoints

Strength and Courage The young have ambition, zeal and strong determination. They are able to undergo hardship and to strive forward despite adverse circumstances. Daniel, for example, was taken to Babylon while still a youth. King Nebuchadnezzar treated him well and sent men to serve him the king's meat. But Daniel resolutely decided not to eat the king's meat, preferring to eat pulse and drink plain water only. When Darius succeeded the throne, he was unafraid, defied the king's decree and continued

to pray to God, facing Jerusalem three times a day (Dan 1:8; 6:10).

When David was still a youth, he went to the battle field to visit his brothers. When he heard Goliath, the Philistine giant, challenging the Israelites, he was indignant. He marched up to the front and killed the giant with just a small pebble (1 Sam 17:41-49).

Samuel and Jeremiah were both called of God to be prophets in their youth (1 Sam 3; Jer 1:4-9). Timothy was a young evangelist (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Tim 4:12). The life of a prophet or an evangelist is hard and full of problems, but these people can handle them because they are strong and courageous.

Good Memory The memory of the young is good. They are impressionable, and if properly nurtured with the truth, they will grow deeper in their spiritual understanding. The Bible says; "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6). Although this verse speaks only of children, it applies to youths as well. If they are trained early to walk in the correct path of the truth, they shall remember it deeply even till they are old.

John said, "... I have written to you young men, because you are strong and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one" (1 Jn 2:4). Those youths having

received the truth, were able to retain it in their hearts, and so they developed a kind of spiritual strength to overcome the wicked one — Satan.

Take Joseph for example. He left his home and was sold to Egypt when he was only seventeen. Later when his master's wife tried to seduce him, he dared not do anything that would incur the anger of God (Gen 39). Probably he had learned of the word of God at home that he should fear God and that he has not forgotten.

Timothy was brought up by his grandmother and mother during his young days. Thus Timothy has unfeigned faith (2 Tim 1:5).

Health In executing the various aspects of the holy work of God, it is vital to have healthy strong bodies. Paul said, "..... in all things approving ourselves as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in strips, in imprisonments, in tumult, in labours, in watchings, in fastings". Also "In journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in wariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor 6:4-5; 11:26-27). These are the personal encounters of Paul. Only through faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit together with a healthy body can the

divine task be accomplished. In the old days, Moses conscripted males of over twenty years to be soldiers and they formed the strong and dynamic Israelite army. They were victorious in battles. This brings out the fact that a strong physique is necessary in any form of work.

Their Weak points

Inexperience Their experiences in life are limited. Their perspective on humanity and the matters of the world are too narrow. Therefore they often suffer losses and can easily be defeated. When King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam went to Shechem. The Israelites and the sons of Nebat also went with Rehoboam to crown him king pleading only that he would alleviate some of their burdens and hardships. Rehoboam first sought the views of the elders and they advised him to give his answer with fair words. Rehoboam then asked the youths and they advised him to rule the people with harsh methods. Rehoboam rejected the elders' advice and carried out the suggestions of the youths. Consequently, except for the tribe of Judah, all the eleven tribes rebelled against Rehoboam and set up Jeroboam as king instead (1 Kings 12:1-20). This disastrous folly was the result of inexperience; both of Rehoboam himself and his fresh aides.

Hastiness Youth tends to be overzealous and ambitious. In a fast-moving society, they expect quick results in their every venture. Yet, the Bible says; "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas 1:19-20). Also, "He that is soon angered dealeth foolishly" (Prov 14:7). It is foolish to do anything while still emotionally upset. Moses while still in his early youth lived in the king's palace. He went out one day to look at his brethren. When he saw an Egyptian bullying an Israelite, he was worked up and in a moment of fury, killed the Egyptian. Later, when the Pharaoh heard of this matter, he wanted to kill Moses. So he fled to Midian and dwelt there (Ex 2:11-15).

When Solomon was old, he was seduced into idolatry by his many pagan wives. Therefore God divided his kingdom into two; giving only two tribes to his son Rehoboam, and the remaining to Jeroboam. At that time, the kingdom was continually harassed by the enemies from outside. Jeroboam did not wait for the right time and unwittingly rebelled against Solomon. His premature attempt met with a crushing defeat and he went on an exile to Egypt when Solomon wanted to kill him. (1 Kings 11:4-40) God has already pre-planned his rulership. Had he waited just a little while longer, he would

not have had to flee in fear. His hastiness did not pay off. Neither did Moses'.

Non-perseverance The young are sometimes very bold having the valour to face all sorts of danger, but they are not experienced enough to handle things. If they stumble upon unexpected obstacles, they are confused, surprised and even doubtful. Their enthusiasm will be dampened.

According to the ancient history of China, when the Western Hans attacked, the Ch'u enlisted youths into the Chinese army to fight against the Hans. At first the Ch'u army was extremely courageous. But the Hans cleverly contrived a plot. Suddenly in the midst of fighting, they sang loudly the Ch'u national folk songs. When the young Ch'u soldiers heard this, their fighting spirit diminished because they were homesick. They lost.

It is said that the mark of a general is not his courage but his strategy, and the strength of the army is not in numbers but in skill. If the Ch'u soldiers were better trained, more experienced and better prepared, they would not have fallen into the Hans' trap.

The Old

Their Strongpoints

Insight and Foresight When the elderly engage in business, they

think deeply and are far-sighted, making careful and complete plans. The elders suggested to Rehoboam to give his answers in fair words. They have insight into the heart of men. Experience shows that it's easier to win support and loyalty through virtue than through force. Unfortunately the king did not heed the elders' advice. Consequently, the kingdom collapsed. This story elucidates the fact that the older people are wiser and have profound insight compared to the younger ones. These, tempered with their experience make their advice worth following.

Calmness The king of Syria once sent out chariots and calvaries to Dothan and they hastened there by night surrounding the city desiring to capture Elisha. When Elisha's servant woke up the following morning and saw this, he was stunned and frightened. He told Elisha. Elisha comforted him saying, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that are with them". Elisha was not excited or worried, he was calm and collected. He believed deeply that God would be with them, and that they would not be taken by the enemy. And sure enough, Elisha and the Israelites suffered no harm from the armies of Syria.

In the annals of Chinese history, during the late Han Dynasty, a certain Mah Lun failed to guard the post and the

great army of Tze Mah Yi took the opportunity to attack that city where Kung Ming was living. At that time there were no guards in the city and the situation was tense and very dangerous. But Kung Ming retained his composure, undaunted by this change of circumstances, he casually commanded his men to open the gate of the city wide, while he played the harp as though nothing unusual was going on. The attacking army saw this and thought that it was part of a military ploy. They were afraid to enter the city. Thus the crisis passed and peace was restored.

Discernment The elderly people have plodded more deeply into the world. With the length of years behind them, their experiences abound and so their views and actions are usually proper and suitable. They are able to distinguish right from wrong and will not jump to conclusions. Once the Priests and the Pharisees sent their officers to arrest Jesus in order to convict him. They accused the Lord of being a fraud and a blasphemous sinner. But Nicodemus being very dissatisfied with their rough treatment, protested saying; "Does our law judge a man, without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" (Jn 7: 50-51).

Their Weak points

Stubbornness and Prejudice Some elderly people assert that they have lived more years, their experiences are wider and deeper; and therefore their methods of operation are always better. They maintain their own ideas under all circumstances, not at all willing to take on the suggestions of youths or even to consider them. But the Bible says; "... without favour, doing nothing from partiality" (1 Tim 5:21).

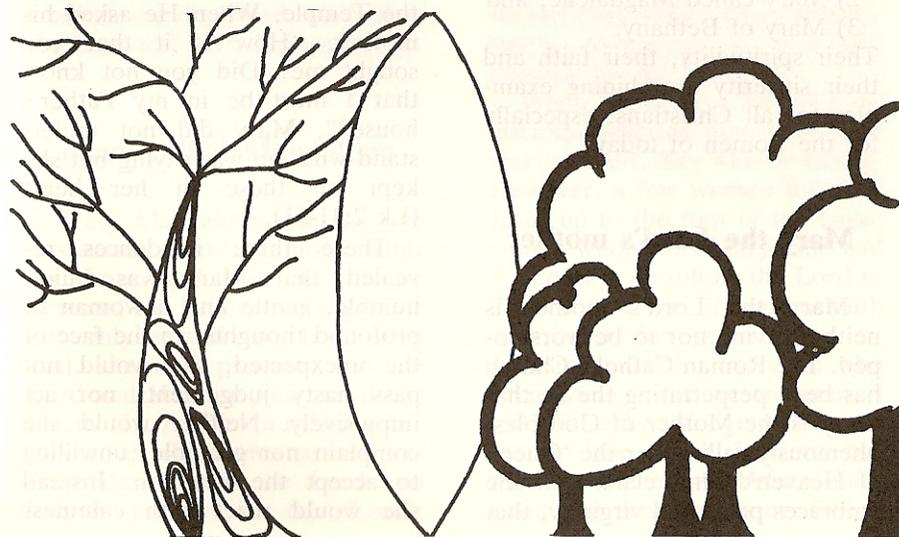
Self-glorification The older people find it irresistible not to glorify themselves over past achievements which admittedly give pleasant reminiscence. Yet it is equally true that the social world is in a constant state of flux and is continuously progressing. The youths of today have received modern education; fresh knowledge which should be utilised. If the seniors were to be unyielding, a whole lot of young bright talents in the church would be wasted. Therefore the older ones should not be self-conceited.

Senility An old adage says that once the moon passes the fifteenth of the Lunar Month, its bright-

ness decreases; men who have passed their middle age will gradually rest from everything. There is some truth in this saying. When a man passes the middle age, his mental and physical prowess, gradually languish. As a result their ability to work also slackens, unless God specially wants to make use of this person. In that case, he would be given extra health and physical strength. Like Moses, who after attaining the age of eighty, became the leader of the Israelites and led them out of Egypt. When Caleb was eighty-five years old, he was still able to win wars driving out the other inhabitants of Canaan (Acts 7:22-30; Josh 14: 6-15). For most people who have passed the middle age, they will grow weary although they may sometimes wish to use more of their strength to do more work.

The Church

Both the young and the old are members of the church — the various parts of Christ's body. Although they have their own strong points and their own weak-points, when the former is accentuated and the latter eradicated wherever possible, when they freely exchange views and suggestions and work together harmoniously, it will not be difficult to enlarge the perfect body of Christ — the church. Even if prominence is given to the youths, the older workers must not fade from the scene. The divine work must be coordinated so that the old and the young have one mind in sharing and working diligently for the faith of the gospel and to pass it down generation after generation until the Lord comes again.



MARY, MARY AND MARY

The Paragons of True Femininity

In the Bible, there are many people with the same names. In the pages of the New Testament alone, there are already six women named Mary. Let us study three of them:

- 1) Mary the Lord's mother,
- 2) Mary called Magdalene, and
- 3) Mary of Bethany.

Their spirituality, their faith and their sincerity are shining examples for all Christians, especially for the women of today.

Mary the Lord's mother

Mary the Lord's mother is neither divine nor to be worshipped. The Roman Catholic Church has been perpetrating the lie that Mary is the Mother of God blasphemously calling her the 'Queen of Heaven'. They claim that she embraces perpetual virginity, that

she is immaculate and that she has ascended to heaven to assume a mediatory role between Jesus and Man. Many sincere but uninformed Catholics have been misled. As a result, they actually worship Mary as God!

Undeniably, Mary has extraordinary virtues. God was pleased with her and she was blessed among all women (Lk 1:28,42). The Gospels recorded three instances when Mary pondered over the things which she had heard, keeping them in her heart. The first was when the archangel Gabriel, who was sent by God, to Nazareth in Galilee, greeted Mary (Lk 1:28-29). The second was when the shepherds spoke of the good tidings the angels had brought to them after the birth of the Saviour Jesus (Lk 2:15-19). The third was when the twelve year old Jesus was in the Temple. When He asked his mother, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?", Mary did not understand what he was saying but she kept all these in her heart (Lk 2:41-51).

These three incidences revealed that Mary was quiet, humble, gentle and a woman of profound thoughts. In the face of the unexpected, she would not pass hasty judgements nor act impulsively. Neither would she complain nor grumble, unwilling to accept the situation. Instead she would react with calmness

and meekness, seriously pondering over what the will of God was. The Bible says; "Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph 5:17). It also says; "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1-2). We must search the Scriptures, ponder over it, meditate on it and pray seeking to understand more of the will of God. In this regard, Paul exhorted the Colossian Christians to be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work...." (Col 1:9-10). If we are able to ponder and meditate on the Word, the will of the Lord will not be strange to us.

Mary called Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was the one possessed by seven demons. After the Lord had cast out all the demons, she believed in Him. She not only served the Lord with zeal, she also provided for the Lord and His disciples out of her means (Lk 8:1-3). In offering her substance, she demonstrated her gratitude towards the Lord and helped greatly in the Lord's

ministry. Everyone treasures his own property and would not simply give it away. But Mary willingly offered hers to the Lord.

Many believed because they had their sicknesses and diseases healed by the Lord. Although some know how to give thanks for the grace of the Lord some forget the grace completely. The nine lepers who were cured by the Lord are but to name a few.

The True Church has plans for world evangelism. Manpower and strong financial backing are necessary. King David and his people provided much wealth and property for the construction of the temple (1 Chron 29:1-9). Nehemiah made great sacrifices during the rebuilding of the holy city (Neh 5:14-19). The same sacrifices have to be made if the full gospel is to be proclaimed to all corners of the earth. Should we not then follow Mary Magdalene's footsteps in providing liberally for the Lord?

When Jesus was on trial his disciples deserted him. When He was crucified, they were in hiding. However, a few women followed Jesus up to the foot of the cross; among whom was Mary. She had the courage to follow the Lord to the end. She was firm in her faith even before her enemies.

Jesus said; "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father

who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33). In times of trouble, men often fail to acknowledge the Lord. Even His dearest disciple, Peter, denied Him three times. Yet Mary's genuine love for the Lord was so great that it impelled her to draw near to the Lord even during His sufferings.

Mary was quick in spreading the good news about the Lord's resurrection. After Jesus' death and burial, the eleven apostles and the other disciples were disappointed and dejected. However, on the first day of the week, when Mary Magdalene and some other women came to visit the tomb Jesus appeared to them and asked them to tell His disciples about His resurrection. They left in a hurry, afraid yet filled with joy. Are we still dragging our feet, reluctant and unwilling to proclaim the good news? Do we share the enthusiasm that propelled Mary Magdalene?

Mary of Bethany

Once Jesus came to Bethany and was in the house of Simon. As He sat at the table, this Mary came in with a costly alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured it over His head. Indignantly some objected querying, "Why was the ointment thus wasted?". And they reproached her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a

beautiful thing to me". Then Jesus added that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done will be recounted in memory of her (Mk 14:9).

Judas claimed that Mary's jar of ointment was worth three hundred denarii, equivalent to almost a year's income. Evidently, that jar of ointment was indeed precious. According to Jewish custom, the nard ointment was part of the bride's dowry. On the wedding day the ointment would be applied over the body of the bridegroom so that the whole room would be full of its fragrance, to signify a prosperous and happy family. Yet, Mary of Bethany offered the ointment to the Lord.

She broke the jar and anointed the Lord with the whole jar of ointment and not just a few drops. Our love for the Lord is likened to the ointment. Do we break the jar and let the ointment flow lavishly or do we just let it trickle from the jar?

When the Lord went to her house, she sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teachings. The Lord commended her saying, "Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (Lk 10:42). The value of the Word is reflected in Jesus' words; "Do not labour for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life" (Jn 6:27).

When her brother, Lazarus died, she went to Jesus and fell

at his feet saying, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died". When Jesus saw her weeping, He was deeply moved in the spirit and troubled (Jn 11:32-33). She loved her brother dearly. That was why she wept so bitterly over his death that even Jesus was deeply moved in the spirit.

Only true and genuine love can move and comfort men. We should have concern for one another; sharing our griefs and joys. Perhaps through our true love for another, we might bring him back to 'life'.

New Feminism and True Feminity

The 'New Feminism' or popularly known as the 'Women Liberation Movement' has almost totally infested Western society. A shocking fact is that it is now threatening the Orient, overturning well established social norms and tearing up the traditional family unit. Impressionable young girls in their attempts to 'keep up with the times' are beginning to ingest wholesale the new morality of the so-called 'liberated women'. In so far as their ideas are in conflict with biblical principles, young Christian girls are advised to follow the examples of the three Marys. They are the model of what true femininity really is.



THE GREAT MEN WHO PRAYED FOR OTHERS

What is lacking in the Church today is not money or talented people but faithful people who will pray for others. The divine mission of the Church is successfully completed not by might, nor by power but by the Spirit (Zech 4:6). As Christians, we should realize that we are responsible for the progress of the Church. But how can the flame of revival be kindled? How can the Church be revitalised?

Only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone should devote more time to prayer. But you, my friends, must fortify yourselves in your most sacred faith. Continue to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jude 20, NEB). We should help in the divine work through prayers. Ask God to open the door of the Word (Col 4:3), so that the true word may be propagated worldwide.

Let us study several great men who prayed for others.

Moses

In the Old Testament, Moses

can be regarded as the greatest faithful man who prayed for others. Although God advised Moses not to pray for the Israelites, Moses still stood in the breach before God and prayed for the Israelites that God would turn away His wrath from destroying them (Ps 106:23). Had Moses not prayed for the Israelites out of his profoundest love pleading, "but now, if thou wilt forgive their sin — and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written", (Ex 32:32), the Israelites would have been utterly annihilated.

The secret behind the victory of the Israelites over the Amalekites at Rephidim was the fact that Moses held up his hand in prayer (Ex 17:11). He prayed for them all day!

How earnest such a prayer was!

Praying for others is very important as it brings about victory and salvation. We should spend more time everyday kneeling in ardent prayer before the Lord for the weak brethren, for the faith of our family and for the salvation of mankind. This is

good and acceptable to God our Saviour (cf 1 Tim 2:1-4; Jas 5:14).

Samuel

Samuel was a great prophet who prayed for others. He prayed for King Saul. It came about when King Saul rejected God, Samuel said, "Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way" (1 Sam 12:23).

Today the elders, deacons, evangelists and the teachers should take up the responsibility of praying for the members. At home, the parents should continually pray for the faith of their children. They should follow the example set by Job who constantly prayed for his children (Job 1:5).

Once there was a young lad who was serving drinks in a little known town in Que-Moy. There he had his first taste of alcohol. Before long, he was getting hooked on it. However, one day as his mother was having her morning prayer, she saw in a vision her dear son drinking away with his chums. Immediately she wrote a letter to him: "Have you begun the bad habit of drinking?"

God's eyes see all, He manifest His power to help those who are honest with Him (2 Chron 16:9).

Having received his mother's tender words of love, the lad

refrained from drinking. An old preacher once said, "If the parents are to pray in tears for their children, the merciful heavenly Father will never forsake their children."

It is hoped that we may be like the prophet Samuel, who prayed continually for the people.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah was the prophet who prayed in tears. He said, "My eyes are spent with weeping; my soul is in tumult; my heart is poured out in grief because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,.... my eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, O that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Lam 2:11; 3:48-49; Jer 9:1).

He secretly wept and prayed to God in tears for the Israelites who were proud, disobedient and rebellious towards God (Jer 13:17; 14:17). From the experience of Jeremiah we understand that earnest prayers for others are not in vain. Sometimes our prayers have quick answers, some are answered eventually — Jeremiah's prayers were answered only after seventy years. Because of Jeremiah's prayers for others,

God promised; "I will bring them back to this land." May we all strive to pray for the divine work of the Church.

Paul

Paul was another great man who prayed for others, in the New Testament. One who does not make full use of his time cannot become a prayerful man. And one who does not pray can never be able to accomplish any work for God. Paul spent a lot of his time on his knees. He prayed for all the churches and believers whom he continually mentioned in his prayers. To the Roman believers, Paul wrote; "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers" (Rom 1:9).

To the Ephesians he wrote; "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Eph 1:15-16).

To the Philippians he wrote; "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy" (Phil 1:3-4). "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for

the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil 1:9-11).

He prayed unceasingly for the Colossian believers that they may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9).

In leading the believers to embark on the sanctified path, Paul's prayers have accomplished more than his preaching. Thus he said; "For this reason, I bow my knees before my Father".

Conclusion

A person who prays for others must himself have a high degree of purity, the right motives, zeal and spiritual wisdom. Moreover, he must lead a life of dedication and self-sacrifice. Even Jesus, God incarnate Himself, prayed for others. Peter knew how to repent and resist the devil; he was able to regain strength to become a pillar of the church because the Lord prayed for him (Lk 22:31-32). Being the Eternal Father Himself, He still relied on the power of prayer. What more mortals like you and me?

You may not be endowed with the gift of speaking. You may not even be up and about meeting people and proclaiming the Good News. But you can be a Man of Prayer. In your own unique yet scriptural way, you can contribute to the growth of the Church — simply through your sincere prayers for others.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS IN SPIRITUAL NURTURE

"Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the spring of life.

Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.

Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.

Take heed to the path of your feet, then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil."

(Prov 4:23-27, RSV)

This extract is taken from the Proverbs of King Solomon, the sagacious monarch. Enshrined within it are the Four Elements In Spiritual Nurture;

1. Purity of Thoughts
2. Purity of Speech
3. Purity of Sight
4. Purity of Action

Spiritual Nurture is a process, through which a Christian attains greater heights of spirituality. It is important to a Christian. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, the Apostle Paul said, "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching

to others I myself should be disqualified", and in Philippians 2:12, he wrote; "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling".

1. Purity Of Thoughts

The mind is the master of the entire body. It controls and coordinates the functions and actions of the various parts of the body. Our Lord Jesus observed that "the good man out of the good treasure of his heart pro-

duces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Lk 6:45). Small wonder then that spiritual nurture should begin with the mind.

But how can a man achieve mastery over his mind?

The Bible declares; "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9).

The answer seems obvious. If the heart is so deceitful and corrupt, simply replace it with a new one!

How?

It is written in the Scriptures; "A new heart I will give you, and a new Spirit I will put within you, and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to observe My ordinance" (Eze 36:26-27).

It is the Spirit of God who can change your heart, your whole trend of thoughts and give you a whole new attitude. Such miraculous change is called the 'renewal of the Holy Spirit' (Tit 3:5).

Before Saul was anointed King of Israel, God, through the prophet Samuel said, "the Spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you....". Then it happened when he turned his back to leave Samuel, God changed his heart... (1 Sam 10:6,9).

You too can experience this remarkable change within you. You can be imbued with the Spirit of God if you pray constantly. Submit yourself to the Spirit's guidance. Conquer the lust of the flesh. Then you will enjoy the glories of a sanctified life and the promise of eternity hereafter (Rom 8:1-13; 2 Thess 2:13).

The Word of God is also helpful in achieving purity of thoughts. It is pure and perfect and it revives the soul (Ps 12:6; 18:30; 19:7,9). The ancient Psalmist said, "I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps 119:11).

Allow the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly and meditate upon it day and night (Col 3:16; Ps 1:2).

Finally, there should be a conscious effort on our part to control our thoughts, as Peter so aptly put it; "therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope solely upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:13).

2. Purity Of Speech

While it is not disputed that we should be pure in our thoughts, equally we should be guarded in our speech. Admittedly, this is extremely difficult 'for we all make many mistakes, and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also'

(Jas 3:2). The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boast of great things. Behold how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire. And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity, the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and set on fire the course of our life.

A warning from Jesus is pertinent here;

"But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned"

(Mt 12:36-37)

The Book of Revelation speaks of a hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed ones in whom 'no lie was found in their mouth' (Rev 14:15). On the other hand, those to be thrown into the Lake of Fire are liars who love and practise falsehood (Rev 21:8; 22:15).

It can never be over-emphasised that a Christian must be careful in his speech. One careless word may cost us a life-time regret!

"How then can I control my tongue?", one might ask. James confessed that every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind; but no human being can tame the tongue — a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (Jas 3:7-8).

It does not sound easy at all! Perhaps you might find the guidelines below helpful.

(a) **Be of few words** 'Silence is golden' is an old adage. It has survived and its truth remains unchanged generations after generations. The Bible reaffirms that 'when words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who retains his lips is prudent' (Prov 10:19). Elsewhere it is written; "He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent" (Prov 17:27-28).

Even King David expressed similar sentiments when he declared;

"I will guard my ways, that I might not sin with my tongue. I will bridle my mouth, so long as the wicked are in my presence"

(Ps 39:1)

"Those who seek my life lay their snares, those who seek my hurt speak of my ruin, and meditate treachery all the day long, but I am like a deaf man. I do not hear, like a dumb man who opens his mouth.

Yea, I am like a man who does not hear and in whose mouth are no rebukes"

(Ps 38:12-14)

Clearly, the first step to greater control of speech is to speak less.

(b) **Refrain from speaking evil** We mingle with others daily and often

there is a need to communicate, to speak. But in order to be blameless in our speech, we should disdain vulgar and abusive language. The Scriptures say, "What man is there who desires life, and covet many days, that he may enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit" (Ps 34:12-13). To keep your tongue from evil is to eschew vulgarities, lies, gossips, carpings, levity and licentious talks. It also includes reviling or slandering (Eph 5:3-4; 4:29; Rom 1:30; 1 Cor 6:10).

(c) **Speak edifying words.** Christians should be lavish with words of encouragement that are good for edification according to the occasion that they may impart grace to those who hear (Eph 4:29). Even our Lord spoke 'gracious words' to edify people (Lk 4:22). Words that are good for edification are words uttered in truthfulness and sincerity, words spoken with gentleness and kindness, words of gratitude and words of wisdom. (Eph 4:25, 5:4; Col 4:6; Prov 15:1-2; 31:6).

3. Purity Of Sight

Eyes are the windows of the mind through which the wonder and splendour of God's creation become real to us. Through which also we absorb the wealth of knowledge accumulated in the writings of great people. Yet, the eyes can cause people to sin. We sin as a result of seeing things that

are not supposed to be seen. That was why Jesus said, "If right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Mt 5:29). So it becomes imperative for us to keep our eyes undefiled as we tread the path of spirituality.

Purity of sight stems from keeping the eyes from gazing at evil. (cf Is 33:15) The Psalmist prays saying; "Turn my eyes from looking at vanity, and give me life in thy ways" (Ps 119:37).

What made Eve to take of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

Was it not that her eyes saw that it was good for food?

And what about Achan?

What stirred him to hoard the things that should have been destroyed?

Was it not his eyes which has caused him to sin?

Achan confessed, "When I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them" (Josh 7:21).

Job claimed; "I have made a covenant with my eyes, how then could I look upon a virgin?" (Job 31:1).

A wise step to follow!

A man likes to see things of beauty especially the beauty in woman. Often this is the cause of many a sin.

Jesus warned; "I say that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).

The ever victorious King David met his match one day when he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. (cf 2 Sam 11:2).

The Bible says; "They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin" (2 Pet 2:14).

We should instead acquaint our eyes more with the Word of God, because the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes (Ps 19:8).

4. Purity Of Actions

While our feet can carry us on the road of righteousness, they can also lead us to destruction and death. The Bible unequivocally claims that 'all men have turned aside, together they have gone wrong their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know" (Rom 3:12; 15:17). As such, Christians ought to be wary where their feet are leading them to.

To keep our feet from evil is to leave the ways of the sinners. As is written in Proverbs 4:14-15, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it and do not go on it, turn away from it and pass on".

It is unwise to patronise discotheques, night-clubs, casinos and other off-beat places of entertainment.

Solomon epitomizes the path of the righteous as the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. But the way of the wicked is like darkness. They do not know over what they stumble. (Prov 4:18)

Peter the Apostle exhorts us saying, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps" (1 Pet 2:21). Christ has gone through sufferings and pains just for you; his feet has brought him to the synagogues, the homes of the disciples; on treacherous journeys, and mission to heal the sick (Mt 4:23; 8:14-15; 10:1-9).

As followers of Christ, follow the way that our Master has trod. We cannot go wrong if we do.

As we travel on the journey, have with us the word of God which is the lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105).

He will lead us into the path of righteousness and the way of wisdom. When we walk our steps will not be hampered and if we run, we will not stumble (Prov 4:10-12).

Day by day, as we walk closer to God, he shall surely show us the way we should go for the Scriptures promise; "For a man's way are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths" (Prov 5:21).

BRIDLE OUR TONGUES

EVERYONE has a tongue. Apart from tasting food, it enables us to talk.

Some people liken the tongue to a swift sword which can be wielded to do good or to do bad.

Idle talks, gossips and rumours exist because of the unbridled tongue. Where they do exist, friendship is being torn apart, innocent hearts are being hurt, and trust and confidence are being replaced by suspicion and apprehension.

Among us, some are vexed by rumours and some are hurt by the unkind criticisms and vile abuses of others. But have we ever realized that very often we allow ourselves to gossip without considering the feelings of others?

Have we ever pondered over the people that have been hurt by our backbitings, sarcastic remarks and faulty judgement?

Uttering all kinds of evil behind the back of others is a sin which we easily commit. There is so much pleasure when we group together to talk about others and there seems so much to talk about. James therefore has this to say: "... the tongue is a fire. The tongue is a unrighteous world among our members but no

human being can tame the tongue — a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (Jas 3:6-8).

Nobody is perfect, yet it is best that we try not to hold prejudiced opinions of others, as there are many facets of truth. Therefore we ought to examine everything carefully, especially rumours. Until we understand the whole situation, we should not make rash conclusions about someone. Otherwise, if our judgement turns out to be wrong, it will not only reflect on our superficiality but will also injure the feelings of many innocent ones.

We should know when to speak and when not to speak. We should speak with care and sincerity. There should never be an ostentatious flaunting of our intelligence when we speak. If we do not speak with care, and without pretence, we might be a thorn to others. Indeed it is most contemptible to hurt others in such a way.

When Michael the archangel, contending with the Devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgement upon him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9). Take this as a guide;

neither speak contemptuously against anyone nor hold prejudiced notions of anybody.

Pray saying: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips!" (Ps 141:3). The Bible warns; "...on

the day of judgement, men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Mt 12:36-37).



UNITY, PERSEVERANCE AND PRAYERS

The Keys to Success

Unity, perseverance and prayers are important factors contributing to the success and progress of the church in every place and in every nation.

UNITY

Unity is strength. What Satan fears most is the unity and the oneness of the church. Right from the very beginning up to the present time, Satan has been hindering the progress of the divine plan and is determined to destroy the church.

The easiest way to achieve this is causing divisions in the church so that there is no agreement of opinions. He stirs up calumnies and malicious accusations which result in insoluble dissensions between groups of believers so much so that the body of Christ (the church) is divided.

But the Lord said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand" (Mt 12:25). To permit divisions in church is to fall into the evil plot of the devil. If this is not prompt-

ly realised and peace is not restored early, there may not be any remedy later. The members will soon be consumed by one another (Gal 5:15). As such we must clearly recognise Satanic plans. In all things, let every member with all lowliness and meekness with patience, forbear one another in love to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:2-3). Only in this way can there be victory over Satan and can the church have "the God of love and peace" working in her (2 Cor 13:11).

In the churches

In every church there are elders, deacons and believers. They form the family of God (Phil 1:1). In the eyes of the Heavenly Father, they are all brethren (Mt 23:8,9). God chooses elders and deacons because he wants them to be overseers and servants, to look after His household on His behalf (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 4:1,2). Hence, every member of this family should give the elders and deacons due respect and pay heed to their guidance, advices and instructions as is

written in Heb 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account." Again, it is written in 1 Peter 5:5, "Likewise, you that are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another."

Those who are younger should treat the elderly among the men as they would treat their fathers and to treat the elderly among the women as they would treat their mothers (1 Tim 1:1,2; Phil 2:22). In return, those who are elderly should similarly treat the younger as they would treat their own sons and daughters. They should have parental love in guiding and nurturing them with the hope that these younger ones can soon become useful vessels of God, reliable successors and faithful stewards. If this "family love" can exist in the church, differences in opinions or other unpleasant happenings will eventually succumb to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation amongst the brethren because the love of God prevails in the church. Forbearance of one another, peace, unity and service to the Lord with one mind will then be present (Col 3:12-15).

Among the churches

During the days of Moses, when the Israelites were journeying in the wilderness, the twelve tribes encamped facing the tent

of meeting. On the east side were encamped the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. On the south side were encamped the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad. On the west side were encamped the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin. On the north side were encamped the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphthali. Only the tribe of the Levites were encamped at the centre surrounded by the rest. All of them faced the tent of meeting having it as a centre point and were encamped at places allotted to them. When they broke camp to start on their march, they also moved off together in order according to prior arrangements (Num 2). Evidently, they had an organisation with a coordinating centre. They were also orderly and were not in confusion.

The Old Testament is the foreshadow of the New Testament. The incident above portrays the present day church in the New Testament. Not only should there be unity in the churches, there should also be coordination among the various churches. In the church, there should also be a centre. The churches in the Apostolic days were in close contact with one another (Col 4:15,16) with Jerusalem as their headquarters. When Paul was in Antioch and had differences in opinion over the question of circumcision with some brethren, the church brought the matter to Jerusalem

to be decided among the apostles and the elders (Acts 15:1,2). They obeyed the decisions of the apostles who were guided by the Holy Spirit. All the churches also practised and followed the decisions of the apostles. The faith of the believers were edified and their number increased from day to day (Acts 15:22-31; 16:4,5).

The church at that time was just like the twelve tribes of Israel which encamped facing the tent of meeting. Presently, in every nation there is a General Assembly to coordinate all the True Jesus Churches in that particular nation. This type of organisation promotes the training of workers, the uniformity of teachings, the exchange of evangelistic materials, the appointment of caretakers of churches, the propagation of the Gospel, and also the tackling of difficulties in the church. Hence, it is necessary for every church to support and abide by the decisions of the General Assembly while the General Assembly in each nation should support and respect the decisions of the International Assembly. Of Christ, the Bible records, "Not a bone (inner part) of Him shall be broken" (Jn 19:33-36). His garments (outer part) were also not torn (Jn 19:23,24). In the same way, our unity should not just be within our hearts which is not visible but should also include unity in organisation, which can be seen. If churches in every nation can be united,

then all the churches in the world can be of one body. In this way, through the concerted effort of all the churches, the commission placed upon us in the last days by our Lord can soon be accomplished.

PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance is an important factor which contributes to success. Harmony between the government and the people may ensure peace and political stability in a country but there is always the danger that the people may soon become languid; slacking in their responsibilities and insensitive towards the crying need for progress. Consequently, the country will be paralysed and can easily be overcome by the enemy.

When Deborah was judging Israel, they were victorious in battle over Sisera, the general of the army of Jabin, the king of Canaan. Besides receiving the grace of the Lord, the victory could be attributed to the sacrifice, and efforts of the various tribes. Hence, Deborah sang a song, "Among the clans of Reuben, there were great searchings of hearts.... Zebulun is a people that jeopardised their lives to the death; Naphtali too, on the heights of the field" (Judg 5:15, 16,18).

David also had many brave men who gave him strong support. (1 Chron 11:10). Had there not been this great sacrifice from

these mighty men of valour, there would not have existed the powerful kingdom of King David.

Today, if we wish to spread the gospel of salvation of our Lord Jesus and to enlarge His spiritual kingdom, it is all the more essential for every believer to become the soldier of Christ and be ready to persevere in the work for him.

Of the Leaders

The preachers, elders and deacons are the leaders of the flock and also the pillars of the church. Whether or not they are sincere or faithful to the Lord, has great influence on the fervency of the whole flock and the progress of the church.

When Moses grew up, he no longer wanted to be reckoned as the son of the Egyptian princess and was not willing to enjoy the pleasures of sins. Neither did he long for the wealth in Egypt but instead chose to suffer with the chosen people of God. For the sake of the Lord, he was abused and beaten. God, however, performed the great task of saving His chosen people through Moses (Heb 11:23-27). The factors which contribute towards Moses' great achievements were his readiness to sacrifice his status, pleasures and wealth for the Lord's sake; and his willingness to endure sufferings and dangers for the Lord and His people.

The workers today should possess such an attitude. They must

be ready to sacrifice themselves even though they may have high status. He must not be desirous of fame, nor seek enjoyment, nor be afraid of poverty, of toil or persecutions. Instead, he should be diligent, faithful and be able to trust the Lord wholeheartedly. He has to strive to the utmost by using the best methods to proclaim the gospel and to feed the flock of Christ. If every servant in every place has this kind of attitude, the Lord will work through him to accomplish the last day mission of the Church. (cf Ps 126:5,6).

Of the Believers

The work of God is not only confined to the elders or the deacons but all the people of God (1 Pet 2:9). Paul said, "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:7,8). We are bought with the precious blood of our Lord and He has been sustaining our life ever since. Hence, should we not live for Christ?

We should study for the Lord, earn for the Lord, marry for the Lord, have children for the Lord, and in everything, we do for the Lord!

Although we may not be able to offer ourselves fulltime to work for the Lord, the least we can do is to offer as much as we can to God. We should also do our best to find time to help in the work of

the church so that we can be useful instruments of the church.

In the olden days, the people of God composed this Psalm, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!" (Ps 137:5,6). They swore never to forget Jerusalem but to love Jerusalem above anything else. If for the present times, the preachers, elders, deacons and believers have the same determination never to neglect the church as the people in the olden days; and to love the church above anything else, the Lord will surely accept their sacrifices and grant their petitions that the borders of the heavenly Jerusalem may be widened.

PRAYERS

Unity and perseverance are things within the reach of man. However, success in divine work is never possible without blessings and help from above.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts (Zech 4:6)

During the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites, led by Moses came to Rephidim where they encountered resistance from the Amalekites. The Israelites' victory was not due to the might of Joshua or his men, but it came as a result of the prayers of Moses (Ex 17:8-13).

Now Satan realises that he has not too much time left so he plots to destroy and hinder the work of God. If it were not for the fact that God opens the heart of men to the truth or that He causes wonders and miracles to happen or that He gives men the Holy Spirit, mere preaching would not have led anyone to Christ. So we should pray to God to work through us. We have to pray to our Lord:

(1) to choose more workers to perform the work (Mt 9:37,38).

(2) to add to the ability of our preachers (Eph 6:19).

(3) that the door for preaching the word of God in every nation may be opened (Col 4:3,4).

(4) to add to the number worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom (Is 26:15).

(5) to manifest more in wonders and miracles (Acts 4:29-31).

(6) to motivate the believers and to stir up their fervency (2 Tim 1:6,7).

(7) to help the believers to be sanctified (1 Thess 5:23).

(8) to grant peace that the word of God may be proclaimed throughout the world (Jer 29:7).

The great work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the result of the united and earnest prayers of the apostles and the believers (Acts 1:14; 2:1-47).

Hence, for the progress of the church, it is necessary to have unity in the church, coupled with perseverance and prayers.

THE WORK WHICH THE YOUTHS CAN DO FOR THE CHURCH

The Mission Of The Church

Before we are able to know exactly the type of the work to be undertaken by the youths in the church, we must first understand the mission of the church. The mission of the church falls into two categories:

1. To go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15).
2. To tend the Lord's flock of sheep (Jn 21:15-17).

Youths Are Successors

Youths are the successors to the pioneering members of the church. Every youth should regard the preaching of the Gospel and the establishing of the church as his own duty, and work hard at it. As such, they should study the Bible to acquaint themselves with the doctrinal truth at an early age (2 Tim 3:14-17; Lk 2:46-49). They should be good assistants to the elders, the

deacons and the preachers and to learn from them the various kinds of work (Ex 33:11; Mk 5:36-43). They should also nurture themselves spiritually, setting a good example to the believers, in faith, in purity, in humility, in love and in all things such that they may become worthy successors. (1 Tim 4:12; 2 Tim 2:21).

The Things To Do Now

Before assigning important tasks to the youths, there are many important things the church has to do. The church has to have an efficient and good system of religious education for the children and the youths. The rise or the fall of the church is much dependent upon the success or failure of the religious education.

The organisation of the youth group should be enlarged. Below are a few suggested groups the youths should form.

1. Varsity or School Groups

2. National Service Groups
3. Overseas Groups
4. Literature Groups
5. Church Working Groups

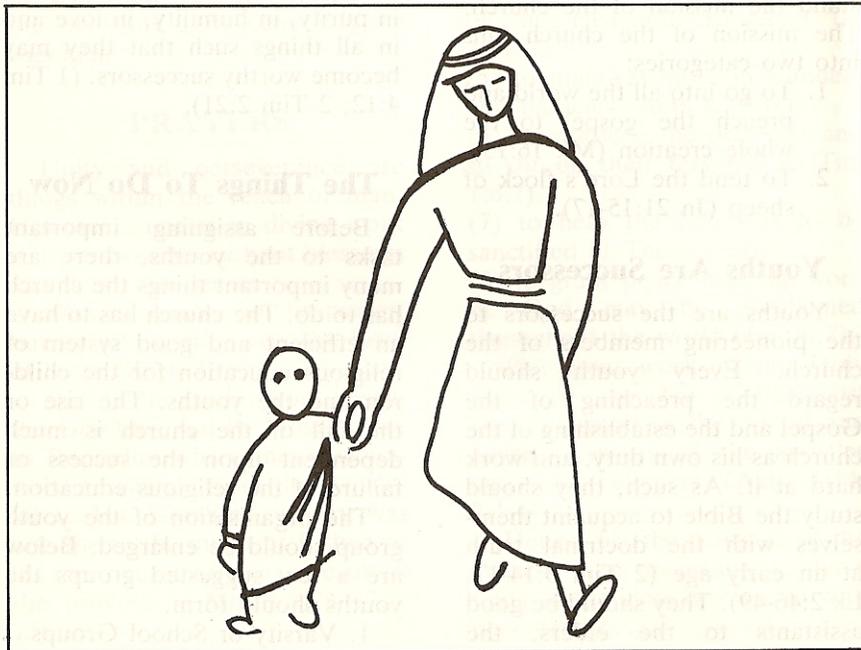
Understand Your Position

The olive tree, the fig tree and the vine, each understands why God has created it (Judg 9:8-13). We, who are chosen by God must all the more understand our duties in the church. In order to accomplish the two great missions of the church, there must be a dynamic workforce, finance and the most important the power

of the Holy Spirit.

When Moses grew up, he understood that God wanted to make use of him. So he was willing to forgo the status of a prince, the wealth of Egypt, the alluring pleasures in the palace and offer himself to the Lord in order to accomplish the great task of saving God's own people (Heb 11:24-26). It is time you start to share the workload of the church. Discover what God wants of you.

But first, are you willing to submit completely to His plan for you? May He uncover your latent talents.



MAY GOD USE HIM

The Aspiration Of A Theology Student's Wife

The Lord has blessed me with His abundant grace and I thank Him in my every prayer. I am moved by the Holy Spirit to share with you this experience of mine.

Before my marriage, I had a burning desire to be a student of the Theological College of the True Jesus Church with the hope that one day I may be sent by the Lord to all parts of the world to preach the gospel; to live every-day for Christ and to leave all the worldly cares behind. How wonderful it would be to live for the Lord only!

God demands my whole self but wretched as I am, I still crave for material things. God did not want a half-hearted worker. Anyway I convinced myself that I can work for the Lord without being a full-time evangelist.

Eventually my faith began to wane and I no longer had the desire to dedicate my whole life to Him. But God in all His greatness had a better plan for me. Strangely, instead of I going to the Theological College, He

called my husband to be His worker.

After one and a half years of marriage, when my daughter, Hsiao-En was only seven months old, my husband heard the call of God. He realized at that moment that he must leave everything behind and whole heartedly work for the Lord: to tend His flock.

Our problems then were our parents, who were unbelievers, our little daughter and our financial standing. But God was calling. Could we ignore His call?

After praying day and night unceasingly, the Holy Spirit not only moved my husband to surrender himself to the Lord, I too felt that there was a strong force stirring me also.

I knew that all things belong to God and I should not doubt His calling. In fact we were so thankful that He had chosen my husband to be His servant. Abraham through faith offered his only son to God willingly. Our heavenly Father also gave His only begotten Son to die for the world. Are they not good examples for us to follow?

If I do not allow the one I love to serve the Lord how could I

claim that I love God? Paul regarded all things as refuse for God's sake. How blessed am I to have Hsiao-En with me!

God will surely not burden me unnecessarily. He only wants to refine me as pure gold. I therefore accepted what God had planned for me with joy.

I was greatly comforted during my prayers. Though there may be obstacles in our way, we strongly believe that God would open up a way for us. We ought to be courageous enough to step into the 'River Jordan' and then the dry land would instantly appear. Then the Lord would lead us to the dry shore. Thanks to the Lord, my husband was accepted into the College.

When the news came to our parents, they objected strongly and used all sorts of ways to dissuade my husband from entering the College. But we faced this opposition bravely. We know whom we have believed and trust that He will keep us unto the Last Day.

The College had started its term but my husband's resignation from his teaching post has not yet been approved. A month later the school authorities informed him that they would not accept his resignation but instead they suspended him. That was a shock to me. I was angry but he was surprisingly calm. He even comforted me saying, "While we are treading on the path of heaven, we should not be con-

cerned with vainglory, social status, money and worldly gains".

I was moved by those words.

The difficult days passed swiftly, we were never in want. Though our family income reduced considerably after he had left his teaching career, our days passed without a hitch. He was able to concentrate on his studies. We considered ourselves blessed.

In retrospection, I find that God has a plan for everyone. Humans have their weaknesses and I am no exception. I often fell into the devious traps of Satan whenever I was alone and when I faced my relatives who are unbelievers.

Now, when I encounter such situations, I've learned to put my trust in God and seek His guidance.

Furthermore, I was greatly encouraged by my husband and also the many church members who were so thoughtful. I was thus able to overcome many difficulties and win many spiritual battles. This helped to strengthen my faith.

We are grateful to God for His protection and loving care. One semester has passed smoothly. I pray that my husband be endowed with wisdom, courage and faith to be a good soldier of Christ. To give him endurance when he is tried and refined as pure gold. To make him a useful vessel like the saints of old.

May God use him.

Amen.