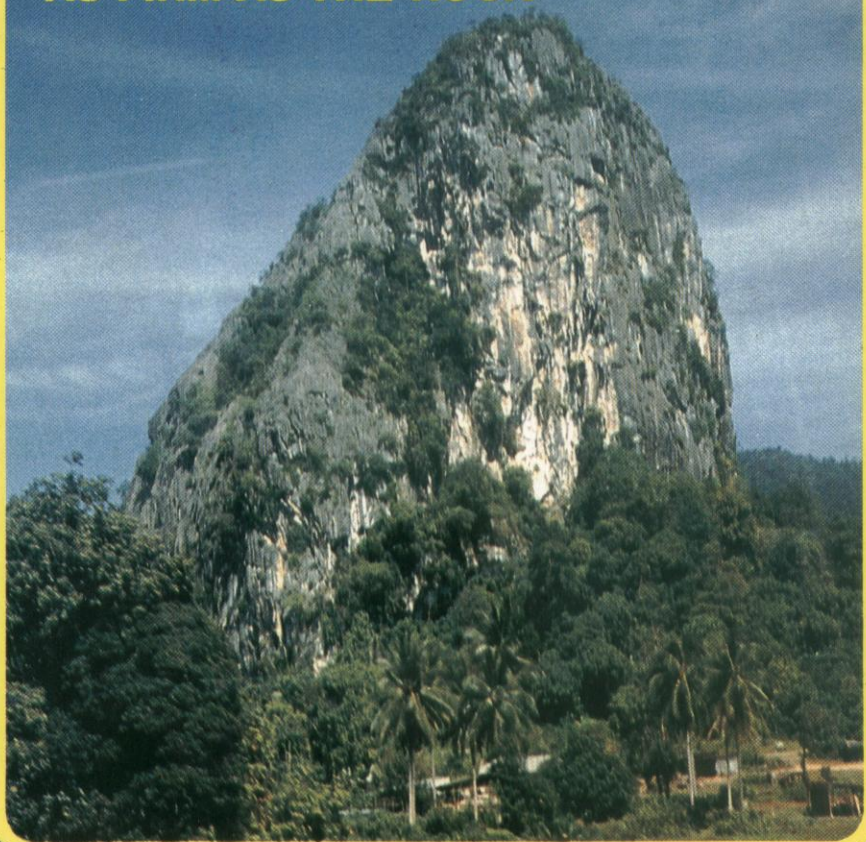


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AS FIRM AS THE ROCK



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IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL	1
Do You Hold Fast Your Integrity?	3
SPECIAL FEATURES	
Abraham In The Book Of Romans	15
The Doctrine Of Sin	20
The Requisites Of A True Prophet	24
ARTICLES	
The Call From All Directions	5
Be The Doers Of The Words	8
Blessed Are The Peacemakers	13
Be Contented In Whatever Circumstances	14
My Child, Did You Hurt Yourself?	18
Viewing Life Through Ecclesiastes	29
The Books Of Wisdom	32
PERSONAL TESTIMONIES	
The New Found Faith	9



EDITORIAL

Gibraltar lies on a narrow peninsular on the southern coast of Spain. It is often referred to as the 'Rock of Gibraltar'. A British dependency, it has been with the British since the early 1700's and has been a great military importance to her. The British have used it to keep enemy ships from entering or leaving the Mediterranean Sea. During World War II in 1942, the Allies launched an attack from Gibraltar against the German and Italian forces in North Africa.

Some wild monkeys called Barbary apes live there.

Strong and firm as the British claims, she depends largely upon the Barbary apes which live there. Tradition has it that as long as the Barbary apes live there the British will never lose the control of the Rock of Gibraltar.

How unreliable it is to depend on the existence of the apes which hold the destiny of the 'Rock'? Will the apes live there forever?

It is typical of man to rely on the creatures than on the Creator who

created him.

Many Christians today build their faith on the foundation created by man which is as unreliable as the Barbary apes in Gibraltar.

The Rock on which we build our hope is on God who is our strong fortress, the rock of salvation. His Word is our foundation in which we rest our faith on.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 11 Paul says, "For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Paul speaks of only one foundation. He does not wish to give the impression that a man can lay any foundation he chooses. There is only one foundation on which this spiritual edifice may be erected, on that is laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. Only faith that is built on this foundation can stand the trial of time.

Let us then be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Eph: 2:20)

John Chin

DO YOU STILL HOLD
FAST
YOUR INTEGRITY?

A probing question is derived from three Bible readings.

Money, reputation and the lust of the flesh can easily cause one to lose his belief. If his faith is not strong enough, he is easy prey for Satan.

The wily one will exploit any situation to cause him to fall, using what people generally like best, riches and glory, as bait for the unsuspecting Christian. Consider then these snares that Satan put to the following three men and their responses. Put yourself in their place and ask, "Could I still hold fast my integrity?"

I. Jesus

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me". Then Jesus said to him, "Begone Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'". (Mt 4:8-10)

Have we been offered bribes in our business ventures? Do we continue to pursue worldly gains instead of worshipping God? Satan may not appear to you directly as he did to Jesus, but often uses his surrogates to offer something that will take you away from God. That is not all he does. To some he offers bait, from some he takes all. Consider the second man.

II. Job (Job 1 and 2)

The Lord blessed Job, an upright, God-fearing person so that he became a wealthy man. One day Satan said to God that he wanted to test Job's uprightness and integrity in fearing God. Satan destroyed Job's property, livestock and even his ten children. Faced with this calamity, Job said,

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Not satisfied, Satan struck Job again. He afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took potsherd to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die". But he answered, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand

of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin in his lips (Job 2:7-10).

The story of Job remains one of the most remarkable insights into human integrity in the face of adversity. Job lost his property, his children, his wife and his health, but he did not lose his integrity. He retained this very fibre of the human soul and thus survived physically, mentally and spiritually (The story has a happy ending. See Job Ch. 42).

If possessions are everything to us, the loss of them will mean the loss of everything we live for, and it is easy to answer the question of Job's wife.

See what Jesus has to say;

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. **FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE WILL YOUR HEART BE ALSO.**" (Mt 6:19-21 Emphasis added)

III. Paul

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one - I am talking like a madman - with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and in hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.

(I Cor 2:23-28)

Satan knows that much glory awaits the faithful Christian at the End. He tries to turn the Christian from this objective by employing a gilded substitute in the form of temporary, immediate glory. A Christian who pursues true spiritual glory will find his integrity in working for God sorely tested when he encounters difficulties. Moreover, he knows that for the same effort, he can obtain much more from the world. The lure often proves too much.

Paul's example is worthy of emulation. In his work for God, he displayed as impeccable standard of integrity, hurdling obstacles as they came.

Can we still hold fast our integrity?

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves.

(2 Cor 13:5)

The Call From All Directions

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh in the world, proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom and ushered in the new age of spiritual truth and grace. After his glorification—the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation, He gave the Holy Spirit to establish the ministry

of the church, preparing for his Second Coming. Now that the eschatological signs have been manifested according to His predictions in Matthew 24 (Parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 17 and 21), we know that the End is approaching.

In this end-time, high technology and scientific research into outer and inner space have brought human imagination to unexplored realms and increased the comfort and luxury of people's living. This should be a joy to human civilization. But when one takes a closer look into the moral and spiritual condition of man, a disheartening fact is immediately discovered: the entire human world is at stake, threatened by ecological, moral, and spiritual crises. Ironically, most people have lost the sense of self identity and the purpose of life despite material blessing. Pollution of the mind is no less dangerous than that of air and water. Violence is even more terrifying than that in the age of Noah or Lot. In his strife for a better future, man can not solve the problem of mortality and immutability which has baffled the wise and the foolish throughout the ages.

To be delivered from the finality of death and the horrible eternal condemnation at the Second Coming

of Jesus Christ, one must come to the salvation, provided by the Calvary. This is eternal life, the Bible states, if one believes Jesus and accepts the washing of regeneration through his redemptive blood. The gracious Lord will further give the Holy Spirit to guarantee the heavenly inheritance He has prepared for His beloved children. But the words of God must be proclaimed so that people can hear and build up their faith, before they call upon His name (Rom 10:14-16). Before His imminent Second Coming, God is calling His workers to spread the good news. Meanwhile, He is calling the whole world to come to the true knowledge of His divine will and words for salvation.

Listen, the call to preach to every creature of the world. The call to accept the gospel of salvation. The call to perfect individual faith and love. Listen, the call to be worthy of the Lord and do good works in His service. And the call comes from all directions:

1. The call from above: The wicked and corrupt world is doomed, for the Lord has remembered all her sins: covetousness, malignity, deceit, idolatry, immorality. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire and brimstone for their exceeding wickedness. The sinful people in Noah's time indulged in eating, drinking, selling, and buying, until the day when the Flood came to sweep them away. The Lord's divine judgment is always preceded by the message and call to repentance delivered by His servants. Now in the end-time, the Lord is calling from above: (Mark 4:4) A person

“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins; lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” (Rev 18:4-5)

2. The call from within: The Lord Jesus has asked us to pray for the spiritual power and spiritual wisdom, for the unity in the faith and spirit. He wants every believer and servant to examine his faith, character, and commitment. The Lord wants the community of faith to shun from ignorance, strife, or worldliness. He calls His children to worship Him in spirit and truth, and to embody the splendour of love, humility, meekness, justice and compassion. Only through such self-awareness and improvement, will church ministry begin to unfold, and the Bride of Christ begin to make herself ready for the Coming of the Lord.

3. The call from without: The Lord wants us to direct our attention to the poor and the helpless, for they are spiritually harrassed and downcast. They need the faith that heals and saves. They need our sympathy and charity that helps and relieves them of distress. Recognizing where the people needed him, the apostle Paul went to Macedonia and elsewhere in Asia Minor. Many were thus saved and the Lord was glorified. The call is now addressed to us: Behold, the “field” calls for more labourers. The world outside is bidding us to sow the seeds of the words and kindness, of miracles and of love. Although we might sow

with tears in the beginning, in the end we would come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Blessed are those who respond to the call and faithfully do the will of God in preaching the gospel, for they will receive the crown of life. Blessed are those who sow the seeds of peace, love, and concord in the community of the spirit, for they will enjoy the fruit of the tree of life. Blessed are those who keep themselves pure and holy in this perverse and crooked generation, for they will see the face of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is speaking to everyone in the church: be zealous and repent (Rev 3:19).

“Hark the voice of Jesus crying:

Who will go and work today?

Fields are white and harvest waiting,

Who will bear the sheaves away?

Long ago the Master calleth,

Rich reward He offers thee,

Who will answer, gladly saying:

Here am I; send me, send me!”

Jesus is coming soon. None of us can afford being cast into the outer darkness, when He comes to receive us into His glorious kingdom.

Let us consider the lyric by James M. Black in the hymn “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder”:

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and times shall be no more;

And when morning breaks, eternal, bright, and fair;

When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,

And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

BE THE DOERS OF THE WORDS

“For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” (Rom 2:13).

A person who hears the words of God and acts upon them is considered righteous in the sight of God. Obedience is thus the primary requirement for him who has faith in Jesus Christ. James warns the believers against the failure in combining hearing with doing: If any one is only a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he deceives himself and is not able to grasp firmly the divine will and his own relation to God (Jas 1:22-24). This failure is compared, in a parable of the Lord Jesus, to a house which is not built upon the rock (Matt 7:21, 24-25). When rain and the flood come, the ill-constructed house collapses.

God does not justify a Christian who merely uses his faculty of hearing. Instead God expects him to build up his faith by practice. A practical faith will produce tangible experience in the Lord and His wonderful words of life. It will thus motivate him to love the Lord and to improve his spiritual level. If one stops at the stage of hearing and does not show action, his faith is like the seed which falls upon the pathway (Mark 4:4). A person may hear countless sermons, but never benefit from them. The reason is: he

does not express the word of God into action. This also underlines the failure of the chosen people in the Old Testament. They heard the voice of God but scarcely lived up to the divine demands. The author of the Book of Hebrews states: the message of God did not meet with faith in the hearers (Heb 4:2). The Lord manifested His majestic power and glory at Mount Sinai in declaring the Ten Commandments. The law of God repeatedly reminded them of their exclusive allegiance to Him, for He is the Saviour who had delivered them out of the Egyptian bondage and guided them to the promised land. Unfortunately, most of the Israelites perished in the wilderness because of unbelief. Taking this historical lesson, one must emphasize the integration of hearing and action. James has rightly stated that a faith is dead without works. Incidentally, the works here should not be taken as legal observance in the rabbinic sense; instead, the works refer to the fruit or deed attuned to the divine will and words.

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas 2:21, 24), and so by both hearing and doing one is justified in the presence of God.

THE NEW FOUND FAITH

by:

THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH
Mansilingan, Bacolod City 6001
Negros Occidental Philippines

It is a great joy and privilege to be on the Lord Jesus' side. This newly found faith longs to be always in the Saviour's love. The group of believers, who are newly born of water and of the Spirit will also always depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They thank the Lord for His goodness in sending the missionaries from Singapore to open their minds in the true teaching. Trying every spirit to test whether they are of God, (1 John 4:1), this group went from church to church, doctrines to doctrines, beliefs to beliefs, until they found the True Jesus Church which teaches them all the truth. They found the true Spirit of God. To have the Spirit of the Lord means—liberty! (2 Cor. 3:17). They were looking for a true teaching from a true doctrine in a True Church of God!

It was on May 12 1980, when Brother Ernesto L. Torres, a fresh graduate of the United Pentecostal Church Bible College, Manila, Philippines, returned home with his wife, Maria Theresa. He was installed as a Pastor of the United Pentecostal Church in Mansilingan, Bacolod City, with a small congregation. From that time, this young Pastor took care of the flock and tried his best to feed them with the fresh spiritual milk,

that is the Word of God taken from the Holy Bible.

Six months had passed from Brother Torres' installation, when he remembered that he had brought with him a bundle of pamphlets, the *Words of Life*, taken from a carton in a room at their Bible School Building. He read those pamphlets thoroughly. He was blessed by these writings after reading and pondered why those pamphlets were not distributed in the Bible College in his first year term for it would have been a great help to their study. Instead it was purposely left behind in a corner, unread. While planning to go home to his hometown, Bacolod City in the central part of the Philippines, he looked for pamphlets, tracts and other books to be brought home. He did not mind where those pamphlets were published or what denomination it belonged to as long as it truly spoke the word of God. Even though he knew that the pamphlets were from the True Jesus Church and not from the United Pentecostal Church, he enjoyed distributing the pamphlets to all his members in Mansilingan. He even gave one, the volume two of the *Words of Life*, to his Presbyter. Brother Torres really appreciated the contents of these writings and in sharing them with his

co-pastors in the same organisation, he ran out of copies for distribution. He then wrote to the True Jesus Church English Literature Centre in Lorong H, Telok Kurau, Singapore, asking for some other writings and for more copies of the *Words of Life*. Deacon John Chin replied to his letter, sending him more literature and copies of the *Words of Life*.

Brother Torres did not stop contacting the True Jesus Church. He wrote another letter to Deacon John Chin asking for more information about the functions of their Church in Singapore. He asked them if they had already spread the Truth to the Philippines. This was the last letter he sent to Deacon John Chin before he plunged into a busy schedule of United Pentecostal Church Conferences and meetings. But still, his last letter was kindly and lovingly replied and more literature, including the *Christian's Basic Faith* was sent. Brother Torres accepted all that were written in this pamphlet except the doctrine of Infant Baptism. He was not convinced on this subject. He could not accept that infants were qualified for baptism for he felt that infants could not repent nor could they commit sin. Consequently, he stopped writing and did not have anymore communication with Deacon John Chin.

There was another man, touched by God, named Brother Martin B. Balaston of Mansilingan. He was a previous Pastor of the Bible Apostolic Church. He had been praying for the past ten years that a True Church would come, to teach a True Doctrine of Christ. He was guided to know about

the True Jesus Church through Sister Rosita Arellano, a previous member of the U.P.C. under Brother Torres in Mansilingan who showed him a copy of the *Words of Life, volume 2*. He was then given a copy of the *Christian's Basic Faith* and a reply slip attached to the *Words of Life* distributed by Brother Ernesto Torres to Brother Victor Escobar, the present Pastor of the Mansilingan United Pentecostal Church (for Brother Torres was transferred to Talisay, Negros Occidental, 13 kilometers away from Mansilingan).

After knowing the truth of the True Jesus Church through the pamphlets, Brother Martin Balaston wrote to Deacon John Chin for more copies. He received a reply from the latter. Brother Balaston, now being convinced of this Truth of the True Jesus Church through the writings, sent another letter to Deacon John Chin asking him to visit the Philippines for he was now ready to be baptised in the right mode of baptism. He wanted to keep the Sabbath by grace. He longed to please the Lord with all of his heart, with all of his life. He had always wanted to follow all the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible. He told his wife that if the missionaries from Singapore would come he would be ready and would sincerely be a true Christian.

Deacon John Chin wrote to Brother Balaston to inform the latter that he would visit the Philippines sometime in April or May, the year of 1983. He requested Brother Balaston to contact Brother Torres in Talisay to let him know that he would be

coming. But the Lord did not permit Deacon John Chin to come on the proposed date until Sister Edilla A. Solis, the mother-in-law of Brother Torres, who was previously a Sunday School Teacher of the United Pentecostal Church, had come to a decision to write to the True Jesus Church extending another invitation. Sister Solis met Brother Balaston with a group of ex-Pentecostals, suggesting that she with Brother Balaston will write again to Deacon John Chin. She further suggested that they fast and pray for 3 consecutive Sabbaths before sending their letter to Singapore. Brother Balaston was so happy to have the group every Sabbath at his house for prayer and fasting. Their readiness and eagerness to be baptised was the reason why the group urged in their letter that Deacon Chin come if it be the will and grace of the Lord Jesus.

After the three Sabbaths passed, the letter was sent. The group hoped for a response. Three days after the letter was mailed, the United Pentecostal Church Presbyter visited Sister Solis and the group, in an attempt to convince them to have a Sunday Service at Sister Solis' house to be pastored by her. With a sincere heart, Sister Solis told the Presbyter that they were now waiting for the response of the True Jesus Church to their invitation to come to the Philippines. She also told the Presbyter that the group was willing to become members of the True Jesus Church. "It would be so nice to become a real Christian, keeping the Sabbath holy unto the Lord," Sister Solis added.

The group received the letter from Deacon John Chin stating that he would be coming with Evangelist Chin Mun Loong on June 21. It was God's grace that the letter was received in time by the group. Brother Balaston immediately contacted Brother Torres in Talisay, informing him that Deacon John Chin and Evangelist Chin Mun Loong would arrive that day at 6.50pm. So together with Sister Solis, Sister Rosita, the two went to the airport to meet the two missionaries. But while waiting, the four realised the problem of how to distinguish the two missionaries. They didn't have any pictures of them. But Brother Balaston had the *Christian's Basic Faith* pamphlet with him and what he did was to hold it up with his right hand in the hope that the missionaries would catch sight of it. He was right for when the two missionaries arrived, they were looking for someone to meet them and recognised Brother Balaston by the copy of the Church's publications held up by him.

The two missionaries were lovingly accommodated by Brother Balaston and his wife, at their house. The missionaries were so humble that they accepted the invitation offered by a poor Brother Balaston. The group was very happy to have the servants of God from Singapore. After a few hours of conversation with Brother Torres, the two were left to rest after eating their supper. While on their way home from Brother Balaston's house, Brother Torres was so sad to exclaim that he could not really accept the Infant Baptism teaching. Sister Solis, his mother-in-law, responded

kindly and advised him to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The first Bible Study on the following day was held at Sister Solis' residence. The discussion was very inspiring as it was taken from the Holy Bible. The vernacular translation was conducted by Brother Torres. The next meeting was again held at Sister Solis' house with Brother Balaston as the interpreter, for Brother Torres failed to come.

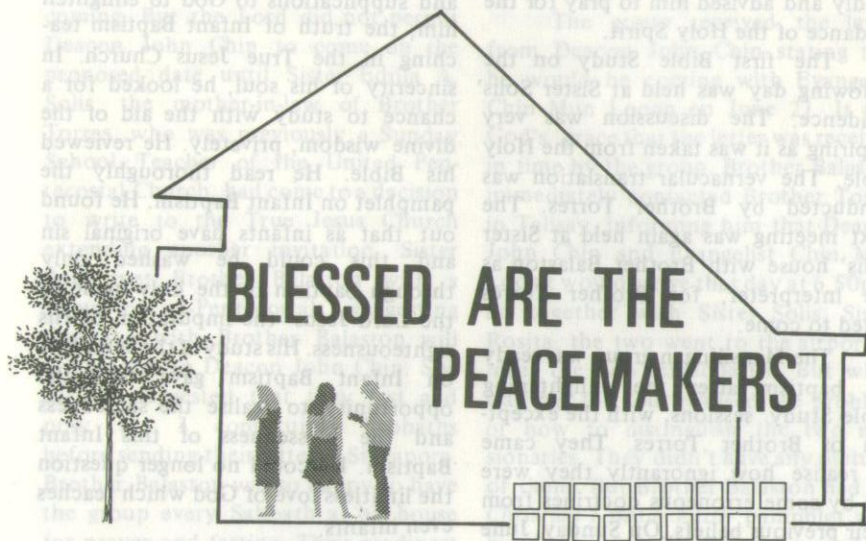
The Mansilingan group was ready for baptism after the enlightening Bible Study sessions, with the exception of Brother Torres. They came to realise how ignorantly they were led by some erroneous doctrines from their previous beliefs. On Sunday, June 26 1983, 26 souls were baptised in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ at the river of Caliban, Murcia, Negros Occidental, 15 kilometers away from Mansilingan.

The Lord always has His ways to make all things work out together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). He wants His Church to be happy through always following His will and guidance. Self is to be crucified, not now and then, but daily. The physical, mental, and spiritual must be subordinate to the will of God. The glory of God, the perfection of Christian character, is to be the aim, the purpose, of this new found faith.

The love of the Lord Jesus which passes knowledge is a wonderful reality that Brother Torres cannot deny. Pondering deeply on the goodness of the Lord he became very concerned for his salvation as well as that of his family. He realised, through prayers

and supplications to God to enlighten him, the truth of Infant Baptism teaching in the True Jesus Church. In sincerity of his soul, he looked for a chance to study with the aid of the divine wisdom, privately. He reviewed his Bible. He read thoroughly the pamphlet on Infant Baptism. He found out that as infants have original sin and this could be washed only through baptism in the holy name of the Lord Jesus—the imputation of His righteousness. His study of the pamphlet on Infant Baptism gave him the opportunity to realise the sacredness and the blessedness of this Infant Baptism. He could no longer question the limitless love of God which reaches even infants.

Brother Torres has now repented. He has no way to reason against this teaching. The Lord Jesus' baptism was an example done out of obedience to fulfill all righteousness required by God. Who was he then to question God? Why should he not follow this example? This young Pastor was sincere in serving the Lord and did not want to be easily convinced without a rigorous study on the matter. And as a logical consequence of a sincere study of the Truth, his doubts were eradicated and no obstacle remained to bar his way. He was baptised with his family, in the True Jesus Church, after leaving his previous Church, and is now very happy serving the Lord with the group. Their new found faith has made them children of the True God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ! This is the wonderful witness of the Lord's compassionate love for the True Jesus Church in the Philippines.



**Blessed are the peacemakers;
For they shall be called the sons of God.**
(Mt 5:9)

Our Lord Jesus stresses the importance of making peace because He Himself is the God of Peace, the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). He brought to the world the gospel of salvation, the gospel that makes peace between God and men. Jesus came and preached peace to them that were "far off", and peace to them that were "near" (Eph 2:17).

The Lord Jesus wished His disciples to imitate Him, so in the sermon on the Mount He taught His disciples to make peace. As peacemakers, they could preach the gospel to those separated from God, seek harmony with all men (Heb 12:14) and settle disputes among the brethren. Recognizing that Satan works to destroy peace everywhere, we the good soldiers of Jesus Christ must work to maintain peace between God and our fellow men. The Lord blesses those who make peace, and make them the children of God, by giving the Holy Spirit to them. Moreover, the person who counsels peace will receive joy (Prov 12:20) because his efforts have helped to mend a broken relationship and to restore trust and friendship.

A peacemaker is kind, humble, meek and compassionate. Colossians 4:6 states, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how ye ought to answer each one". A peacemaker never uses harsh words as they stir up strife.

Brethren, let us seek to emulate the Lord Jesus in sowing the Gospel of peace, and in return we will receive blessings and obtain a rich reward as sons of the Most High God.

Be Contented In Whatever Circumstances



Paul in his letter to the Philippians said, **Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned in whatever state I am, therein to be content. (Phil 4:11)**

his most beautiful picture!

Greed is a source of distress. If one is greedy, he will not be happy no matter how much he has. On the other hand, a person may be poor, but if he is content, he will have inner peace. Contentment is a source of happiness.

As this artist, we often travel far and wide in search of happiness and fulfilment, but do not realise that the happiness we pursue after is to be found in ourselves. Contentment brings out happiness and fulfilment.

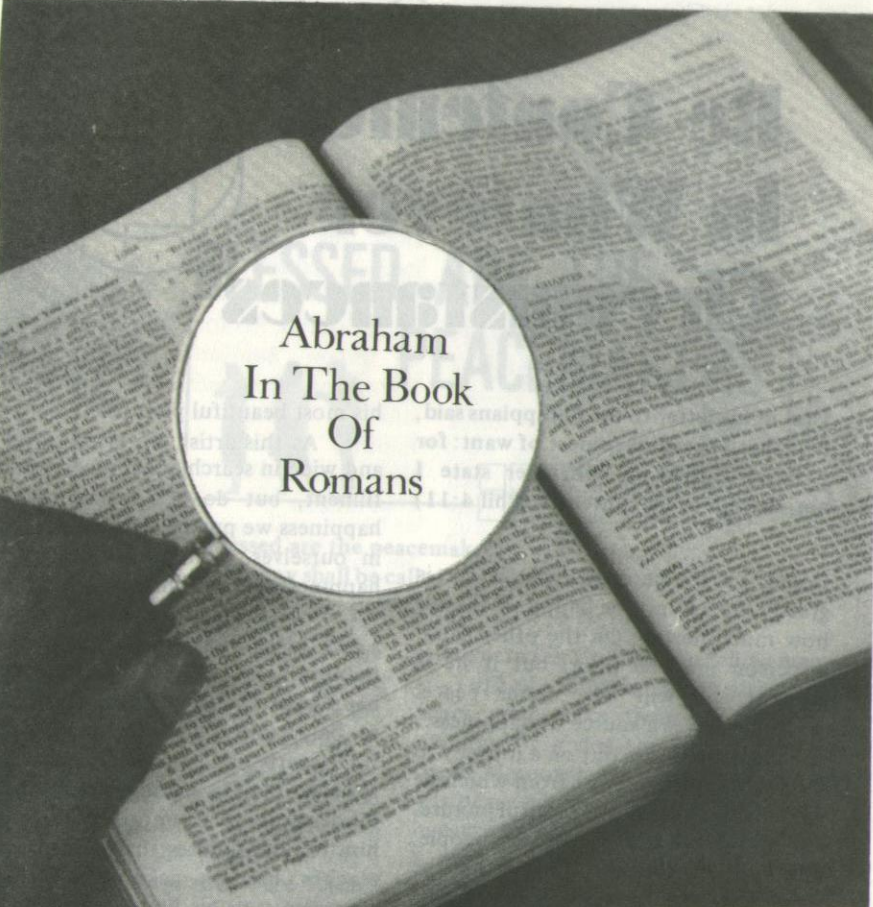
An artist sets out on a journey to find an exquisite object from which he would paint the most beautiful picture. On his journey he met three people. The first, a preacher, told him that the most beautiful thing was belief; the second, a soldier, told him that the most beautiful thing was peace; the third, a young maiden, told him that the most beautiful thing was love.

Contentment in no way suggests a lack of ambition in life, but rather a thankfulness to God resulting in happiness. One who is content is able to be thankful for wealth as well as for poverty, and for health as well as for sickness. His contentment does not hinder a desire to improve, but braces him for the failures that may occur. It teaches him to acknowledge God's sovereignty in his life. He understands contentment to mean "wholly at ease under God's providence". This is what Paul means when he says,

He was confused as to what was truly the most beautiful thing in life, and returned home from his long journey with a heavy heart. To his amazement, he discovered that belief, peace and love existed in his own home! So he used "Home" as his theme to draw

"I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound; in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want."

(Phil 4:12)



Abraham In The Book Of Romans

In Romans 4 the apostle Paul deals with the history of Abraham and uses Genesis 15:6 to support the fact that a man is accounted righteous apart from the works of the law of God defined as the Mosaic covenant and the rabbinic tradition in the Old Testament (Rom 3:28; 4:1-8).

It is here that the main theme of Abraham's faith and Paul's account of salvation history really begins. To appreciate the theological implications of Christian faith in terms of grace and human obedience it is fitting for us to examine the importance of the figure of Abraham in Romans.

1. Abraham is the father of Israel. God called him forth among the nations (Gen 12) made his covenant, attaching circumcision as its sign for all his descendants (Gen 15:17). This tradition was continued in the Primitive Christianity as evidenced in the Gospels and Acts. The earliest Christians too, claimed to be Abraham's sons and heirs of the promise made to him. The God whom they confessed was the "God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" (Mk 12:26), just as Jesus the Messiah was called Abraham's son (Matt 1:1f, Gal 3:16).

2. Abraham is the prototype of true believers. His behaviour shows Jew and Christian alike what was meant by faith. In Genesis, Abraham obeyed the call of God, leaving his native land and kinsmen, and heading for an unknown destination (Gen 12): a courageous departure from an ungodly past. He had unrestricted trust in God's promise of a great posterity (Gen 15) and as a climax of his faith, he offered his son and heir Isaac at Mount Moriah. This faith God counted to him as righteousness.

3. In Romans Paul speaks of righteousness of God and of believers (1:17): the believer's righteousness is entirely subsumed in that of God. A devout person's strife for the righteousness on the basis of the works of the law is his own righteousness (Rom 10:3) and never God's (of Rom 9:30-10:4; 3:21,31). God is righteous and proves His righteousness by justifying the person who has faith (Rom 3:26). As in Galatians 3:6, Paul draws on

Genesis 15:6 in support of Abraham's faith mentioned in the sections of Romans 4:1-8, 9-12, 13-22, 23-25. Abraham did not work for the divine promise as a due but it is the gift, or grace of God. He submitted without reservation to the divine promise.

4. That God justifies the ungodly, i.e., Abraham (Rom 4:5) must have shocked Paul's contemporary devout Jews. Rabbinic traditional belief as evidenced in the Midrash on Psalm 32, Psalm 1:6, Ecclesiasticus 44:20, thinks of Abraham as a figure of tremendous spiritual stature. In Josephus' *Archaeologia* (I, 7, 1) and Philo's *De Abrahamo* 81-2, the works of the first century historian and theologian, Abraham did, however, experience a conversion from his former life as idol worshipper or astrologist. With the proof-text of Psalm 32, Paul thought of Abraham as a sinner because he was still a Gentile when God justified him for his faith. As a justified sinner, Abraham represents all the Gentiles, or more exactly, the prototype of believing Christians, sinners justified by faith.

5. Paul's doctrine of justification is in direct confrontation with the Jewish covenant, symbolized by circumcision. Jews have taken pride in this sign of covenant as the chosen people (Rom 3:27; 4:2). However, Paul argues that the institution of circumcision (Gen 17) comes after Abraham's justification by faith (Gen 15). Circumcision is, in Paul's mind, to set a seal on and to endorse the righteousness conferred on Abraham by his

faith while he was still a Gentile. Obedience and perfection (cf. Gen 17:1) precedes and is also inherent in the external sign of circumcision. Accordingly, circumcision can never be the presupposition for "righteousness."

6. The lengthy statement about Abraham's faith and God's blessing in Romans 4:17-22 has a universal dimension in Paul's theology. Abraham was called "father of many nations" (Rom 4:17; Gal 3:16) and so salvation is not to be tied to the promise made exclusively to Israel and to be found in the sphere of the Law. The promise to Israel, which is valid and has been fulfilled through Jewish Christians of the primitive church, is not abrogated and will be extended to all the children of God, members of the true community who have come to the Lord Jesus Christ through faith and baptism into His name (Gal 3:27-29; cf. Rom 4:13). The true members are one in Christ, for Jesus Christ is the one true seed of Abraham from whom the rest of the spiritual descendants, Jews and Christians, of the promise spring.

7. Abraham's faith is depicted as faith in "creatio ex nihilo" (Creating Something Out Of Nothing) and God's power of resurrection (Rom 4:17). This is a cosmic dimension in which, through His creative will and power, God commanded something from nothing, and is the master of life and human destiny. Jesus' life and ministry evidences this power which transcends the human space-time. Paul

identifies the faith of Abraham with that of true believers, faith which interprets the salvation of the individuals through belief, repentance, baptism for remission of sin, receiving the Holy Spirit, and doing the will of the heavenly Father (cf. Acts 2:38; Matt 7:21-23) as a "creatio ex nihilo". The mystery of the Gospel (Eph 3:5, 6) and the body of Christ (I Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:23; Col 1:24) are the eminent manifestations of this divine power. Typologically speaking, the offering of Isaac on Mount Moriah, an act which requires absolute obedience and complete trust in God, typifies the offering of Christ on Calvary and his resurrection by the almighty God. Paul commends Abraham for his belief in ultimate fulfilment of the divine promise in posterity. This profound lesson of "Yahweh Jireh" (God will provide Gen 22:8, 14) is invaluable to the true believers. For this reason, Paul relates the patriarchal period to the end-time Christian faith; the promise hidden in the scripture is revealed by the Gospel and actualized in every believer, who has the same access to God, because He justifies the people of faith, which involves fulfilling the righteousness of God.



My Child, Did You Hurt Yourself?

An Israeli folk-tale reads like this:

There once lived a widower with only one daughter. Though they were very poor, they lived happily together. The father loved his daughter very much, and his daughter would say, "My father is the one that I love most in the world".

One day this girl fell in love with a man. She loved him deeply and told him, "You are the one I love most in the world". The man did not believe her and told her to remove her father's heart to prove her love for him.

The girl considered this matter for a long time. One night, she took a knife and plunged it into her father's chest. She took out his heart and ran as fast as she could to offer it to her lover.

In her haste, the girl tripped and fell in the darkness. Her father's heart cried out immediately, "My child, are you hurt?" She realised that she had done wrong and began to cry bitterly. . .

I could not but marvel at the greatness and gentleness of this father's love for his daughter when I reached this part. Even when his daughter had been so unfaithful, he remained loving and caring.

How many of us today resemble this girl? "I would never plunge a knife into my father's chest and take out his heart!" you may say, but instead of making hasty statements, let us consider the case of a typical Christian and see if we fit his mold. When a man has just believed in Jesus Christ, he is elated and seeks baptism. At his baptism, he cries, "Oh, I love you, God! Oh, I love you, Jesus!" Months, then years pass. Many things begin to take the place of God in his daily life — education, career, family, money. . .

Church attendance slackens; he does not pray as often and offers very little to God; he may resort to unscrupulous means to achieve his ends. But, this is not surprising since he has lost his first love – God.

The girl in the folk-tale removed her father's heart. This is gruesome enough, but consider what the Bible says about the atrocities we commit against our Father in heaven:

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How are we robbing thee?' In your tithes and offering (Mal 3:8).

We increase His burden on Calvary's cross: Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many (Heb 9:28). Every sin that we commit has to be accounted for. When we ask God for forgiveness, our sins are ascribed to Jesus on the cross. His burden was enormous because of the many sins men have committed through the generations. Isn't it a shame, that as enlightened children of God, we add to his burden each time we sin?

Some crucify him a second time: They then commit apostasy (and therefore) they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt (Heb 6:6).

Except for the last of the above sins, God is willing to forgive us of our offenses against Him. We rarely remember that He is looking on sadly with a heart pierced by our misdeeds. He grieves when our conscience, darkened by sin, causes us to stumble and hurt ourselves spiritually. Troubles, failures and illness stalk us. Yet it is at this time that He speaks to us gently, "My child, are you hurt?" He offers to lift us up and anoint us with wine and oil. Though we often hurt deeply the heart of our heavenly Father, He still says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you." (Jeremiah 31:3)

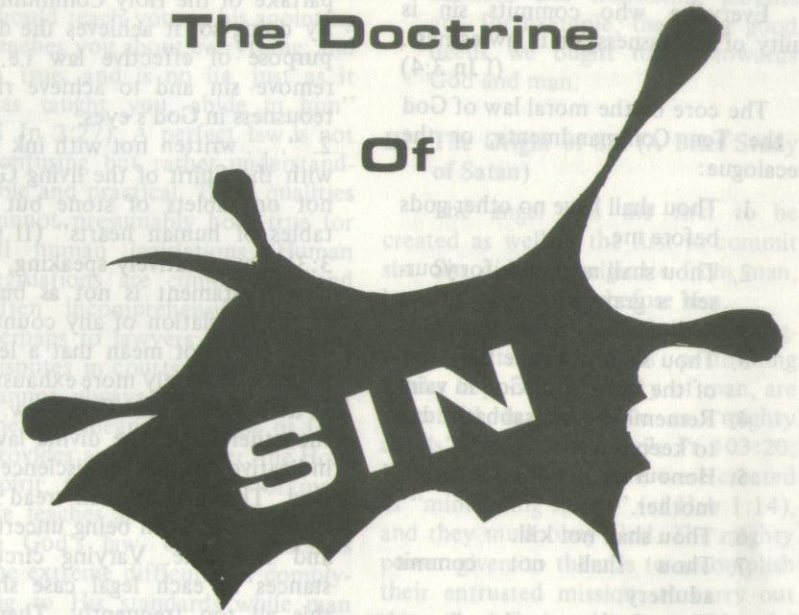
Strangely, some refuse His hand offered to them in their difficulty but those who repent and turn from their sins can find comfort in God's love.

He will not always chide; neither will he keep His anger forever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. (Psalm 103:9-10).

We end with a prayer to our God-
Oh Lord! How deep your love is. We pray that we will all be touched by your love and to love you all the more.
Oh Lord! We are not worthy to plead to you. But because of your love, you have overlooked our sins and have counted us worthy. Though we can never repay you fully, we pray that we can reciprocate your love for us, at least by not hurting you through the things we do. Help us to love you more, for evermore.
Amen.

The Doctrine

Of



PART 1

I. Sin - Differing Views of God and Man

Sin is wrongdoing.
A society's moral and ethical principles and laws reveal man's view of sin. But, they are only a collective expression of that particular society, varying from place to place and with time. People cannot even agree on what is right or wrong.

God's view of sin often differs from man's. For example, idolatry is considered a very grave sin by God

(cf Ex 20:4,5) but no sin at all in criminal law. The difference extends beyond the form of the law, for unlike man's fickle interpretations of right and wrong, God's view of sin is immutable. The law of God, established upon His eternity, omnipresence and His abiding Truth, transcends time and space; it cannot be wrong.

II. God's View of Sin

The Holy Bible is God's revelation of His will to man (cf II Tim 3:16),

from which we may obtain the correct concept of sin.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. (I Jn 3:4)

The core of the moral law of God is the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue:

1. Thou shall have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shall not make for yourself a graven image. . . thou shall not bow down to them.
3. Thou shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honour your father and your mother.
6. Thou shall not kill.
7. Thou shall not commit adultery.
8. Thou shall not steal.
9. Thou shall not bear false witness.
10. Thou shall not covet your neighbour's possessions. (Ex 20:3-17)

The Ten Commandments have existed since Moses, and continue to be binding today. Sin is the breaking of the commandments in the New Testament sense which is different from the Old Testament interpretation of the Ten Commandments in three important areas:

1. It is a spiritual law and not a literal one (cf Rom 2:29; II Cor 3:6). It takes into account God's plan of salvation for man. As such, it incorporates the commandments

of Christ for Christians to be baptised, receive footwashing and partake of the Holy Communion. By doing so, it achieves the dual purpose of effective law i.e. to remove sin and to achieve righteousness in God's eyes.

2. ". . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tables of human hearts" (II Cor 3:3). Quantitatively speaking, the New Testament is not as bulky as the legislation of any country. This does not mean that a legislation is relatively more exhaustive in its coverage than God's law. On the other hand, the divine law is indicative of the omniscience of God. The laws of man tread the thin line between being uncertain and inflexible. Varying circumstances in each legal case show this all too frequently. Then it is left to the most respected, yet highly fallible judges to interpret the law. Often, known criminals are freed while innocent men are imprisoned. The guiding principles of the law of God are written in the Bible while the details are written in the hearts of man, his conscience. This conscience is reliable if it is subject to the Spirit who wrote on it. The actions of man are thus not restricted by minute details written on paper, but free within the limits of the perfect law of the Spirit. Sin is determined by a perfect and just judge, God Himself.

3. "But the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him" (I Jn 2:27). A perfect law is not confusing but rather understandable and practical. These qualities cannot presumably hold true for all human legislations. Human legislations are cumbersome and often incomprehensible, except perhaps to lawyers. But frequent disputes in courts show that they cannot always agree as to what the law means. The law of God provides an able teacher, the Holy Spirit, God's anointing for man. He teaches as well as guides man in God's law. God understands the extreme difficulty of complying to His standards while man remains in his fallen nature. The Holy Spirit is given to the sons of God who endeavour to flee from the clutches of sin. He is God Himself, taking part in making His law feasible.

Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin (Jas 4:17)

Sin, an active transgression against God or man, is doing that which should not have been done. The neglect of duties towards God and man, the more unknown side of sin, is highlighted in the book of James. The inhibition to do evil to others does not acquit us from the sin of withholding good.

The 4th and 5th of the Ten Commandments of observing the Sabbath and honouring parents are, for example, the active good deeds we ought to do towards God and man.

III. The Origin of Sin (A Brief Study of Satan)

The angel was the first to be created as well as the first to commit sin. Sin did not originate from man, but had existed long before him.

Angels, (Greek angelos - messengers), spirits capable of performing works beyond the ability of man, are described in the Bible as "mighty angels" (cf II Thess 1:7; Ps 103:20; II Pet 2:11). The angels were created as "ministering spirits" (cf Heb 1:14), and they must obey God. The mighty power given to them is to accomplish their entrusted mission, to carry out the will of God and to praise Him (cf Ps 103:20; Lk 2:13, 14).

Corrupted by his own pride, the archangel Lucifer led a part of the angels in a futile rebellion against God. He had forgotten his duty and his endeavour to elate himself proved tragic. We are told of how he fell from grace (Ezek 28:11-17):

1. The rebellious angel was once highly honoured among the angels. He was blameless, full of wisdom, beautiful and was the anointed cherub covering the ark of God.
2. He was on the holy mountain of God, walking in the midst of the stones of fire.
3. He was blameless in his ways from the day he was created, till

unrighteousness was found in him.
4. The cause of his downfall was due to his pride; he was beautiful and his glorious splendour corrupted his wisdom.

5. In punishment, he was driven out from the mountain of God, from the midst of the stones of fire and God cast him to the ground.

6. He was given a free will to choose between right and wrong. God did not make him an unthinking ministering spirit. But unfortunately he chose to rebel against God.

The words of God spoken through prophet Isaiah tell us more about the fallen angel (Is 14:12-14):

1. Though he was honoured with the name "Day Star, son of Dawn", he was not satisfied.

2. His intention to rebel was not only expressed in his thoughts, but also put to action.

3. He refused to obey God. He mentioned no less than five times "I will do this or that".

4. His ultimate aim was to take the position of God by usurping His throne.

Sin originated from this rebellious angel, the leader of his demonic company. He is the evil one who controls the world now (I Jn 5:19). In Genesis chapter 3, this evil one is known as the serpent, and in Revelation 12:9, he is called the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the Devil and Satan.

In Hebrew Satan means "to oppose". Satan has opposed God since

the beginning (I Jn 3:8). Later, he obstructed the work of God on many occasions. The Devil (Greek diabolos - the accuser) slanders God (Gen 3:1, 4,5), and accuses man before God (cf Job 1:9, 11; 2:4, 5; Rev 12:10).

The Bible reveals the characteristics of Satan:

1. He is the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2); he is the world ruler of the present darkness (Eph 6:12; Jn 12:31).

2. The whole world is in the power of the evil one (I Jn 5:19); he has the power to bind and oppress the people (Lk 13:16; Acts 10:38; Lk 22:3; Acts 5:3).

3. He is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (I Pet 5:8).

4. He has the power of death (Heb 2:14).

5. He is capable of performing signs and wonders (II Thess 2:9). He is the deceiver of the world (Rev 12:9).

6. He can disguise himself as an angel of light (II Cor 11:14).

In attempting to lead a righteous life free from sin, we must learn to protect ourselves from the Devil. Sin comes from him, and he continues to sow its destructive seeds. We must resist him.

To be continued



the requisites of a true prophet



Rev 13:11-14).

The situation is indeed serious. When religious leaders claim God's approval by manifesting great signs and wonders, how can one be sure of their claims? God is not to be mocked. He leaves ample guidelines for those who truly seek Him. A second look at Matthew 24:24 gives reassurance: "to lead astray, if possible, even the elect". The verse implies that the elect would not be misled, even if false teachings arise to do so. Unlike the Gentiles or nominal Christians, the elect are the true Christians whose foundation of

faith is firmly established. However, the elect of God must be equipped with spiritual wisdom and knowledge. It is beneficial for everyone to know the biblical teaching about the characteristics of the true prophets:

I. A True Prophet Must Be Sent by God.

Prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah, that the Lord had not sent Hananiah, because the false prophet made the people trust in a lie (Jer 28:15). Jeremiah questioned the authority by which Hananiah prophesied. That a true prophet must be sent by God is ascertained by the history of the chosen people. Paul's declaration deserves our attention - "How can The Lord Jesus warned of the rise of false prophets who would show great signs and wonders to lead many people astray (Mt 24:11, 24). As one of the signs of the end-time, false prophets deceive many people because they would appear with great signs and wonders to pervert the truth and confuse the world (cf II Thess 2:9;

men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:15).

He who preaches without being sent is a false prophet, even he who would preach in Jesus' name. Matthew 7:21-23 indicates the true meaning of divine approval. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers'."

Many false prophets have preached heresies in Jesus's name, and beguiled the masses by telling them that they are sent by God since they use the name of Jesus. This grievous sin of falsehood brings condemnation both to themselves and their followers. Before His ascension Jesus Christ sent his disciples by breathing on them, and said to them, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:21-22). The heavenly Father had sent the Lord Jesus to preach the gospel through the Holy Spirit. In the same way the Lord Jesus sent His disciples to preach the gospel by endowing them with the Holy Spirit. This promise made by the Lord was fulfilled with the downpour of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost (cf Acts 2:1-4). Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4, 5 record that the Lord ordered the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts concerns the key role of the Holy Spirit who

empowered the apostles and guided the church ministry. To become the mouthpiece of God, a prophet must receive the Holy Spirit, and be commissioned by God Himself.

II. A True Prophet Speaks the Truth of God.

The word "prophet" means "the spokesman of God" (Mt 1:22; I Cor 14: 1, 3). We can understand then that a true prophet must speak the truth of God. What God commands him to speak, he must speak accordingly. He should not speak anything of his own (cf Jer 1:7; Num 22:38; I Kings 22:14; Jn 14:10). A true prophet should understand clearly the punishment of deviation: "If any one adds to them (the words of God), God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev 22:18, 19).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul was very firm in his warning. Even if an angel of God should preach a gospel contrary to that which they had received, then he should be cursed (Gal 1:6-9). The gospel of God today is found solely in the Holy Bible, the inspired Word of God (II Tim 3:16). Any change to the Bible is deemed heretical. No other religious literature can be considered infallible scripture.

A false prophet is not true to the Word of God, and his deviant teachings do not save but lead men away from God. Even a little change in the basic doctrines of salvation cannot be

tolerated. Just as "a little leaven leavens the whole lump", distorted or partial truth will ultimately destroy the whole truth.

The Lord Jesus said, "For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me" (Jn 12:49-50). The commission of a true prophet is to be truthful to God's words and to make them fully known.

III. Prophecies Must Be Fulfilled.

When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him. (Deut 18:22)

Every prophecy uttered by a prophet must eventually be fulfilled, and this is how a true prophet may be recognized. If any prophecy is not fulfilled or only part of it is fulfilled, then the prophet has spoken presumptuously. The congregation should not be deceived by him, "because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (II Pet 1:21). Many Christian leaders have failed in their hasty predictions, such as those of the date of the second advent of Christ.

IV. A True Prophet Must Uphold Christ.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11).

Paul often introduced himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and as one called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. True prophets are servants of God and they should always exalt Jesus as the Most High and most reverend Lord.

The Lord Jesus said, "He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood" (Jn 7:18).

The prophets in the New Testament are sent by the Lord, so they should exalt the Lord in all things. If the prophets have accomplished some marvellous task, they should not glorify themselves but say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty" (cf Lk 17:10).

The apostles Peter and Paul achieved great success in their missionary work, but neither of them dared to be worshipped by others (cf Acts 10:25-26; 14:18-15). Even the angels of God would not allow men to worship them (cf Rev 19:10; 22:8). Now one may look at any religious leader around the world and ask these questions: Does he accept and encourage the adulation of his followers? Does he preach his infallibility and perfectness?

Does he claim to be God? An affirmative answer to any of the above will throw doubts on his being a genuine prophet of God. Instead, he will be deemed a "son of perdition" described in II Thess 2:3, 4.

V. A True Prophet Acknowledges That Christ Came in the Flesh.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God; every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. (I Jn 4:1-3)

Not every spirit is the spirit of God, for there are spirits which are antichrist. The antichrist spirits worked hard during the apostolic days, bringing heresies and confusion through false prophets everywhere. In the guise of Christians, they deceived many. It was with reference to them that John advised the believers to test the spirits and not to believe them readily. The major heresies that the spirit of antichrist expounded during those days were the philosophies of the Gnostics. The Gnostics were one of the early heretic Christian sects who claimed that all matter was evil and that only the spirit was righteous. Since God was righteous, it was not possible for God to have anything to do with matter. They then deduced that Christ did not have a natural corporal existence. They also denied the truth of redemp-

tion, and for the same reason they maintained that it was not possible for the Son of God to have suffered on the cross. They taught that the earthly life of Christ was only an illusion. This is certainly contrary to the scripture which clearly states that God became man to die for our sins (cf Jn 1:1, 14; I Tim 3:16). John condemns all deviant teachings about the divinity as well as the humanity of Christ. Today some Christian sects give Jesus an inferior position to God the Father, claiming that Jesus is only a smaller god. Yet, even sadder, a major part or Christendom holds the doctrine of Trinity, assigning to God a tripartite identity and wrongly portraying God as "three different personalities in one" concept. Such teachings are particularly harmful, for they attack the very basic understanding of God. It affects the concept of salvation since in the knowledge of God is eternal life! "And this is eternal life, that they know thee; the only true God and Jesus whom thou has sent" (Jn 17:3).

A true prophet preaches that God is one, that He came to this world in the form of man as Jesus Christ, and that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same - the only God. The apparent difference in the three lies in their functions (hence the names) and not their personalities.

VI. A True Prophet Will Not Conform to the World.

False prophets belong to the world, so what they say is often to suit the prevailing social or religious ideas. For example, homosexuality, a sin condemned in the Bible, is now accepted by some circles as a normal, "enlightened" act. This twisting of the truth to suit the world is definitely NOT a characteristic of true prophetism.

However, a true prophet is aware of his cultural and social background and, to meet with the spiritual needs of his people, he would expound the Words of God according to the divine will. While remaining truthful and faithful to the divine words, he must be sympathetic and concerned to the people around him. See what Paul, a true prophet, has to say: "To the Jew I become as a Jew, in order to win Jews.

To those outside the law I become as one outside the law - not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ - that I might win those outside the law" (I Cor 9:20-21).

Because of his uncompromising fidelity to the spiritual principle, a true prophet is often hated by the world (cf. Jn 15:19). However, a true prophet is willing to suffer for what he believes in, and he will not conform to the world.

VII. A True Prophet Will Listen to the True Church.

The apostolic church belonged to God, for she had the presence of the Holy Spirit, the truth (I Tim 3:15), and signs and wonders as testimonies

(Mk 16:20; Heb 2:4). Those who acknowledged God would listen to them. People who did not acknowledge God would not hear them (I Jn 2:18-19). There is a great distinction between these two groups of people.

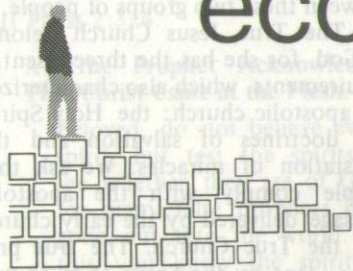
The True Jesus Church belongs to God, for she has the three essential requirements, which also characterized the apostolic church: the Holy Spirit, the doctrines of salvation and the attestation of miracles. We ask that people comply with the apostolic message delivered by the early church and the True Church. The true prophets sent by the Spirit of truth will be united with the True Church and listen to the truth (cf. Jn 10:16). As the Bible states, the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (I Cor 14:23). The teaching given by the apostle John warrants our consideration:

We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (I Jn 4:6)



Viewing Life Through

ecclesiastes



PART ONE

King Solomon, renowned for his wisdom and the splendour of his kingdom, had everything his heart desired, yet the book of Ecclesiastes he wrote is heavy with an air of emptiness. In fact, the word 'vanity' appears 32 times in the book. Solomon perceived that 'under the sun, all is vanity and a striving after wind' (1:14).

It would then seem appropriate for the book to be named the Vanity of Life. This apparent discrepancy draws closer attention to the title of the book- Ecclesiastes i.e. the Preacher, who expresses a profound truth in the main theme. Solomon as "the Preacher" of God expounds subtly that in the midst of vanity lies hope in this truth: God is willing to fill the emptiness in man's life and can create something out of nothing (Rom 4:17). He can change vanity into fulfillment.

Vanity of vanities

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. (1:2)

The preacher comments: "And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (2:10,11). Like Solomon, man toils to satisfy his needs. However, man's needs grow with his achievements. Upon securing three meals a day, and a shelter over his head, he proceeds to satisfy higher needs, the highest of which, according to Maslow's famed Hierarchy of Needs, are self-esteem and self-actualization. This is but chasing after wind, a veritable exercise in futility. The wind, if it can ever be caught, will just be 'still air' in the hand. Man's needs are similar - achievement does not bring satisfaction, it only creates needs.

Death - the grim reaper

... sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. (2:21)

All material gain a man has vanishes at his death; Death reaps what a man sows. Another may enjoy the legacy of his benefactor, but again, Death awaits him.

The temporal nature of achievements

For of the wise man as of the fool there is no ending remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool. (2:16)

This may seem a harsh statement to historians but it is pointless to argue the fact that to the world today the great men of the past are but a shadowy mist. Who remembers the deeds of the past? Many are more intent on following the events and achievements of the present. Remember, how the future generations regard us today is similar to how we today regard the past generations.

Besides Solomon, other great men of the past such as Buddha have realized this bleak truth about life and have striven to seek an answer to this vanity. Yet all have failed because God alone holds the answer. Solomon acquiesces: "I said, 'I will be wise'; but it was far from me. That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?" (6:23, 24). "(God) has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity

into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. . . Whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him" (3:11, 14).

God does not withhold the answer. In His own time, He reveals the answer. His revelation of His will, the Bible, records: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (Rom 8:20-22).

The way of emancipation begins with the understanding that the vanity of life is the result of sin. Since the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) and death is the finality of the physical aspect of life, every achievement in life becomes vanity at death.

Man must undergo three kinds of death: physical death, spiritual death and eternal death. Physical death, which is no stranger to anyone, is the cessation of vital functions; spiritual death is the state in which man is severed from God's presence (cf Eph 2:1, 2); eternal death is eternal destruction in hell (cf. II Thess 1:9).

We next need to know that Jesus Christ opened a way of eternal life for man. For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us and was raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). The grace of God is manifested and

man obtains a chance to pass from death into LIFE again, in effect to nullify the vanity that death imposes upon life!

For those who would believe in Jesus, there is a chance to be freed from the vanity of this life.

The body can be resurrected from physical death (cf. I Cor 15:22). What about spiritual death? The Bible says that spiritual life can be regained when we are born again through baptism and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Rom 6:3-11).

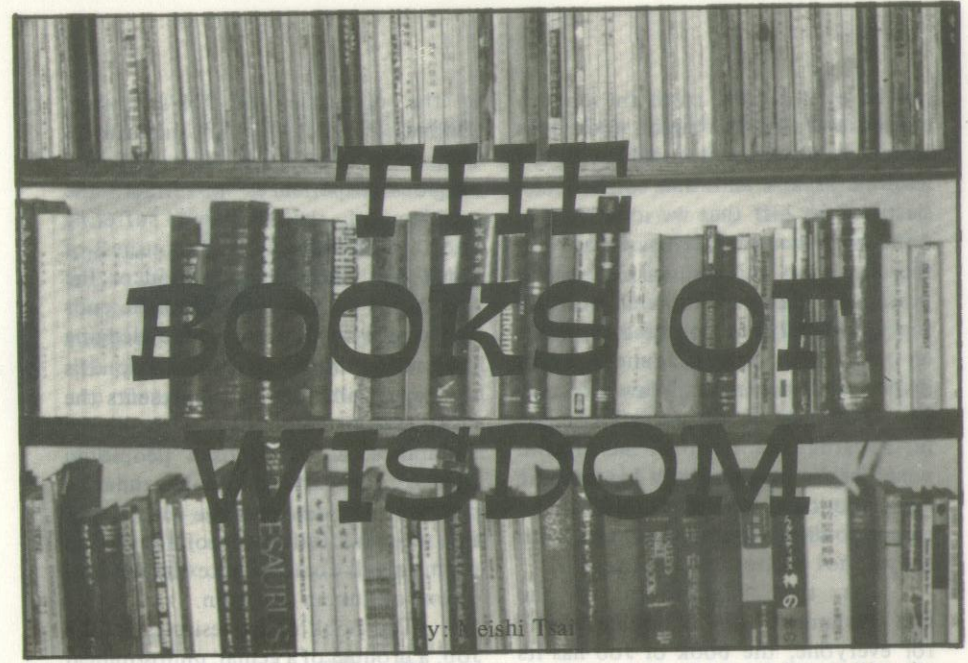
What about eternal death? Jesus has promised us eternal life i.e. escape from eternal death if we believe in Him and keep His teachings to the end (cf. Jn 3:16; Mt 24:13).

Solomon lived long before Christ. He perceived the "silver lining" of hope in God behind the "looming dark cloud" of Death. Today, God reveals that the source of that hope is Jesus Christ. God offers us an eternal life of meaning and joy in His Kingdom. A life of vanity can be transformed into a meaningful one when we live in hope of the coming eternal one and when we tell others about it.

A word from Solomon about how we should live our present life while awaiting the eternal one:

Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of men. (12:13)

To be continued



The wisdom books which make an important part in the thought of the Old Testament have the following main themes: 1) faith is a divine cosmic wisdom which rules and governs the universe with rational and immutable norms. 2) the wise man is the one who adapts himself to these norms and discovers the way in which they work, perhaps their essence; the fool or even the wicked man is the one who fails to do this and is quite unconcerned. 3) each man receives his deserts in accordance with his wisdom or his foolishness: the wise is given wisdom and through it a serene and fruitful life, while the fool and the wicked have a life full of troubles.

Comparable to the Egyptian *ma'at* (truth, justice, or world order), this divine wisdom is called *hokmah* in Hebrew and is related to the derivatives of "justice" (Hebrew *sdq*). The typical

themes in the faith of Israel, like the election of Israel, promises about the people and the land, are almost absent in Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes in the Palestinian canon and the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus in the Alexandrian collection. There are traces of influence in prophets (such as Isaiah and Amos), and the psalmists (such as Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112, 127, 128, 133), in the Canticles (Song of Songs), the Book of Tobit and perhaps even in Deuteronomy. What follows is to view wisdom from Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes as an apologetic of Israelite life.

Expressed in brief sentences which offer the reader or hearer observations on day-to-day life and practical rules for behaviour, proverbial wisdom is not completely lacking in faith: Prov 1:7 solemnly affirms that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge" (9:10; 15:33, cf Ps 111:10; Job 28:28). This statement

can be of a general truth (in modern expression, a bit of religion never does anyone any harm). It is only with the wisdom Psalms and then with Ecclesiasticus 24:23ff that we identify wisdom with the torah (Mosaic Law). In the Proverbs, it is emphasized that a perceptive man can know an order in the world; let him not be a fool, but let him act with prudence. God's justice and the natural law of compensation will do the rest. The belief in rewards for personal merit and penalties for personal guilt has become an orthodoxy. Righteousness can be equated with wisdom and evil with folly.

As the "Matterhorn of the Old Testament" and a "noble book" for everyone, the book of Job has its poetic eloquence, religio-philosophical majesty and profundity. The author of Job puts the perceptive religious convictions in the mouths of the interlocutors. He chooses as his central figure the pious Job (Ezek 14:14) and associates with Job's three friends from the East, a traditional home of wise men. In the three cycles of speeches, and wisdom poem (Ch 28), his argument develops vividly with mounting intensity until Job rests his case and God has the last word.

The author of Job does not deny providence, but criticizes the proverbialist's uncritical acceptance of their dogmatic position on personal retribution. To him, man is more complicated and God less transparent than the teachers of Proverbs and their complacent clients assumed. The orthodox teachers of the Proverbs appear

in the discourses of Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar). Instead he deals with one of the most profound religious experiences of Israel: the problem of the righteous suffering and that of theodicy (righteousness of God). Far from denying God or the fact of his dealings with men, he ends by siding with God, and acknowledging the moral order governed by His sovereign will. Job thus represents the crystallized Israelite wisdom: the heroic endurance of the chosen people in time of adversity will enable them to perceive the ironic purpose of God and the ultimate fulfilment of the divine promise will come despite the ups and downs of human situation.

The book of Ecclesiastes is, like Job, a product of a genial, philosophical spirit. The author presents himself as Qoheleth (the preacher) and with a tint of pessimism and hedonism, he views that a person knows and finds things and their principle through experience and reflection. With a benevolent attitude, Qoheleth sets out to discover what it is good for a man to do in the few days of his life. He experiments with folly and with drink, with commerce and with the arts; he considers the nature of wisdom and the ways of human society. He concludes that, when all is seen and done, everything is only "vanity and a striving after a wind" (1:14), and the best that men can do is "to be happy and enjoy themselves as ideal which resembles the ancient Greek Philosophy of golden means.

At the centre of Ecclesiastes' discussion stands a sense of the "proper

moment" (Ecc. 3:1-9). The autonomous "moment" extends from the seedtimes and harvest, cold and heat, even to such personal things as love and hate. But God has placed "eternity" in the hearts of the people for them to transcend the particular moment of human life. In 3:14 the preacher shows that God has done all the things high and low, great and small, known and unknown, that men must fear him. This is an old demand of the Old Testament piety and wisdom: the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and also is the conclusion of this book of wisdom (Ecc 12:13-14).

As a conclusion we take Psalms 73 to reflect a troubled faith which reminds one of Ecclesiastes, that does not understand why the godless can prosper while the righteous suffer. The answer can be given in the psalmist's belief in "the sanctuary of God". Only through man's committing his life in the hands of God and to the fear of God, is he able to find how the human and natural order is governed and reflects the divine order and wisdom. This is a gist of the Israelite wisdom:

My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my
heart and my portion for ever.

