

MANNA

ISSUE 69

One True Church



**The Only Church That Is Saved—True Jesus Church (I) •
The Great Physician • Grow in Tears to Reap in Joy**

“The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths.”

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One True Church

Editorial

by T. Chen

“Which church do you go to?” “True Jesus Church.” Puzzled look. “Why true? Are there any false churches out there?” Silence.

This is a scenario that many of us in the True Jesus Church (TJC) may have experienced before. It may cause uneasiness in some of us, even to utter the word “True Jesus Church” because it seems as if we were boasting about ourselves. But do we truly understand what makes a church “true” and why there is only one true church? The theme writers in this issue provide comprehensive answers to these questions.

Looking at the etymology of the Greek word “ekklesia” for church, we find that the term refers to an “assembly called out from the multitudes.” Moreover, the Bible defines the church as an assembly of people redeemed by the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins—a fact that makes the church unique. Therefore, she is not a secular but a sacred organization, precious in the eyes of God.

Since the church is a sacred institution, we need to look at her from a spiritual perspective to determine whether she is true. Spiritually seen, what makes a church true is not the size of her congregation, material wealth, power, or international standing but the biblical truth she upholds. If the church does not obey the complete word of God as given in the Scriptures, how can she claim to be a true church? Where will she lead the believers?

Moreover, in God’s eternal spiritual realm, the church already existed before the foundation of the world and will remain forever. She is the dispensation of the mystery hidden in God from the beginning of the ages until the apostolic time, when this mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets and the spiritual true church was manifested through the downpour of the Holy Spirit. When the created world perishes, the New Jerusalem, which is the spiritual church, will descend from heaven. She will be ready as a bride adorned for her husband and will be received into eternal

glory. This spiritual true church includes both ancient saints and new covenant believers, and she transcends time and space.

Paul tells us: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4-6). The true church, the only body of Christ, has only one faith. If we believe that observing the Sabbath day is part of the truth of salvation, while another Christian group does not, the latter does not share one faith with us. The true church has only one baptism. If we believe that water baptism can only be administered in the name of the Lord Jesus, while another Christian group baptizes in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, we do not have the same baptism. Therefore, the Bible distinguishes the one true church from other Christian denominations.

The Lord promised us eternal life—our ultimate hope. So, just as a patient has to follow the doctor’s instructions faithfully in order to recover, we too must be faithful to His word to be saved. We cannot pick and choose what we want to or do not want to believe in. The path to salvation has been laid out in the Bible, and in the end-time, this path is found in the True Jesus Church. If we want to obtain salvation, we have to follow this path tailored by God.

Members of the true church, which the Lord has called out and redeemed with His own blood, need to truly understand and be rooted in the doctrine of one true church. Only then, can we be firm in our faith and have courage and confidence to carry out the great commission that the Lord has entrusted to us. Let us therefore live up to Jesus’ expectation; let us witness for Him by preaching the gospel of salvation and glorify Him by living a life worthy of His calling, so that many more will be drawn to the “mountain of the LORD” and enter the one true church.

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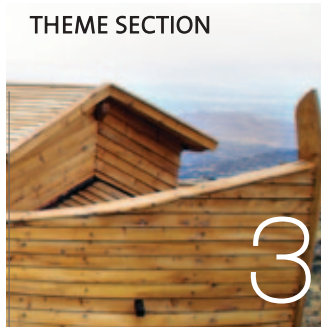
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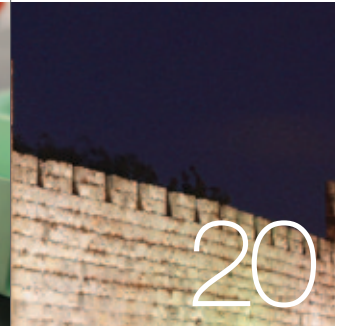
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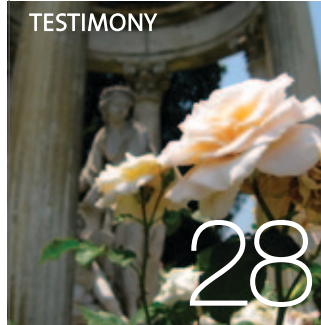
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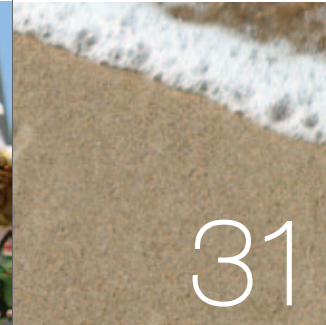
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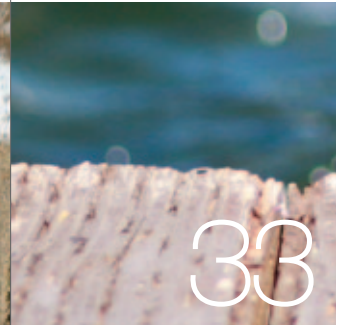
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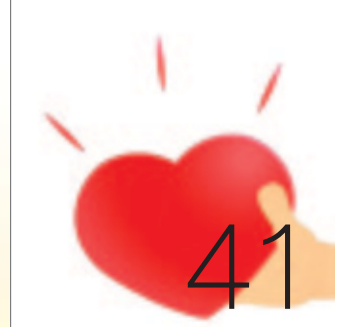
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One True Church



The Only Church That Is Saved—True Jesus Church (I)

H.H. Ko—Heidelberg, Germany

In the end-time, God has established the True Jesus Church as the Ark of the Last Days. Thus begins the great work of the dragnet before the close of this age (cf. Mt 13:47–50). God's chosen people within the ark are convinced of the one true church—True Jesus Church, but by-standers together with the “mixed multitude” (cf. Ex 12:38; Num 11:4) who benefit from their shallow acquaintance with the True Jesus Church, would often cast doubts or put forth grilling questions. Those “beside the walls and in the doors” who only seem to be God's people (cf. Ezek 33:30–33) behave likewise. Worse still are the modern Pharaohs who do not know the True Jesus Church; they slander, attack, persecute and oppress her, simply because she is the only saved church.

The notion that the True Jesus Church is the only church that is saved elicits diametrically dichotomous responses—from firm-believers with a deep understanding of the church to persecutors resolved to wipe her off from the face of the earth (Acts 22:22–24; 23:12–24). We shall pursue this subject by first defining “church” based on its etymological and categorical meanings, followed by a Bible-based examination of the spiritual essence and characteristics of the church, and hence discern the church's uniqueness. This then forms the yardstick for scrutinizing the essential nature of the True Jesus Church, giving us an insight into her exclusiveness and her place in the history of salvation.

DEFINITION OF “CHURCH”

Modern understanding of the word “church” embraces a multiplicity of use. Sometimes it alternatively refers

to the body of believers or the physical building used for worship; sometimes it refers to a local organized assembly, e.g., “Singapore Church,” “Malaysia Church,” “Taiwan Church” etc. There are times when it is appropriated for denominational bodies, such as “Presbyterian Church,” “Lutheran Church,” and “Anglican Church.” The word “church” is sometimes even associated with certain systems of beliefs within Christendom, e.g., “Roman Catholic Church,” “Protestant Christian Church,” “Eastern Orthodox Church.” But how should “church” be defined? We shall approach it in two ways: firstly we take a peek into the etymological meaning, and secondly we scan the Bible for every instance of use to arrive at its categorical meanings.

Etymological Meaning

It is common knowledge that the word “church” used in the New Testament for the gathering of Christians originates from the Greek εκκλησια (ekklesia). This compound word concatenates the preposition εκ (ek), which means “from” or “out of,” and the verb καλέω (kaleo), which means “to call.” Hence the etymology of εκκλησια (church, ekklesia) shows that “church” means “an assembly called out from the multitudes.” On this basis, the meaning is extended to “a convened assembly,” “a gathering.”

Categorical Meanings

OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Two different words are used in the Hebrew Old Testament (OT) Scriptures to refer to the assembly of God's people. The first is קהל (qahal), translated as εκκλησια (ekklesia) in the

Septuagint (LXX). Qahal means “to let out a sound” and gradually evolved to mean “to call out,” “to summon.” In the OT, it first appeared in Isaac’s blessing of Jacob: “...that you may be an assembly of peoples” (Gen 28:3). This was a prophetic blessing, as the “assembly of peoples” would only be realized through Jesus’ blood (Gal 3:26–29).

Subsequent use of קָהָל (qahal) refers to the assembly of Israel, God’s chosen people. Examples include:

- “assembly of the LORD” (Deut 23:1–3)
- “assembly of God” (Neh 13:1)
- “assembly/great company” (Ezek 16:40, 17:17), which is also the assembly of those who responded to God’s calling (Ex 35:1; Num 16:26; Deut 4:10, 9:10, 31:30; 1 Kgs 8:14).

Sometimes the term is also used to describe a specific gathering (Jer 44:15; Ezra 10:1).

However, קָהָל (qahal) is not used exclusively for the assembly of Israel. In Ezekiel, it almost always refers to Gentile nations and armies (cf. Ezek 16:40, 17:17, 23:24,46–47, 26:7, 27:27,34, 32:3,22–23, 38:4,7,13,15). The other term used in the Hebrew Bible is עֵדָה (edah)¹. This word appears later than קָהָל (qahal) and is first used in the context of the Passover (Ex 12:3). It specifically refers to the Israelites when they were assembled—“the congregation of Israel” (Ex 12:3,6,19,47, 16:1,2,9,22). People who were not ethnic Israelites would not be referred to as עֵדָה (edah) (Num 31:12). Hence the Septuagint translates the term as συναγωγή (synagogue), the same as in “synagogue of the Jews” in the New Testament (Mt 10:17; Lk 12:11; Acts 6:9; Jas 2:2).

NEW TESTAMENT ERA

God wants to “save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21) and since “the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He ... likewise shared in the same” (Heb 2:14). God “became flesh” (Jn 1:14), “manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16), and “according

to the flesh” was born a Jew “of the seed of David” (Rom 1:3). So He started off calling only Israelites as in ancient times, going only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 10:6, 15:24). Hence He went into the midst of the “congregation [עֵדָה (edah)] of Israel,” synonymous with “synagogue (συναγωγή) of the Jews.” “Synagogue” is a compound word comprising the preposition σύν (syn—with, together) and the verb ἄγω (ag’o—to lead, to bring, to induce). Hence the word specifically refers to the place where Jews gather for worship as an assembly of people drawn together by God.



In the New Testament Bible, συναγωγή (synagogue) was:

1) a place where Jesus worshipped, ministered, preached, taught, performed signs and drove out demons (Mt 4:23, 9:35; Mk 1:21,23,29,39, 3:1, 6:2; Lk 4:15–16, 43–44; Jn 6:59, 18:20). It was also a place where the Jews opposed Jesus and plotted to kill Him (Lk 4:20–28, 6:6–11, 13:10–17).

2) a place where chosen people under the OT gathered (Acts 15:21; Jas 2:2). It was also a place where scribes and Pharisees showed their hypocrisy (Mt 6:2,5, 23:6; Mk 12:39; Lk 11:43).

3) a place where Jesus’ disciples were beaten, accused and judged by the unbelieving Jews (Mt 10:17, 23:34;

Mk 13:9; Lk 12:11, 21:12; Acts 22:19, 26:11).

4) the base camp of those who opposed salvation through Jesus during the apostolic era (Acts 6:9, 9:2).

5) the prime evangelism ground where Paul and later missionaries preached during their outreach (Acts 9:20, 13:5,14,43, 14:1, 17:1,10,17, 18:4,7,19,26, 19:8, 24:12).

6) what Jesus described as the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9, 3:9) at the end of the apostolic era.

When Jesus had completed His earthly ministry, He was “lifted up from the earth” and drew all peoples to Himself (Jn 3:14, 8:28, 12:32; Acts 2:33, 5:31). After the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, He began to extend His “call” to everyone in the world who belongs to Him (Mk 1:14–20; Mt 11:28–30; Jn 4:42, 7:37). Before His ascension, Jesus entrusted this commission to His disciples (Acts 1:8; 2:39; 1 Thess 2:4), and so the NT church emerged after Pentecost.

Categorical meanings of “church” based on the NT Greek Scriptures are as follows:

1) Usual political gathering (Acts 19:39) and also common gathering of people (Acts 19:32,41).

2) Assembly of Israelites, particularly a gathering for religious purposes (Acts 7:38; Heb 2:12).

3) Mostly referring to Christian churches in the NT time.

a. Gathering of Christians in various regions, e.g., “the church that is in their house” (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 2); churches in diaspora, e.g., the church in Jerusalem (Acts 5:11, 8:1), Antioch (Acts 13:1, 15:22), Caesarea (Acts 18:22), Thessalonica (1 Thess 1:1), Corinth (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1), Cenchrea (Rom 16:1), churches of the Gentiles (Rom 16:4), churches in Galatia (1 Cor 16:1), churches in Asia and Macedonia (2 Cor 8:1), churches of God (1 Cor 11:16).

b. A local church as an organized unit or its members. Hence the “church” could hear and even fear (Acts 5:11). She could also

¹ In NKJV קָהָל (qahal) is translated as “assembly” (Num 16:3, 20:4; Deut 23:1–3,8; 1 Chr 28:8; Mic 2:5), while עֵדָה (edah) is translated as “congregation” (Num 27:17, 31:16; Josh 22:17).

receive guests, send missionaries or workers, and make intercession (Acts 15:3,4,22, 12:5).

- c. The universal church, commonly termed "church of God" (1 Cor 10:32, 11:22, 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1), "church of Christ," "churches of Christ" (Rom 16:16). In other words, the church is seen as a whole (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 10:28,32).
- d. In the spiritual dimension, the church is pre-existent and perfected, that is, "the church in heaven" (Eph 1:4; Heb 12:22; Gal 4:26; Rev 12:1). From such a perspective, the church is the body of Christ and Christ, who fills all in all, is the head of the church (Eph 2:22, 3:7,11,21, 5:25; Col 1:18–25).

In summary, the etymological and categorical meanings of the word "church" derive from God "calling" His people and "gathering" His children together since the OT times. God chose Abraham in antiquity to establish an "assembly" (qahal) of many nations. This promise was proclaimed through Isaac's blessing to Jacob. It was first fulfilled in the "holy assembly" of the Israelites in the OT. After the exodus, ethnic Israel as a whole was known as "edah." From Moses to Jesus, God's election was limited to ethnic Israelites. Hence "qahal" and "edah" were used interchangeably. Subsequently, Jews who were called to Christ adopted the term "qahal," translated "ekklesia" in Greek, which became a specific reference to the Christian "church." The Jews who chose to remain under the OT law retained the word "edah" for their assembly, thus its Greek translation specifically refers to the Jewish synagogue.

In the NT era, Jesus, the Word incarnate, completed the universal calling of God's people. This work was later carried on by His disciples. Now the word "ekklesia" no longer falls into a general social and political context. Today, we can go straight to

the Scriptures to understand the true meaning of this term, which is: "The church of God which He has purchased (or redeemed) with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH

As we study the church's definition, we realize that "church" can be understood at many levels. Historically, we can look at the church within time and space; spiritually, we can look at the heavenly church. This article weighs more on investigating the spiritual essence of the church, as it lies at the core of the "only saved church" understanding. For our discussion, the Bible's teachings on the spiritual essence of the church can be summed up into three aspects:

Within Eternity, the Church Has God's Pre-existence

In the eternal spiritual realm that surpasses human rationality, the church is a reality to God even before creation. The church is chosen in Christ long before the creation of the world. Regarding this pre-existence of the church in eternity, Paul attested: "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph 1:4–5). When the church was realized in the world, the apostles remarked: "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor 2:7).

We see then, that from eternity, the pre-existent church based on God's absolute foreknowledge and grace, is a reality in the pre-existent Christ. When the church is realized in the world, her membership includes NT believers saved by grace, as well as OT saints who "obtained a good testimony through faith, [and] did not receive the promise" (Heb 11:39). This is "Jerusalem above" in Pauline terms

and "heavenly Jerusalem" attested to in Hebrews.

From Ages Past, the Church Is the Mystery Hidden in Christ

Before God was manifested in the flesh, Christ was already chosen by God from a spiritual perspective, although He who partook of flesh and blood had not yet appeared in history. Just as Peter said:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." (1 Pet 2:6)

This is a mystery "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Eph 3:5). Paul likewise had deep insight into this mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things: "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Eph 3:6). The cross of Jesus not only reconciles humanity with God, so that man can rejoice in His presence (Rom 5:8–11), it also breaks down the wall of enmity between the Jews and Gentiles, reconciling "them both to God in one body" (Eph 2:16).

As the teaching of the cross clearly indicates, the church embodies the mystery hidden in Christ and hence, manifests both the horizontal and vertical aspects of the cross. Vertically, the church reaches towards heaven to God and therefore, she possesses the consistency and integrity from God (unity); horizontally, she traverses nationalities and thus has a universal character (catholicity). Also, having been cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus, she is characterized by holiness (Eph 5:26–27, 32).

Paul explains in 2 Timothy 1:9–10: "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

The church presents the "unity,"

In the eternal spiritual realm that surpasses human rationality, the church is a reality to God even before creation.

“catholicity” and “holiness” in Christ. This is the very “eternal life which God ... promised before time began” (Tit 1:2), showing that the church embodies the mystery hidden in Christ.

At Pentecost, the Church Was Founded in History Through the Promised Holy Spirit

Before He redeemed and established the NT church, Jesus had announced: “on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). Here the “rock” (petra) is to be differentiated from Peter’s name, “stone” (Petros). Materially, a rock can be built upon for a house or hewn into for a tomb and is sought after as a refuge when great calamity comes at the end of the world (Mt 7:25, 27:51,60; Mk 15:46; Rev 6:15–16). Spiritually, “this rock” specifically refers to Jesus, just as Paul says, “that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4; cf. Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8).

The apostolic church is established solely on the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. Through efficacious baptism, the blood of Christ brings about remission of sins. Baptism’s efficacy, in turn, comes from the power of the promised Holy Spirit, as John testifies: –“This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth... And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one” (1 Jn 5:6–8).

Before Pentecost, Jesus sent His disciples “just as the Father sent the Son.” He has also gave them authority: “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn 20:22–23). Moreover, before Jesus was taken to heaven, He entrusted His disciples with the great commission of preaching the gospel to every creature (Mk 16:15–18; Acts 1:8).

When Pentecost came, the disciples who had gathered in one place to pray in one accord received the Holy Spirit that God promised some eight hundred years before. Thus began a

new chapter in the history of God’s kingdom. Salvation through the rebirth of water and spirit had been initiated and the NT church was realized among men:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

(Eph 2:19,20)

Since the church is built on the Lord Jesus, her Rock and cornerstone, and the apostles and prophets who preached the truth of salvation, she is characterized by “apostolicity,” which is her heritage of the historical founding by the promised Holy Spirit.

[To be continued...] ★



True Jesus Church

Based on a sermon by Eng Guan Tay—Singapore

MAIN IDENTITY

All of us have different identities. Our race, nationality and occupation identify us. Yet what is our main identity? Who do we really feel we are?

Theoretically, our main identity should be that of a child of God and a follower of Christ, which is a Christian in the body of Christ, the True Jesus Church. Why is this important? Because our main identity affects the way we behave. And it affects our world view.

Regardless of whether we are a doctor, lawyer, student or engineer, our first and main identity should be that of a child of God. Our world view should be that of a child of God. We may assume the other identities as well if they do not clash with our faith. But if they do, our main identity must surface.

MAIN AFFILIATION

If we are God's children and followers of Jesus Christ, then we must recognize the body of Christ. The body of Christ is the church of God, and we believe that the church of God is the True Jesus Church. Thus, our main affiliation must be to the True Jesus Church. If there were a school alumni meeting, a professional seminar, a clan meeting, or a church service, we ought to know where our first responsibility lies.

It is important then to understand this organization to which we owe our first allegiance. Let us examine the True Jesus Church from two perspectives: doctrinally and historically.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

(Eph 4:4-6)

This passage talks of many "ones". The Christian belief is the belief in the one God, one faith, one baptism, and one body. What is this one body?

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

(Eph 1:22-23)

There is only one body, and God has only one church. This is the teaching of the Bible. How this one church is interpreted is another story. But we cannot deny that from the Bible, there is only one church. In God's eyes, there is only one church. But how do we

recognize this one church?

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

(Eph 2:19-22)

The one church of God is determined by the truth that she preaches. Doctrinally speaking, this church must be built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

But there are many churches in the world today. Some people would say that we are proud when we call ourselves the True Jesus Church. "Are you saying the other churches are not true?" We begin again by saying that there is only one church of God. Some people further say that you can take the best people from all the church and that would form the universal one church of God. I think there are hundreds and thousands of churches in this world.

If you pick just ten from each church, the best ten, to form the one universal church of God, then that would be quite a big church. Now who would be top ten in the True Jesus Church, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church? Is that how God determines His church—by choosing the top ten? No. It is determined by the teachings of the church.

So that is from a doctrinal perspective. The reality is that there are many churches. Let us now take a look at history to see how the many churches came about.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Historically, there was only one church in the beginning.

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

(Acts 11:26)

This one church began with Jesus' disciples, and it was only much later that they were called Christians. The church had no name. There was no need for a name because there was only one church. If you were a Christian then, you had to be a believer of Jesus, and there was only one church.

After some years, churches began to be called after the place where they were.

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write," (Rev 3:1)

Other examples include the church in Rome, the church in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem, etc. After a while, the church in Rome began to dominate the other churches. Since the churches were named after places, the Roman church decided to add another word to its name, and it came to be known as the Roman Catholic Church. They added the word "catholic," which means "universal," to show that they controlled the rest of the churches universally.

As the church grew, false teachings started to creep in (Gal 1:6–9). The apostles all died and so did the next

generation of leaders, like Timothy. More and more non-biblical teachings came into the church, for example, the erection of statues in the church, the concept of Trinity, and the confession of sins to priests.

Historically speaking, by 400 A.D., speaking in tongues was no longer found in the Christian churches. According to the Bible, there is no descent of the Holy Spirit that seals us for the kingdom of God, if there is no speaking in tongues. We believe that the church was no longer blessed by God.

Many years later, in 1517, some people broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. This action was called the Reformation. The churches that broke away were called the Protestant Churches, stemming from the word "protest," in that they disagreed with the teachings of the Roman church. Churches like the Lutheran Church, the Baptist Church, and the Methodist Church were the result of splitting away from the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Church. These are the seeds of all the different churches we see today. But, there was still no speaking in tongues.

We believe that in China, around 1917, God re-established His true church. We believe the True Jesus Church to be the revival of the apostolic church. So our concept of the historical perspective is that it began with one church; then it decayed. From this decay, many churches sprang up, but none of them was the true church. God then revived the original church, which is the True Jesus Church.

THE NAME OF THE ONE CHURCH

Many years ago, we had an observer who faced parental objection. Occasionally, the mother, a Roman Catholic, would call and scold us. Once, she scolded us, saying "How old is your church? You know my church?

My church is at least two thousand years old!" One of us replied, "Our church is also two thousand years old."

Yes, the True Jesus Church is two thousand years old because our church is the revival of the apostolic church. We do not have any new teachings or any new Bible. The Scriptures we use are the writings or the words of the apostles and Jesus. We have nothing new because all we need is to return to the original. So we do not say that the members in 1917 were the founders of the church. We just call them the early workers or workers of the second phase of God's revived church. We don't have any great leader that we name our church after. For example, the Lutheran church is named after Martin Luther, and a Methodist church in Singapore is called the Wesley Methodist Church after John Wesley; the Roman Catholic Church was named after Rome. But our church is named Jesus church. To distinguish her from the many other churches, the church must bear the name of Jesus.

The church must also uphold the truth. Like Jesus, the church must be the true vine:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." (Jn 15:1)

Even Jesus used the adjective "true" because it is very important. When we think about it, what is special about our church? If there would be only one thing that we could say, which would be the most important?

Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

(Jn 18:37)

...no matter what virtues we want to obtain, they must be true. Love, faith, and hope are all very important but we must inculcate the true ones. That is why the church has the word "true" in its name, ... Truth also distinguishes the church from other churches.

When Jesus was questioned, He answered that the reason He was born into this world was to bear witness to the truth. He not only came to this world to love this world, or so that people can have faith, although we know all these to be true. But when pressed to say one thing, Jesus said He had come for the truth. So if truth is above everything, why does 1 Corinthians 13 say that the greatest is love? Is there a contradiction? There is no contradiction because love is the greatest. But what kind of love? We are now talking about a different level. When we talk about virtues such as love, faith, and hope, truth is above them. For we want love, but we want true love. We want faith, but actually we want true faith.

The world is in a mess because everybody wants love but not true love. For example, gay love. The movement is so powerful that it is now taken to be the most natural thing in the world for two gay men to want to marry each other. Even in our schools, liberal minded teachers are telling their students that gay love is the most natural thing in the world. It is very hard to argue with the world outside because they do not believe in God or the Bible.

But as members of the True Jesus Church, no matter what virtues we want to obtain, they must be true. Love, faith, and hope are all very important but we must inculcate the true ones. That is why the church has the word "true" in its name, because truth is very important. Truth also distinguishes the church from other churches.

The word "true" in True Jesus Church does not only mean we emphasize on the truth, but it also helps us to understand God's framework of salvation. Matthew 7:14 says that the gate is narrow and the way is difficult that leads to salvation. This is the framework that helps us understand how God works. How many people entered Noah's ark and were saved? Eight. Everybody else was killed. How many people do you think lived during that time? Very few—a very conservative estimate could perhaps be one million people in the whole world. Out of this, only eight were saved. Today, we have around five billion people in the world. If we were

to calculate proportionally, God would save only forty thousand people out of the five billion in the whole world, which is very few. Certainly, such an estimate cannot provide and is not the actual number, but it does give us a sense of what Jesus meant when He said "few [will] find [the gate]." The gate truly is very narrow. Some people argue that our church cannot be the one true church because we are so few. However, after doing this simple calculation, we find that it is possible that those to be saved are so few, and so we should not reject a "small" church. This is God's framework.

TRUE CHURCH GROWTH

How should the church work? The one true church, the church of God, follows the Bible, and this is very important. In trying to grow the church, let us not make the mistake of turning to others without turning to God.

In 1 Samuel 8:5 the Israelites demanded from Samuel to anoint a king for them because they wanted to be like the other nations. God was not pleased (1 Sam 8:7). The true church must look to the Bible for inspiration. It does not mean we cannot be modern, but there are some fundamentals that we have to be careful of.

For example, does the Bible mention the idea of cell groups? Think carefully, the idea of cell groups is to split the church into small groups and to appoint people to look after them. People are very close in these cell groups. Thus, although the whole church is too big, everybody is taken care of and the church becomes strong.

It sounds like a very good idea, but why is it called a cell group? We had something similar in the True Jesus Church, but we call it a Bible study group. What is the difference between a Bible study group and a cell group? The focus of the Bible study group is to study the Bible together. The leader and the members of the group must make their decisions based on the study of the Bible.

A cell group need not do that. In fact, some of the mega churches are very successful because they divide the church into cell groups that need not study the Bible; they just organize BBQs and visit the sick. It is all about love and care. When the cell groups come

together in their big church, they listen to a very charismatic speaker. Everyone comes together to listen to this one man, which is very important. When they are out in small groups, they only need to care for one another and do not have to think so much about other things. Truly, if we want our church to grow like theirs, then if we do the same thing, it will work. Just focus on care in the small groups. When we come together, we choose amongst us the best, most charismatic speaker. Everyone would be excited to come to listen. If choir practice is very difficult, we just need to get electric guitars and drums to attract people, and that is how we would grow.

Do we want to follow them? If this is the true church, then the fundamentals, like Bible study groups, must be based on the truth. And because of that, we would expect that we do not grow the way other people grow. In fact, sometimes we even want to avoid that our best speakers speak too much, because people would only come for that man, and not for Jesus; this is after all the True Jesus Church.

Also, let us not abuse the concept of "love" in the church. Weak members constantly justify their actions by saying that the church does not have love. It would be more helpful to themselves and edifying to others if they considered what is true love - it is when you think that there is no love, you practice love.

There are many people in our church who have silently given love to the weak. Their love is informed by the truth. We can do better, but if we continue to criticize the church for having no love, it does not help the church. Instead, we should say, "Because of the truth that I love, I will try to make up for the gaps that I see."

In conclusion, it is very important for believers to understand what the True Jesus Church stands for. Jesus, just as He is in the center of our name, is the center of our organization. Truth is the basis of our belief and actions. ★

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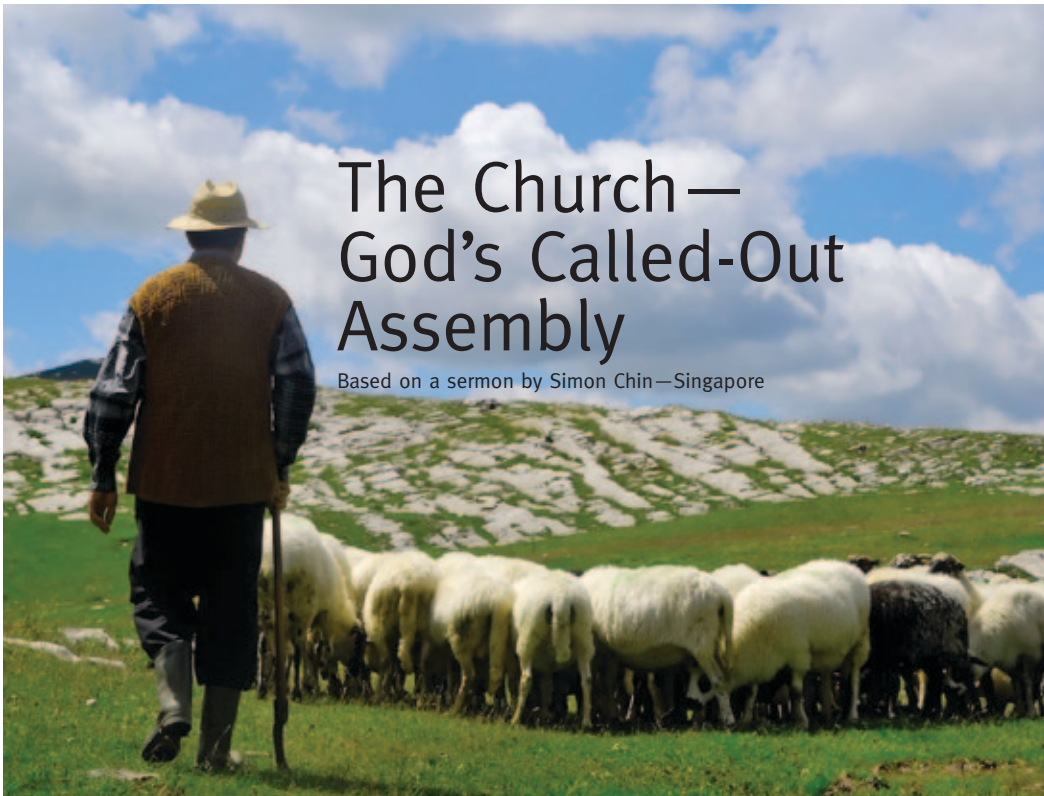
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The Church— God's Called-Out Assembly

Based on a sermon by Simon Chin—Singapore

INTRODUCTION

Normally, when people say they are “going to church,” they refer to the physical church building. In the context of the Bible, however, the church refers to an assembly of people called out by God. It comes from the Greek root word *ekklesia*, which means “called out.”

We first see evidence of people being “called out” in the Old Testament:

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (Deut 14:2)

Back then, God told the Israelites that they were a holy people, chosen by God for Himself. There were many other nations at that time, such as the Philistines and the Assyrians, but God did not choose them. God chose the Israelites, and they became a people called out from the world to belong to Him. They were a special treasure above everybody else. This was amazing grace given to the people of God.

This unique status was also made apparent to the world. The king of Moab tried to bribe a false prophet,

Balaam, to curse the Israelites. But Balaam could only speak what God told him to speak (Num 23:7–8). Balaam thus ended up blessing the Israelites, referring to them as “a people dwelling alone” (Num 23:9). Clearly, this nation of God’s people is not a nation of the world.

In the context of the True Jesus Church today, we need to realize that our church is not a church of the world; she is a called-out assembly of God’s people. Since the church is not of the world, she must dwell alone. When people ask what denomination the True Jesus Church belongs to, we say that we do not belong to any. Being part of a Christian denomination—the categorization of the churches of the world—signals that we belong to the world. We do not belong to the world but to God.

REDEEMED BY HIS BLOOD

Some skeptics may challenge our claim to be the church of the Lord. How do we know we have really been called out by the Lord? Let us examine how God called His people out in the New Testament.

In a vision (Rev 5:9–10), Elder John saw four living creatures and twenty-four elders around the throne of the lamb, singing praises to God. They

sang that Jesus Christ was worthy to take the scroll and open the seal. Christ was worthy because He was killed to redeem people to God by His blood; this group of people was made a kingdom and priests to God.

In other words, this church of the Lord is an assembly of people called out to the Lord by His precious blood. That is why the church is so precious in His sight. We must never think that the church is just any organization and that we belong to a mere organization. We are all members of the church of Christ because Jesus has redeemed us with His blood. We are very precious to Him.

Apostle Paul spent three years providing pastoral care to the church in Ephesus. Just before his departure, he exhorted the elders there to shepherd the church of God:

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

“God” in this passage refers to Jesus. The church that belongs to God consists of the believers, whom Jesus purchased with His own blood. This is why the church is unique.

A common question is whether there is such a thing as the true church. The answer is a resounding and definite "Yes!" Many churches were established by men, not by the will of God. They were established by the power of kings, priests or people who love the Lord. These churches may be good churches, but the blood of Christ does not redeem them because they are established by the hands of men. This is the difference between the churches of the world and the church of God.

[A]nd from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(Rev 1:5–6)

Elder John tells us that the blood of Christ washes away our sins. Believers then become the church of the Lord; a kingdom (the original text reads "kingdom") and priesthood dedicated to serving God. This cleansing by the blood of Jesus is essential if we are to be part of God's kingdom.

We thank God that this grace is given to the True Jesus Church. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ effectively washes away our sins because the blood of Christ is present. Visions of blood during the baptisms conducted by the True Jesus Church attest to this.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRUE CHURCH

The "true church" is not just a buzzword. It has great significance, which we must understand.

(a) Called To Serve Him

Firstly, God chooses us to serve Him, the one true God.

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

(1 Cor 8:5–6)

Many people in Corinth were idol-worshippers. But the blood of Christ called out the Christians who lived among them. These believers could tell the difference between Jesus, the true God, and the idols. Today we have been called out just like them. Through Jesus, our Lord, are all things; through Jesus we live. Hence we cannot serve another God. The modern danger is not any physical idol, but is represented by the unseen gods we give our love to. Such love belongs to the one true God, and Him alone. But we often give this love to the world. The Scriptures say God is a jealous God. This means that He treasures our love so much that He does not want us to waste even the smallest ounce of it in loving the world. Only when we completely belong to God, will we be set free from the abominable things of the world.

Wickedness exists in this world because there are those who do not love God. They have no qualms doing wicked things because they have no fear of God. In contrast, those who know the one true God have the fear of God. They know that this is their Father, and that through Him they have life. Hence, they resolve to serve Him with all their heart, soul, and mind. God is not someone whom we seek only during prayers or only when we have problems and need a trouble-shooter.

Moses reminds us: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 10:12), and "The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day" (Deut 10:15).

Today, this is why we are called out to be God's assembly. People of the world do not understand this special and precious relationship—He is our God, and we are His people. To many, faith is human-centric, i.e., God "exists" to serve them! So the business people seek the deity of commerce to bless them. Those who need wealth flock to the god of prosperity to bless them. They worship God in order to be blessed.

In contrast, our faith is—and must be—God-centric. We serve Him

because we have been called out for this purpose. Understanding this is very important; it enables us to be joyful as we serve God. Taking up the cross and following Him is easy. We will not murmur when we hit a rough spot. Everything we do for God, we will do with love. This is the grace we receive from God when we serve Him. Those who serve Him sincerely and fervently will draw closer to God and be further strengthened in their faith.

(b) Called to Enjoy His Abidance

GOD'S ABIDANCE AND SANCTIFICATION

Secondly, God calls us out to abide in us. Through His abidance, we become holy. God will not dwell with people of the world but only with His people. God wants His people to come out of this world undefiled. He will then receive them; He shall be their Father, and they, His children.

The church of the Lord comprises a people called out through the blood of Christ so that they will be holy. To sanctify men, God uses the truth and the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts, so that they can abide in God and He with them, and the glory of God can be manifested. Therefore, the church must be cleansed by the word of truth and the Holy Spirit in order to become holy. When we are holy, the Holy One can then abide with us and we with Him. The result of such a life is glory in God's eyes and eternal life.

ABIDE IN THE TRUTH

Also, believers in God's true church must dwell in the truth:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.

(1 Pet 1:22–23)

Since we are reborn, we are no longer our old selves. We are a new people. In Christ, we are a new creation, and we become people with the heart of God, with His holiness, filled with the word of the Lord. This is the church of God. That is why she is called the pillar

of truth. Whatever the church does is according to the truth. Truth must rule over the church.

Given this great importance of the truth, we must esteem learning the word of God. We come to church for fellowship—with God. We need to truly listen to the word of God and accept this word into our hearts. Many of us are physically in church, but our hearts are not there. How then can we have fellowship with God? How then can we be the called-out assembly? Coming to church for the sole purpose of fellowship with men will keep us from being born of the word of God. And if we are not born of the word of God, we cannot be the church of God.

God chose us from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thess 2:13–14). Belief in the truth is receiving the truth into our heart and becoming a new and holy person in Christ. The Holy Spirit working in us helps us to bear fruit for salvation. This is why the truth and the Holy Spirit are so important. Neither money nor intelligence can gain us the truth and the Spirit of God. Yet they are freely given to us by grace. If we are ready to believe, submit, and be humble before Him, this grace of the truth and the Holy Spirit will be given to us. Grace is given to those who have faith. If we have this kind of readiness, and if we are baptized in the blood of Christ, the grace of salvation will definitely result in eternal life.

(c) Called to Do His Will

Thirdly, we must do God's will.

[L]ooking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

(Tit 2:13–14)

When we are called out, we are redeemed by the blood of Christ and purified to be Christ's own special people. But we must also be zealous for good works, i.e., not only must we do deeds of charity to love one another, but we must also preach the gospel. This is why God chose us.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

(1 Pet 2:9–10)

We are different from everyone else—we are a chosen generation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and His special people. This is grace given to us—once we were not the people of God, but now we are the people of God! Jesus tells us that we did not choose Him, but He chose us. Out of all the nations in the world, God chose Israel, not because they enjoyed any quantitative or qualitative superiority; it was purely His choice.

But with this special status comes responsibility. He has given us the knowledge of the truth. It is thus our duty to proclaim His marvelous light, to tell the world of this Savior who called us out of darkness into His light.

Today, there are many—both Christian and non-Christian—who love God. But not all of them were chosen by God, even if they are Christians. Whom God chooses is His sovereign right as Creator and Lord of Life. We, as chosen creatures and part of the minority, can only be grateful for such indescribable grace. Let us not take this for granted but instead try to be worthy of such marvelous grace and do our duty of preaching the gospel.

First, to walk in a way worthy of

His grace requires us to remember at all times that we are called to glorify the name of the Lord. Offering a cup of water to the least of our brethren, sharing a quiet word of encouragement or offering a simple prayer for our brothers and sisters—this is a zealous act when done sincerely and lovingly for the Lord. Those who love the Lord will naturally have a heart of mercy and kindness towards others.

Second, we must preach the gospel in and out of season. As long as there are people we can preach to, we should. This is how Paul preached the gospel. He did not prejudge people as being “worthy” or “unworthy” to receive God's word. Thank God, we see many today who remember that they have freely received the grace of being “called out”—preachers who zealously relocate to very remote places to bring this grace to other souls, and even members who take leave from work for a long period of time to follow ministers in this good work. They do not passively wait to be allocated work, but instead actively seek the opportunity to go. They often do more than they are required to.

CONCLUSION: DO IT IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

As people called by the Lord's name, whatever we do, let us do it in His name and to His glory. When we do things out of the fear of God and according to the truth, when we do so for God and not for us, then we will not lose our reward.

If we have the opportunity to evangelize on overseas missionary trips, be not afraid to launch out into the deep. Yet not everyone needs to go on overseas ministry trips. If we do not have the opportunity to do so, let us do good deeds within our local churches.

In all, seize every opportunity to build up the body of Christ. If we do a beautiful thing unto the body of Christ, we will be like Mary anointing Jesus with the fragrant ointment. God will remember, and we will not lose our reward. ★

Our faith is—and must be—God-centric. We serve Him because we have been called out for this purpose. Understanding this is very important; it enables us to be joyful as we serve God.



The Lord's Parting Prayer for His Disciples—the True Church

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, United Kingdom

"Churches are carrying too much baggage of outdated ideas," say the critics. They believe that the church has to change to survive. To this end, these critics recommend that the modern church be all-encompassing and accept all views unconditionally, even if these views contradict the basic tenets of Christian beliefs. Although not new, such comments came to the fore again when the UK government proposed to legalize gay marriages, and the Church of England stated its opposition to these plans.

Besides societal issues, the True Jesus Church (TJC) also has had to counter attacks on its views on Christian ecumenism. Fellow Christians have long been critical of the TJC stance that the gospel of salvation can only be found in the true church. To them, TJC should join the one big happy Christian family and become more tolerant and accepting of the teachings of other denominations.

These quick snapshots reflect prevailing human expectations of the church. But as Christians – followers of Christ – that should be the least of our concerns. The Greek word "ekklesia" for "church" means "that which is called out." Just as God called the Israelites out of many nations, Jesus has called Christians to follow Him in His ministry.

Hence, our main consideration, in fact the *only* consideration, should be what Jesus' expectations of His church are.

Although the Lord Himself only mentions the term "church" twice in the Gospels (Mt 16:18, 18:17), in His parting prayer during the last supper (Jn 17:6–26), Jesus clearly spelled out His expectations regarding the nature, purpose, and characteristics of His believers, which collectively constitute the church.

THE TRUE CHURCH IS OF GOD

"I pray for them ... for they are Yours." (Jn 17:9)

The theme of belonging to God runs throughout the entire prayer: "They are Yours" (Jn 17:6,9), "all mine are Yours" (Jn 17:10), "keep them in Your name" (Jn 17:11,12), "keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17:15). Believers who constitute the church belong to God for they have been purchased by the blood of God. This is why the church is called the church of God (Act 20:28).

The believers do not belong to the world (Jn 17:14) and they have been kept from the evil one in Jesus' name (Jn 17:11,12,15). Only God's power enables the church to free herself from the influence of this world and the

control of the evil one.

However, God is not an object on which humans can lay claim at their own whim and fancy. We may say that God is mine and we are God's children, but it is God who ultimately decides who belongs to Him. We did not choose Jesus. Instead, He chose us (Jn 15:16). The fundamental relationship between God and the believers is built entirely on God's calling and our unconditional submission to God's word. Jesus said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love" (Jn 15:10, cf. 14:20). Keeping the commandments is certainly not a mere intellectual pursuit where the word of God is painstakingly studied, analyzed, theorized and rationalized. While serious and dedicated study is essential, just as critically, we need to carry out these commandments.

Moreover, the church is not a social organization compelled to accept all the diverse and divergent views of modern society. Instead, the church belongs to God and must therefore practice God's unchanging word. Any view of society that conflicts with the word of God must be robustly and steadfastly rejected, no matter how great the pressure we face from society (Jn 15:18-19).

THE TRUE CHURCH MUST HAVE THE TRUTH AND PRACTICE IT

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (Jn 17:17)

Man cannot discover God through his own initiative or effort. We know Him only because of His gracious self-revelation. The adoption, the covenant, and the giving of the Law were completely God's own initiative. Similarly, God's name could only be revealed through His own volition. Hence, when Moses asked for God's name, God told him to tell His people that He was "I AM." In the New Testament, God revealed Himself and His name through Jesus: "I have manifested Your name" (Jn 17:6) and "I have declared to them Your name" (Jn 17:26).

Today, those who believe in God have been given the word of God (Jn 17:8,14). On their parts, they have received, believed (Jn 17:8), and kept it (Jn 17:6). Such commitment to God's word forms the basis of our relationship with Him. We need to receive wholeheartedly, unconditionally, and trustingly. Accepting God's word entails keeping God's commandments—which encompasses everything from

accepting the gospel of salvation to practicing His word in our daily lives. What we believe and practice must be the complete word of God. The church is not a cafeteria, a place where we can pick and choose what we like; hearing and applying what appeals to us and blithely ignoring what we do not like.

The true church of the living God is the foundation and pillar of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). A church can only be called a true church when it encompasses and embraces all the teachings in the Bible, presents the gospel of salvation in its fullness, and is able to bring people completely before God.

As God is holy, the true church must also be holy (Lev 11:44-45). We are sanctified by practicing God's word, because His word is the truth

(Jn 17:17,19). Keeping His word will also lead us away from the world (Jn 17:16,14). As believers, we should be acutely aware of Jesus' uncompromising stance and the importance of demarcating ourselves from the influence of the world (Jas 4:4).

THE TRUE CHURCH MUST PREACH THE GOSPEL AND GLORIFY GOD

"I also have sent them into the world." (Jn 17:18)

"Separate from the world" does not mean that the true church has been called to self-satisfied isolation. The church has been chosen for a reason—to glorify God. Jesus said, "I am glorified in them" (Jn 17:10). As a

the church must spread the same word, so that others can come to believe in Jesus (Jn 17:20) and receive eternal life through knowing God (Jn 17:3).

God has been glorified through Jesus (Jn 17:4); Jesus is glorified because of the task He accomplished on earth (Jn 17:5; cf. 13:31–32). In the same way, the church has been given the glory that Jesus had received (Jn 17:22). Therefore, the church will and should do greater work than Jesus did (Jn 14:12). Today, the church has truly grown and spread to every corner in this world, reaching out to different nations, tongues, and races. The once close-knit circle of the Lord Jesus has now become spatially and culturally diverse.

THE TRUE CHURCH MUST BE UNITED

"That they may be one just as We are one." (Jn 17:22)

The multiplicity of today's environment far exceeds the divisions noted by Paul between Greek, Jews, and the barbarians, yet the diversity in the church should not be a barrier for true fellowship in Jesus. As members of the true church – the one body of Christ – we should be vigilant against consciously or unconsciously dividing our churches on the basis of location, nationality, and ethnicity. The oneness of God and Jesus is inextricably linked to the expectation that the church be one (Jn 17:11,21,22). A closer look into the church in the apostolic time, however, reveals that she was plagued by divisions. The Epistles of Paul, Peter, John and James clearly evinced that conflicts in the church were inevitable, ranging from high profile divisions in



separate people, we are in the world, but we are not influenced by the evil one (Jn 17:14–15). So we do not live as passive hermits but as messengers sent into the world (Jn 17:18). We live to glorify God just as Jesus did by completing the work that God entrusted to Him (Jn 17:4). Jesus has given the church the word of God (Jn 17:8) that she may know God. In turn,

As members of the church, we do not belong to the world, and therefore we need to glorify Him through unity, loving one another and preaching His word.

Corinth to lower level discord between individual workers in Philippi (Phil 4:2).

No wonder Jesus kept on reminding us of the need for unity in His parting prayer! We are easily influenced by our personal prejudices, strong will, jealousy, pride, and self-interest. These drive huge wedges among brethren, resulting in a lack of unity, which stunts church growth and hinders her from achieving perfection and from fully glorifying God (Jn 17:23). The world will not believe that a church in disarray and riven by in-fighting is the true church sent by God (Jn 17:21). Without unity, the church is not able to manifest God's love (Jn 17:23). And without God's love amongst the members, the church cannot spread His love to the world (Jn 17:26). If the truth is not complemented by love, it is empty—like sound bites with little substance.

FINAL WORDS

Jesus' parting prayer is our source of consolation as well as a last reminder to live up to God's expectations. We were born again through the washing of His blood and of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5). This fundamental relationship makes us special because we are separated from the world. However, this status comes with obligations—we need to glorify Him by following His commandments.

The church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22–23); there is only one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all (Eph 4:3–6). The true church cannot have diverse and opposing views on her basic beliefs. Just as Christ can only have one body, there can only be one true church that is called by God, sanctified by practicing His word that He has given to her. As members of the church, we do not belong to the world,

and therefore we need to glorify Him through unity, loving one another and preaching His word. Through this, the world can see that God is in us, we are of God, and that His love is perfected in our unity. ★

Call for Devotionals

“I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.” (Ps 119:15)

Most of us regularly read the Bible and ponder upon God's word and His works. However, not many of us may take time to actually pen down our thoughts. But if you do, you may actually be writing a devotional.

A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings.

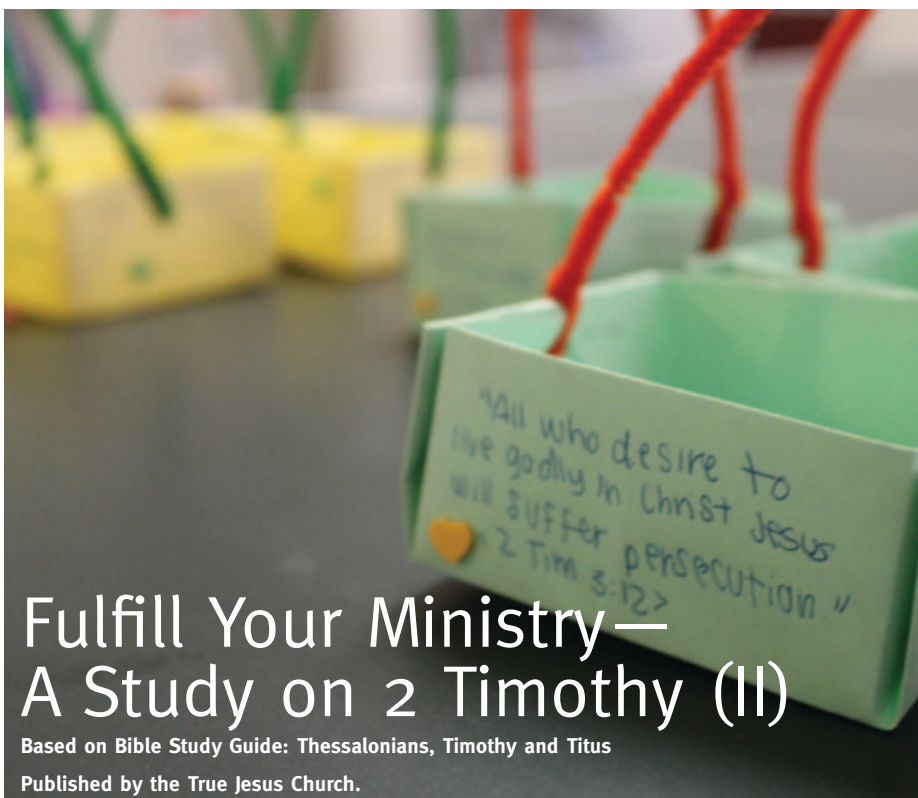
Has a verse recently caught your attention, giving you insight on God's love and a Christian's relationship with Him?

Write it down and share this spiritual nourishment!

If you wish to read recent and archived devotionals written by our church members, go to www.tjc.org and members.tjc.org.

To submit your devotional, please indicate “Devotional” in the subject line and send it to manna@tjc.org.





Fulfill Your Ministry— A Study on 2 Timothy (II)

Based on Bible Study Guide: Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus

Published by the True Jesus Church.

FAITHFULNESS IN PERILOUS TIMES

After encouraging Timothy to be a good worker of Christ Jesus, Paul warns Timothy of perilous times that will come in the last days, when wickedness and deception will abound. To prepare Timothy and the believers for these dangers ahead, Paul reiterates the necessity to endure affliction and to continue in the sound doctrine.

Be Prepared

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come." (3:3)

Because of the prevalence of wickedness, the godly will be persecuted. In terms of spiritual perils, the increasing influence of sin will deceive many people and cause them to forsake the faith (cf. Mt 24:9–13).

Hence, it is necessary to know that we are living in perilous times so that we can be ready to face persecutions from the ungodly. When we do come across such people in society, we need not be surprised or disheartened, since this has been prophesied long ago.

In these last days, Paul reminds us that "men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to

parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (3:2–4). These are apt descriptions of the ills of modern society. Unwittingly, we may also be guilty of such conduct. We need to introspect and guard ourselves against such wickedness.

Pursue True Godliness

"[H]aving a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (3:5)

In this self-centered world, many have no regard for God and His commandments. They live according to what their hearts and flesh desire rather than for God's will (3:4). As believers, we must not conform to the pattern of this world. We need to always examine the choices we make and ask whether we are doing things to please God or to please ourselves.

If we truly love God, we will deny ourselves to carry out God's will. Therefore, if we want to understand the truth and not be deceived by false doctrines, we must first examine whether we have the motivation to obey God. If we continue to indulge in

our sins and do not intend to submit to God, our superficial diligence in studying God's word will not bring us any closer to His will.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

(3:13–15)

Paul warns Timothy that things will get worse. Evil men and impostors will grow bolder in their deception (3:13). But Timothy must continue in the things that he has learned and been assured of (3:14). Likewise we should not be disheartened, thinking God has forgotten us, when we suffer persecution for leading godly lives or when we see more and more evil men arising. We need to hold fast to the truth with which we have been entrusted, and be ready to protect and defend it when evil men attempt to distort this truth to mislead the church.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(3:16–17)

Paul reminded Timothy: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally “God-breathed”) (3:16). In other words, the Scriptures were written under God's direction and guidance; they are not from the writers' own will (cf. 2 Pet 1:20–21). Just as God breathed the breath of life into Adam to make him a living being (Gen 2:7), He has breathed into the Scriptures and made them His living word.

What then are the roles of the Scriptures? It is to make us wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus (3:15). The Scriptures testify about Christ (Jn 5:39). Through the Scriptures, we can come to know the Savior and put our faith in Him for salvation. The Scriptures also make

us complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (3:17). These are accomplished through doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (3:16). Finally, the Scriptures reveal to us God's will, rebuke us when we have sinned, show us where we are wrong, and guide us unto the right path. So through learning and applying the Scriptures, we can be transformed into clean and useful vessels of God, equipped for every good work.

In summary, during these perilous times, when sins continue to increase and false teachings abound, it is necessary for every servant of God to remain true to the teachings of the Scriptures, which are inspired by God. Then our faith will not be shaken, but we will keep our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. We will not fall prey to the increasing wickedness of the world, but we will be complete and equipped for every good work.

PARTING WORDS

Paul is coming to the close of his last epistle. Soon, he will die the death of a martyr. In previous chapters, we have seen Paul's urgent concern for the ministry's continuation through Timothy. In this final chapter, the climax of the epistle, Paul commands Timothy once again with a most solemn charge to preach the word and fulfill his ministry as Paul himself has faithfully done.

Preach the Word!

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.

(4:2–3)

IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON

A preacher of God's word needs to be

ready “in season and out of season” (4:2). In other words, we must have the sense of urgency to preach the gospel at all times, even when the condition does not seem favorable. King Solomon also encourages us to sow our seeds in the morning and in the evening because we do not know which will prosper (Eccl 11:6). This means that we ought to preach the word of God constantly without worrying about the outcome of our preaching. We simply fulfill our duty to plant and water. We can leave the rest to God because it is He who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6–7).

CONVINCE, REBUKE, EXHORT, TEACH

Preaching includes both evangelizing to unbelievers as well as teaching believers. With the word of God, the doubtful must be convinced, the unrepentant rebuked, the weak exhorted and the ignorant taught. All approaches are acceptable as long as they are applied appropriately, according to the needs of the recipients.

PREACH SOUND DOCTRINE

Paul warns Timothy that the time will come when people will not “endure sound doctrine” (4:3–4). Precisely because people will not endure sound doctrine, the need to preach the gospel is all the more urgent. If the preacher is silent at a time when false doctrines abound, falsehood will prevail. But if we patiently convince, rebuke, exhort and teach, we can counter the forces of evil and help some to come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil (2:25–26). Even if no one accepts our preaching, it is still our responsibility as preachers of God's word to warn people of their sins. If we have preached the word and people do not believe, then they will be accountable for their own sins. But if we fail to preach, God will hold us accountable (Ezek 3:16–21).

BE WILLING TO LISTEN TO THE TRUTH

People who have “itching ears” are bored with the age-old truths of God's word. Instead, they are attracted to

If we take “the good fight” in a military sense, our lives are a fight against evil and our own sinful desires. It is also a fight for the faith, to win souls and preserve sound doctrine.

new and novel teachings, especially if these seem philosophically profound and mystical.

There are also those who do not like to hear God's word because it exposes their iniquity and condemns them of their sins. To avoid feeling guilty, they would rather choose to hear soothing words that justify their sins. People who cannot endure sound doctrine will naturally seek false teachers who will tell them lies (Isa 30:9–11). This is what Paul means by "heaping up for themselves teachers." By listening to false teachings, these people can satisfy their own desires and feel good about themselves.

BE PERSISTENT

"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (4:5)

As many will not endure sound doctrine, the work of preaching can be difficult and discouraging. Only if the preacher is equipped with a strong sense of commission and a heart of endurance will he be able to continue in the ministry.

There are many people around us to whom we need to preach the gospel, including our family, friends, classmates, and colleagues. In addition, preaching the word also includes preaching to believers. We need to instruct our brothers and sisters in Christ in the word of God, whether through sermons, Bible studies, children classes, or personal counseling.

Fight the Good Fight, Finish the Race

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

(4:7–8)

This is Paul's famous song of victory. If we take "the good fight" in a military sense, our lives are a fight against evil and our own sinful desires. It is also a fight for the faith, to win souls and preserve sound doctrine (1 Cor 9:26–

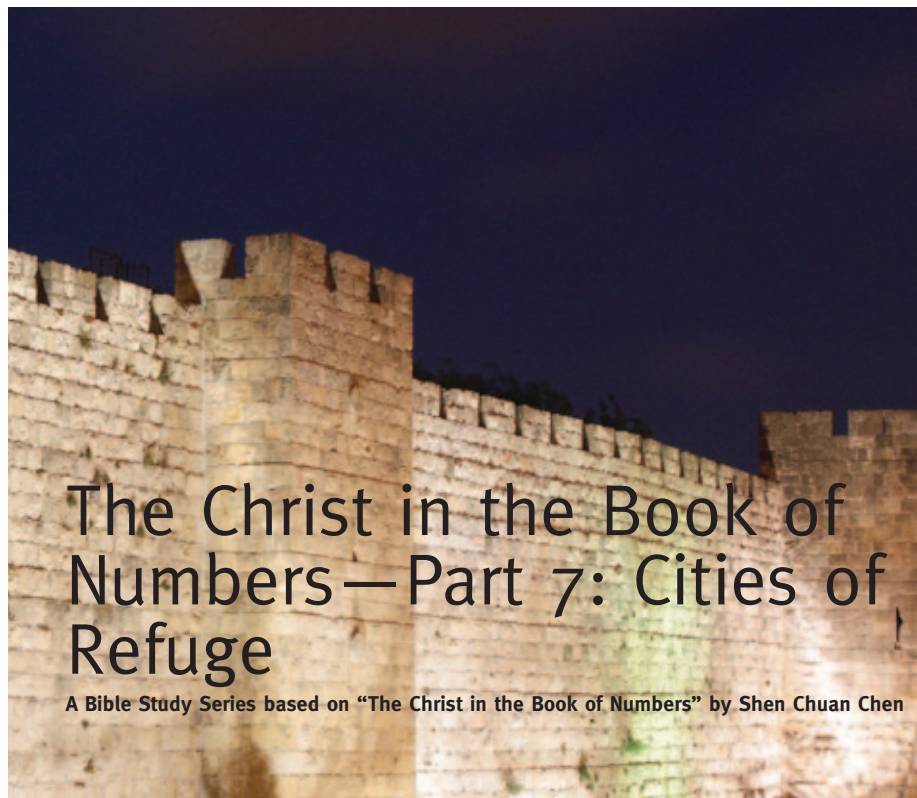
27; Gal 5:16–17; 1 Tim 6:12).

Taken in an athletic sense, the fight refers to spiritual progress and endeavors to fulfill our ministry. Our lives are a race, in which we press on towards the goal, which is to gain Christ (Phil 3:12–14; 2 Tim 2:5). We have to run this race with the self-discipline, energy, and perseverance of an athlete. We also need to keep the faith in our lives. Like an athlete who follows the rules of the game to avoid disqualification, we have to constantly watch our lives and our doctrines and make sure that we conform to God's will and commands. Then we will be able to save ourselves as well as others (cf. 1 Cor 9:26–27).

CONCLUSION

Written in the midst of dire circumstances, Paul's personal messages to Timothy in this epistle reveal his unwavering faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his conviction in the ministry. We learn of a man who knows whom he has believed and who knows that the Lord will not fail him. Never is his faith shaken by his sufferings and loneliness. As we study this epistle, we ought to examine our own faith in the Lord as well as our commitment to evangelism.

Before his death, Paul's utmost concern is the passing on of the ministry. He charges Timothy to preach and be faithful to the word. Paul's final wish calls out to us today. Have we been faithful to the sound doctrine? Have we fulfilled the charge to preach the word? Are we willing to endure affliction for the gospel? We must personally respond to the call of this epistle, as if it were written directly to us; only then will our study of this epistle be truly meaningful, edifying and fruitful. ★



The Christ in the Book of Numbers — Part 7: Cities of Refuge

A Bible Study Series based on “The Christ in the Book of Numbers” by Shen Chuan Chen

Since ancient times, people have committed accidental killings, and the duty of any civilized society is to ensure there are means of expiation. Before the Israelites entered Canaan, God instructed Moses to appoint cities of refuge as a unique system for this purpose. Although unknown at the time, God had hidden the truth of salvation in these cities.

PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST

Numbers 35 records God's instructions to Moses to establish six cities of refuge, as places of safety to anyone who accidentally killed another person. Within the regulations, God defined manslaughter and murder, and explained the process of asylum (Num 35:9–28). After the conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua implemented God's command, establishing cities of refuge from north to south on both sides of the River Jordan (Josh 20). The name of each city had special significance in relation to Christ's future salvation work.

Three Cities West of the River Jordan

Joshua established three cities of refuge on the west bank of the Jordan: Kedesh, Shechem and Kirjath Arba (Hebron) (Josh 20:7).

1. Kedesh (north)

Kedesh was located in the north of Canaan, in the mountains of Naphtali, 20 km from the city of Tyre. It was also known as Kedesh in Galilee (Josh 20:7) or Kedesh in Naphtali (Judg 4:6). The meaning of Kedesh is “sacred place, sanctuary,”¹ derived from a root word meaning “to be holy, to sanctify.”²

The Bible says that Christ is holy (Jn 8:46; Heb 4:15, 7:26) and it is God's will for us to be holy (1 Thess 4:7).

2. Shechem (central)

The ancient city of Shechem was in central Canaan, near Mount Gerizim (Judg 9:7), in the hill country of Ephraim (Josh 20:7). It was probably located at the current city of Tell Balata, at the eastern end of the valley running between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, 50 km north of Jerusalem.³ Shechem⁴ means “ridge” or “neck (between the shoulders) as the place of burdens.”⁵

The name of the city is an apt description of Jesus' salvation: He would bear the sins of man, along with His physical and spiritual burdens (Isa 53:4; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24).

3. Kirjath Arba (south)

The ancient town of Kirjath Arba,

better known as Hebron, was located in the mountains of Judah, between Beersheba and Jerusalem.⁶ It is famous because many of Israel's ancestors had resided there, including Abraham (Gen 13:18). The meaning of the town's name is “community” or “alliance.”⁷

In terms of Christ's salvation, we know that He established an alliance with us through His precious blood and joined us as one to Himself (Jn 17: 20–21; 1 Cor 6:17; Gal 3:27–28).

Three Cities East of the River Jordan

Joshua also established three cities of refuge on the east of the River Jordan: Golan, Ramoth and Bezer (Josh 20:8).

1. Golan (north)

Golan was situated in Manasseh's territory of Bashan (Deut 4:43). The precise location is uncertain, but it is possible that Sahem el-Jolan is the site of this ancient city.⁸ Golan was given to the Gershonite Levites as their dwelling place (Josh 21:27; Num 35:2).

One meaning of Golan⁹ is “captive.” It tells us that Christ was captured and led away, like a lamb to the slaughter, in order to set us free (Isa 53:7; Gal 5:1). Another meaning is “round,”¹⁰ reminding us that the Lord constantly surrounds us with His grace and builds

Jesus Christ established the church as the spiritual city of refuge.

a protective hedge around us (Job 1:10; Ps 3:3, 34:7). Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

2. Ramoth (central)

The city of Ramoth in Gilead, also known as “Ramoth-Gilead,” was located in the central region. It was a city of the tribe of Gad, before it was allocated to the Merarite Levites (Josh 21:38).¹¹ The meaning of Ramoth¹² is “heights.”

When the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people cried out, “Hosanna in the highest” (Mt 21:8–10). Jesus is our Lord in the highest, king above all kings and head over all things (Eph 1:22). He was lifted up and nailed to the cross, like the bronze serpent in the wilderness, so that people could look at Him and have their sins forgiven (Jn 3:14, 12:32). As such, Ramoth, the city of refuge, testified to two matters: Jesus would be the exalted Christ, and He would be crucified.

3. Bezer (south)

The last city of refuge was Bezer in the south. Again, the exact location is uncertain, but the Bible mentions that it was on a plateau in the wilderness (Deut 4:43). It belonged to the tribe of Reuben before it was allocated to the Merarite Levites (1 Chr 6:78). The meaning of Bezer¹³ is “inaccessible spot” (by virtue of height or fortification), from a root word meaning “mighty things” and “strong.”¹⁴

Apostle Paul says that Christ is the spiritual Rock in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:4). He is our fortress and guarantee. In perilous times, we can rely on Him to fight the enemy (Eph 6:10–17). Similarly, the prophet Isaiah says that Christ is our deliverer and reliance, and that His church is “the city that is sought out and not forsaken” (Isa 62:11–12).

In summary, hidden within the six cities of refuge was the message that Christ would come to bring His grace

of salvation and become the refuge of sinners. Moreover, just as the manslayers were released upon the death of the high priest (Num 35:25), so man would be freed from his bondage to sin and the future wrath of God through the death of Jesus (1 Thess 1:10).

REFUGE FOR ACCIDENTAL KILLERS

In this section, we shall see how the cities of refuge foreshadowed the protection of Christ for sinners.

No One Is Free of Sin

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul explains the origin of sin and its effects.

From Adam onwards, all men have sinned. Sin reigns over the world and humanity is under its bondage (Rom 5:12–14). In the words of Elder John: “[T]he whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 Jn 5:19). Death of the body and soul is the price that man must pay; no one is exempt. No wonder, then, that Paul once lamented, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24).

Despite the power of sin, many disbelieve its existence. Yet they cannot escape from its consequence, which is death. Furthermore, on the day of God’s righteous judgment, they will have to face His wrath and retribution (Rom 2:5–6). Even so, people in the world seem to have little or no inclination to seek out the path to life; instead, they are content to live as they please. Nevertheless, it is for such people that God has manifested His love (Rom 5:6–8).

Through His mercy, Jesus died and resurrected so that we could have the living hope of salvation (1 Pet 1:3). For this reason, we should tell everyone about the power and consequences of sin and how they can find protection in the spiritual city of refuge.

Apostle Paul says that the church is the body of Christ, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). Indeed, Jesus Christ established the church as the spiritual city of refuge. The church

is to warn people of their sins and to enable them to enter into God’s grace, to be redeemed, to put on Christ and to escape from spiritual death.

Flee to the City of Refuge

The relationship between God and man is based upon salvation, and indeed God’s sole plan for humanity is salvation. The cities of refuge foreshadowed that plan, and Christ became its substance, revealed to the believers in the New Testament period. If Jesus did not die for us, to become our refuge, we could not escape from God’s wrath in the future.

Before his conversion, the apostle Paul persecuted the church “ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13). However, after receiving God’s grace, he professed, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life” (1 Tim 1:15–16). Paul’s experience testifies to the mercy of Jesus: if Jesus could forgive him—the foremost of sinners—He would surely save others.

In ancient times, God established cities of refuge to shelter those guilty of accidental killing. Today, the true church established by the Lord Jesus Christ is our city of refuge, for she is the fullness of Christ (Eph 1:23); there is no other way for us to escape from sin, avoid spiritual death and receive the promised heavenly inheritance (Gal 3:26–29).

Distributed Evenly Throughout the Land

The six cities of refuge were distributed evenly throughout the land (Num 35:13–14), meaning that a fugitive only had to travel one or two days to find refuge.

Also, the path to deliverance in these cities had to be clearly marked out. The same principles apply to the salvation of Christ.

Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). And before He ascended to heaven, He

said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16).

Apostle Paul told the church in Ephesus, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:13–14).

From the words of both Jesus and Paul, we understand that the path to salvation is now clearly marked for all to find. Those who approach the city of refuge—God’s church—need to enter the door with faith. Having faith means obeying Jesus to receive regeneration through water baptism and renewal through the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5)—the only way to justification and sanctification.

Refuge for All

According to the Law of Moses, any Israelite, foreigner or sojourner who killed someone accidentally could seek asylum in the cities of refuge (Num 35:15). This point highlights the universal nature of God’s salvation, evident even in the Old Testament period. For example, from Noah’s story and the Book of Jonah, we learn that God’s grace extended to the Gentiles. Hence, God promised Abraham, “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing...And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:2–3).

God’s universal salvation plan was also repeatedly revealed through the prophets’ messages. Isaiah, for example, prophesied, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it” (Isa 2:2). Also, Habakkuk said, “Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4). His words became the basis of the doctrine of justification by faith that was later expounded by Apostle Paul.

Paul understood the inclusive nature of God’s salvation grace, and he taught

the believers, saying: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:27–29). Consequently, he became a proactive messenger to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7–8).

In summary, even though the Jews were entrusted with God’s truth from the days of old (Rom 3:1), God did not abandon the other nations; He extended His salvation grace to them. In the New Testament era, we, as Gentiles, have received this salvation directly from God through the spiritual city of refuge, which is His church. We have been liberated from the bondage of Satan, and this grace puts an end to punishment.

Those Who Leave Will Be Killed

Although a manslayer could find refuge and protection from the avenger of blood (a person nominated by the family of the deceased to take revenge), there was a crucial condition: he had to remain in the city (Num 35:26–27).

The city of refuge was the sole place of safety. However, the manslayer had to present his case to the elders and repent of his negligence. This process was important because human life is precious and any form of killing, even if accidental, could not be viewed lightly; the manslayer had a duty to ensure that such a thing would not happen again. Furthermore, because his life was at risk from potential avengers, he had to flee to the city of refuge without delay and not attempt to leave. It was only when the high priest passed away that he could safely return home (Num 35:28).

The above points offer several teachings. Firstly, the people of the world face judgment for their sins, and anyone who delays entering the city of refuge will be in danger of losing his life. Secondly, Jesus Christ is our high priest who bore the sins of mankind. On account of His death, we have obtained life and freedom. But we can only be assured of eternal life and safety if we remain in His love. If we fail to do so, we will once again find ourselves under the bondage of sin

(2 Pet 2:20). We will no longer have access to grace or refuge. We should therefore depart from sin and treasure the salvation found within the city of refuge. It is there that we can wait for the high priest to deliver us from the sufferings of this life and take us to the eternal city, our heavenly home.

CONCLUSION

The law of God is both stringent and humane, evident from God’s regulations concerning the cities of refuge, which offered asylum to those who had killed accidentally. These cities highlight the careful planning, wisdom and grace behind God’s salvation. They also reveal that the spiritual city of refuge is His church. As Jesus Christ died to atone for our sins, we who have been redeemed by His blood must remain in the church and abide in His grace. We must also call upon the people of the world to enter the true church without delay, so that they can escape from God’s wrath and have the hope of eternal life. ★

1 Strong’s reference number: H6943.

2 Hebrew, *qades*. Strong’s reference number: H6942.

3 “Shechem” in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

4 Strong’s reference number: H7927. The same as H7926.

5 Strong’s reference number: H7926. *Ibid*.

6 Merrill F. Unger, “Hebron” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

7 *Ibid*.

8 “Golan” in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 1 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

9 Strong’s reference number: H1474. From *golah* (H1473), meaning “captive.”

10 “Golan” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Volume 2, D–G, ed., Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

11 “Ramoah-Giliead” in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

12 Strong’s reference number: H7216.

13 Strong’s reference number: H1221.

14 Hebrew, *batsar*. Strong’s reference number: H1219.

Four Families in the Apostolic Church (IV): Priscilla and Aquila

Derren Liang— Irvine, California, USA



IV. PRISCILLA AND AQUILA'S FAMILY—A FAMILY FOR ALL

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

(Acts 18:1–2)

Here Paul met a couple, Aquila and Priscilla—a unique family, for their house was actually a church (cf. Rom 16:5). Aquila and Priscilla are an ideal Christian family and illustrate the greatest goal for a Christian family: to act as a church—a place where people feel warm and where everyone wants to be.

A Home Away from Home

Paul dedicated his life to bringing the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. At Corinth, where he first met Aquila and Priscilla, there were many souls to be harvested for the Lord (cf. Acts 18:4, 8). However, he also faced considerable opposition (Acts 18:6) and probably experienced moments of discouragement or fear. Clearly, a critical factor that helped pull Paul

through such moments, supplying him with resilience and courage to continue proclaiming God's word through the one and a half years in Corinth, was the Lord's reassurance, especially given through a vision (Acts 18:9–10). A second key factor was the fellowship he enjoyed at the home of this couple. Burdens shared are burdens lightened (Eccl 4:9). In Paul's case, he could always be sure to find emotional and spiritual support from co-workers who knew him well and would always provide a sanctuary for him. And he was grateful to the Lord for enabling Aquila and Priscilla to be part of his life.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

(Rom 16:3–4)

The movies occasionally glorify the emotionally strong, self-sufficient loner hero who triumphs over huge odds and innumerable foes stacked against him. But in our spiritual battles, there is no need for us to “go it alone.” Evidently, even an apostle like Paul, whom most would associate with great spiritual strength and stamina, needed comfort and support from brethren. From the

long list of personal greetings that Paul sends in Romans 16, we can see that he was thankful not only for the Corinth-based couple who loved him so much they were prepared to risk their lives for him, but also for many who had made him part of their families, Rufus' mother (Rom 16:13) and Gaius (Rom 16:23), for instance. We can feel his joy too at the “fellowship in the gospel” provided by the Philippians who constantly interceded for his evangelistic work (Phil 1:3–5).

Therefore, if God has blessed us with wonderful loving families, let us extend such love to our brethren who are laboring in the field by providing them with a home away from home. Beyond the material, intercessory support is also very important. Do not think that the strong and the actively-serving need no further affection or prayer. In fact, Satan may be even more determined to attack them and/or their families just to derail the progress of divine work. So let us learn from the Lord Jesus' concern and prayer for Peter (Lk 22:31–32), and constantly keep our ministers and workers in our prayers.

On the other hand, let us not limit the hospitality and care for our brethren to “high-profile” visitors. Look around you. Are there brothers and sisters who are sole believers, who may welcome

our concern for and interest in their families? Are there students or members working away from home who may appreciate an invitation to dinner with our families? Are there visitors from abroad who may be touched when we, the local members, greet them warmly and spend time to chat with them?

Let us not be content with giving brethren a distant nod when we meet them. In the apostolic era, the church was in the homes of believers, e.g., Priscilla and Aquila or Nymphas (Col 4:15). Today, let us take the first step to recreate the home in the church by infusing it with familial warmth and sincere concern.

A Home within a Home

Besides providing familial warmth, the exemplary Christian home should also be the place where others can find spiritual help and guidance. In most modern societies, given the general rise in affluence, it is less common to find members who need material assistance. Instead, many more require spiritual guidance and help.

(a) Guidance

When Priscilla and Aquila met the eloquent Apollos and listened to him (Acts 18:24–26), they realized that he had an incomplete understanding of the truth. They could have just shaken their heads and said, “Such a pity! If this outstanding orator had the right concepts, he could have been a good worker for the Way...” and done nothing more. But this couple’s further actions demonstrate their emulation-worthy attributes. They were not just people with much love for others; they also knew the Scriptures so well that they recognized Apollos had been “taught accurately the things of the Lord.” What’s more, they were prepared to invest time and effort to study the word of God with Apollos so that he could learn and subsequently preach the complete gospel.

Their simple act of spiritual concern had great multiplier effects—it not only

saved Apollos but many more in the future who benefited from Apollos’ eloquent evangelism (cf. Acts 18:26).

(b) Assistance

Today, when believers face spiritual problems or hardship in life, who can they turn to? Who can help to counsel and guide them back onto the correct path when they need comfort and help the most? Logically, fellow church members should be the natural source of comfort for one another. However, many members prefer to turn to external help when their spiritual lives hit a downturn—friends in the world or self-help books. Unfortunately, when they turn to external sources for help, they run the risk of receiving advice that may be counter to their faith.

Hence, every church must strive to cultivate families like Priscilla and Aquila who provide a secure “home within a home.” Like loving parents or siblings, they nurture and take care of the weak and needy in a discreet and trustworthy way. When more families willingly open up their hearts and homes to others and invite members who live nearby or who need spiritual support, this warmth will definitely spread throughout the church (cf. Acts 16:15).

Then Jesus said to them “Children, have you any food?”... Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it and bread... Jesus said to them, “Come and eat breakfast.”... Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.

(Jn 21:5–13)

In their weakness, Peter and the other disciples returned to their original occupations after Jesus’ crucifixion. Appearing to them, the Lord’s words were not of stern rebuke but of gentle concern—an expression of love that would continue to long motivate His disciples.

Families who bring warmth and

comfort to those in need can impact more lives than any sermon that is spoken on the pulpit. We need more families to open up their houses to be a church and home for others. Not only does this strengthen our church, it will be a beautiful example of love, which can inspire our children to do the same.

Conclusion

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul has predicted that men’s love will grow cold. The challenge before families in the true church today is how to keep this coldness from pervading our own households as well as the household of God. Like the tent-making couple Aquila and Priscilla, let us make our home a place of trust, refuge, and warmth for everyone. ★

Today, let us take the first step to recreate the home in the church by infusing it with familial warmth and sincere concern.



Church Unity

Yung-Ji Lin—Taichung, Taiwan

Translated from *Holy Spirit Monthly*, Issue: 425

In recent years, scholars have begun to take an interest in the True Jesus Church and her development. To this end, the development of the True Jesus Church was included in the agenda of an international discussion on religions held in 2012.

A common understanding regarding the church and her teachings is vital. Erroneous teaching leads people away from God, and we cannot be complacent in these last days because the devil incessantly seeks to destroy the church of God. The apostolic church started to deteriorate around 100 A.D. But Paul had already warned them earlier, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:6–8).

What is precious about the True Jesus Church is our uncompromising faith in the Bible because we believe that the word of the Lord never changes. We accept what the Bible says and we have indeed experienced the blessings promised by God.

The True Jesus Church has been

established for nearly a century now. We have witnessed the development of the true church and its establishment in over sixty different countries and regions; this is truly the grace of God. However, as the church grows, she faces a great challenge today, which are increased attacks from the evil one; he divides believers by altering the truth and tarnishes the image of church organization, which, in turn, causes the believers to lose their faith and trust in the true church. Faced with such challenges, we ought to rely on the Lord and His great power to be strong to withstand the devil's schemes. We must remind churches everywhere to hold fast to the truth and pursue unity in the truth in order to be victorious over the devil's ploy.

So important was the unity of the church to Paul that even in the midst of his imprisonment, this issue preoccupied him. Therefore, Paul provided specific guidance with regard to church unity saying, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1–3).

From Paul's teachings we know that

we ought to pursue unity so that we will be worthy to receive salvation. How then do we go about pursuing this? Paul proposes five key points:

I. HUMILITY

The humility of believers promotes church unity.

The people of the world live in sin, surrounded by dissension, hatred, murder, and disharmony. The Lord Jesus understands the misery of humankind and knows that the only way for man to live a blissful life is to remove the evil in man's heart.

To redeem man from sin, He humbled Himself and came into the world as a man. To shoulder the sins of mankind, He submitted to the will of the heavenly Father—to undergo crucifixion, shedding His blood for the redemption of mankind, so that whosoever desires to receive the grace of salvation can be reconciled with God. We ought to emulate the Lord's humility and submit to the truth. Only thus can we be reconciled with our brethren and attain church unity (cf. Phil 2:6–8).

Without humility, there is no submission to the truth. Different people insist on their different concepts of serving God, leading to dissension and division within the church. A humble

person respects God's guidance; if his opinion does not receive general concurrence, he will wait patiently for God's time, believing firmly that God is in charge (cf. Isa 2:4).

For example, if a person has a new understanding of the church's beliefs, deems it to be consistent with the truth and wishes to advocate this new perspective, he should first raise this for discussion in the church's "Truth Research Meeting." However, if the subsequent discussion does not yield any consensus and concurrence on this new view, the proponent has to learn to wait patiently for God's time, submit to the stipulation of the church and not proclaim a teaching that has not become part of the church's common beliefs. This is humility. Believing that God has His time, we ought to hold firm to the belief that the Spirit of truth will guide us into unity in all truth (Jn 16:13). A united church is one where everyone humbles himself before God and submits to the leadership of the church with neither discontentment nor complaint (Eph 4:13).

II. GENTLENESS

Gentleness amongst believers will also promote church unity.

Gentleness is a characteristic that falls between the two extremes of being easily angered and never getting angry. In other words, a gentle person gets angry only when there is cause to be angry, e.g., for the truth's sake, not wanting others to be deceived and to lose their spiritual life. In other situations, when the truth is not concerned, a gentle person can keep himself or herself away from anger.

The Lord Jesus was an extremely gentle person and lowly in heart (Mt 11:29). He was not offended by Nathanael's unreasonable criticism but even praised Nathanael as a true Israelite in whom was no deceit. His gentleness won Nathanael's heart. Yet the gentle Lord could lose His temper, and on one occasion, He even became extremely furious. So great was His fury that He made a whip of cords in the holy temple, drove out the oxen and sheep, poured out the changers' money and overturned their tables. All because these traders had made the Father's house a house of merchandise (Jn 2:13–17).

We have to rely on prayer and submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will allow us to realize our inner shortcomings, help us change ourselves and learn humility, gentleness, perseverance, love, and peace. Only then can we bring about church unity.

Moses was another very humble man. When his authority was challenged, he was neither angry nor defensive. Instead, he placed the matter entirely in the hands of God (cf. Num 16:1–5). In contrast, when the people went against God to worship the golden calf, he burnt with such great anger for the truth that he cast down the tablets he had just received from God and broke them. God was also incensed and wanted Moses to execute these rebellious people (Ex 32:7–10, 19–21).

Thus we can see that being gentle and lowly at heart does not mean that we are not allowed to get angry. When someone deceives others and leads them away from the truth and the church, we must not keep silent. Instead, we must vigorously defend the truth and courageously take a firm stand to deal with the person who misleads other believers into departing from the truth. In short, where the truth is concerned, no compromise should be made lest the truth be distorted and the unity of the church be destroyed.

On the other hand, we need not lose our temper over matters that do not concern the truth:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

(Rom 12:17–19)

Gentleness and humility means being able and willing to suffer loss and being taken advantage of in situations that do not involve the truth. When we understand the true meaning of being gentle, we will be able to defend the truth; the church will then be united in the truth.

III. ENDURANCE

The endurance of believers can also promote church unity.

Envy, strife, criticism, and judging are inevitable in church, for we are all still human. While we may wonder how these things can happen in the true church of God, this should not cause us to doubt the church. All these negative incidents still occur because the level of spirituality varies amongst believers: some are like babes who are prone to envy and strife (1 Cor 3:1–3); some are like children who are susceptible to deception (Eph 4:14); but there also those who are spiritually mature and able to discern between good and evil (Heb 5:14).

Let us not quibble with weaker believers but patiently guide them as parents so that they will grow in the truth. When all of us have matured and become full-grown spiritual adults, the church will truly attain unity in the truth.

IV. LOVE

Love amongst believers will promote church unity.

When we meet with believers who are weak, not only do we need to be patient, we also have to help them grow.

The Lord Jesus said, "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Mt 5:39). This "evil person" refers to a person who is spiritually immature. When someone slaps us on our right cheek, let us not set ourselves against him but instead be patient and avoid retaliation. We are also told to "turn the other cheek to him"—what does this mean? From the subsequent part of the passage we can understand its meaning. The Lord Jesus said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." In other words, we are to return good for evil—this is

clearly much more difficult to do than just physically “turning the other cheek to him.”

Once there was an officer who struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” Jesus did not retaliate after being struck, but the evil one perversely continued persecuting Jesus. Eventually, the Lord Jesus was crucified. But amidst extreme suffering, Jesus still prayed to the heavenly Father, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Out of love, the Lord Jesus was forbearing with those who persecuted Him.

Within the church we ought to learn to bear with those who ill-treat us, even if they demand a yard after taking an inch. Let us not set ourselves against them but instead trust that “vengeance belongs to God, God will repay.” Perhaps there will come a day when their hearts are touched by God and they become repentant.

We believe that only love can melt away every kind of difficulty. For example, historically, the love of Christ contributed to the abolishment of slavery; therefore we ought to forbear the ignorance of others through love and guide them in the path of truth. This will promote unity in the truth, which, in turn, facilitates church growth.

V. PEACE

If believers seek to live peaceably with each other, there will be church unity.

When someone offends us, not only should we forbear his ignorance out of love for him, we ought to communicate peaceably with him.

The Lord Jesus said, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Mt 18:15). This is how we pursue harmony with a peaceable attitude.

If the person who offends us refuses to heed our advice, let us not lose heart. Let us take one or two more spiritually sound brethren along to advise him or her, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established (Mt 18:16). This is a more

positive way of dealing with conflicts. Furthermore, if the person who offends us has his conscience blinded such that he hardens his heart and refuses to heed any advice, we should then communicate this to the church and allow the church to handle the matter (Mt 18:17). We ought to avoid willfully bringing the disagreement or conflict to the court, much less broadcast the matter to the general public who, not understanding the full context, may make erroneous judgments (1 Cor 6:1–8). Entrusting resolution to third parties outside the church is a reflection of distrust in and disrespect for the church.

We ought to trust the church as the Lord Jesus had once said, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 18:18). The church is the body of Christ, and she is different from other organizations in society. God entrusted spiritual authority to the church so that she can baptize people for the remission of sins and also hold the authority to maintain discipline within the church.

We need to be alert to the warning signs. A person blinded by sin loves to broadcast to the uninformed general public. To hold the thought that any misunderstanding can be solved on the social media is falling right into the devil’s trap. For people who are blinded by sin have ceased to accept any advice given by other brethren, and they despise the way the church handles the conflict involving them. Instead, they hope to create confusion on the social media by presenting a warped version of the church’s well-meaning explanations, causing other believers to be dragged along by the evil one and be overcome.

Therefore the Lord Jesus said, “But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Mt 18:17).

When there are conflicts among brethren, all ought to submit to the teachings of the Lord in handling such matters. We earnestly believe that this is the way to bring about church unity.

CONCLUSION

After Paul had presented the five important points that promote church unity, he gave us this further

encouragement, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

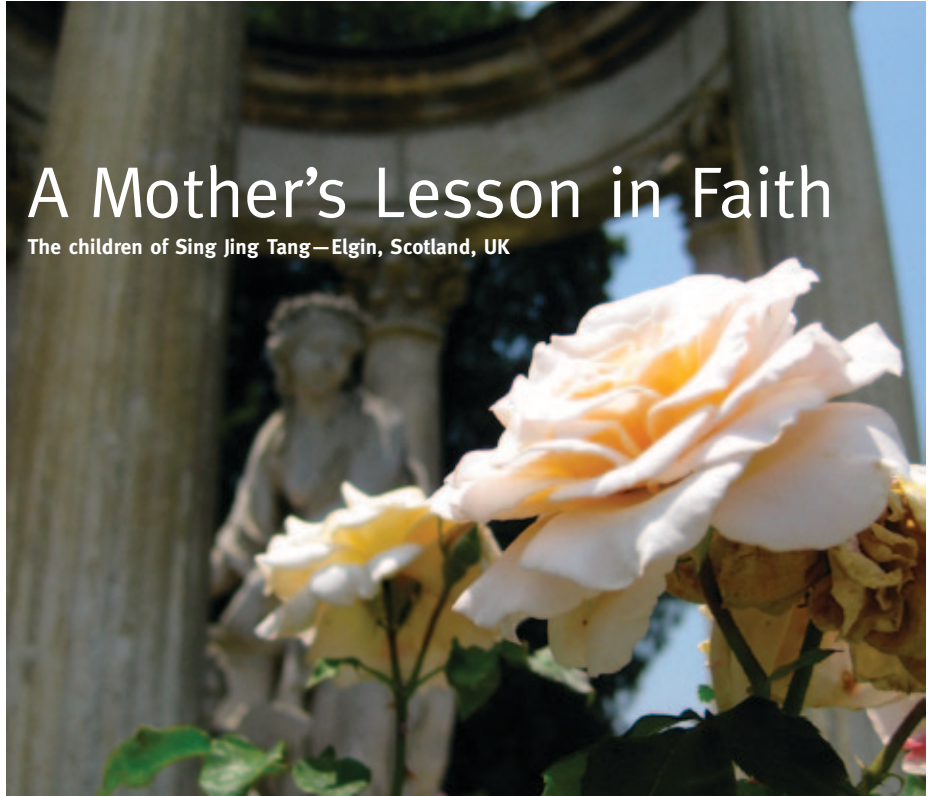
Church unity is a gracious blessing that the Holy Spirit bestowed upon us long ago. However, such unity is difficult to maintain and may even be easily lost. We must do our best to preserve it. Just as couples take up the responsibility of preserving the blissful marriages that God has given them, even more so we should all do our best to preserve church unity.

How do we do our utmost to preserve church unity? Church unity is preserved by relying on the Holy Spirit and cannot be developed through man’s will. When a man falls short of the glory of God, he will turn arrogant and self-righteous, and he will manifest the bitter envy and contention in his heart in various ways (Rom 3:23; Jas 3:14–18). Therefore, we have to rely on prayer and submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will allow us to realize our inner shortcomings, help us change ourselves and learn humility, gentleness, perseverance, love, and peace. Only then can we bring about church unity. Through this process, we will better understand the power of the Holy Spirit and rely on Him to defend ourselves against the ploys of the evil one. Simultaneously, we ought to make an effort to learn and understand the Bible, emulate Jesus in using the word of God to resist the devil, to uphold the truth and agree with the true church. In this way, Satan will not stand a chance to work.

When the church is united, she will make great leaps in her growth. We shall enjoy the same experience as the church in Jerusalem—we will be preserved by the Holy Spirit to be united as one and have favor with all the people. And the Lord will add to the church daily those who are being saved (Acts 2:46–47). ★

A Mother's Lesson in Faith

The children of Sing Jing Tang—Elgin, Scotland, UK



FACING TRIALS

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we testify.

"It's cancer"... the words that strike fear in countless families. Now, it was our family's turn to battle with cancer in a loved one. Our mother had been experiencing discomfort in her intestinal area for a while. She underwent a colon examination in Scotland and was told there were no problems. Still, she felt something was not right. So when she and our father had their annual stay in Hong Kong in January 2012, we persuaded her to seek another doctor's opinion.

A gastroenterology specialist arranged an endoscopy to investigate her entire intestinal tract. Our mother originally opted to test only the upper intestine but was persuaded to undergo a complete examination. A three-centimeter mass was found in her colon. Luckily, our mother had agreed to the full examination, the specialist said, otherwise they would have missed the tumor.

The next step was to determine if the tumor was malignant or benign. One week later, the results came in. Our parents encouraged us to pray silently and to accept the results, no matter what they were. The specialist reported that the tumor was malignant and

they would have to check if there were more cancerous cells. In the taxi home, no one spoke as we tried to come to terms with what the future might hold for her and our whole family. We called our brother, anxiously waiting back in Scotland. Saying aloud that it was cancer finally made it real to us, and we all broke down in tears. Our father went into his room and closed the door. Yet our mother just went into the kitchen and started preparing dinner as usual. When we checked on our father, we found him sitting on the bed, sobbing silently. That was only the second time we had ever seen him cry. Our mother put her arms around him, telling him (and us) to be strong, for there was still hope.

By the quiet power of her faith, our mother was the comforter instead of the one who needed comfort. She was the one facing cancer, and yet she was the one with the most hope and serenity. We always knew our mother's faith in God was strong and steadfast, but now seeing it in action was touching, remarkable, and inspiring. She set a wonderful example for us as a parent and as a Christian. Her faith in God was so steadfast that she did not cry once over her illness. If she could be so positive, how could we be anything less? She stated that

nobody wants this illness, but it falls to us now to face it with faith. Where was her faith if she murmured against God asking, "Why me?" If she were to doubt now, in what has she believed all these years? She wanted us to accept that whatever the future held for her, it must be according to God's will. Was she scared? She said she couldn't and shouldn't be afraid if she trusted God and had her family behind her.

STRENGTH THROUGH GOD'S SPIRIT AND WORD

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (Ps 46:1)

As the news of my mother's illness spread, we received much encouragement from the prayers, concern, and good wishes of our brethren around the world. A preacher suggested we hold family services to strengthen us. We would sing a hymn, read and share a chapter of Psalms, and then pray. When we reached the famous Psalm 23, the beautiful words were particularly poignant and relevant to us:

...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
(Ps 23:4)

Our mother was experiencing this walk herself and by extension, our whole family was too. Yet God's words told us to keep walking without fear, for our loving, almighty Lord was with us every step of the way. Through God's word and our long prayers, it seemed that we were actually doing something constructive to deal with our ordeal.

It was also comforting to know that many people were walking along with us. In our parents' home church in Elgin, the members prayed for our mother and some members even fasted. Each day, our parents would join Elgin Church's morning service by reading the same chapter from the Bible and praying for the same duration. Brethren and family may have been separated by distance and time but they were together in spirit and united in the same cause.

Our mother had to undergo further

tests and scans to see if there were more tumors in her body. Each time she underwent a procedure, she would ask God for courage and the will to endure. Each time we dreaded what the results would show. We wavered between thinking the worst and trying to be optimistic. Throughout all this, our mother was her usual calm self, maintaining her habit of morning Bible reading and prayers.

Thank God, we were told that the cancer had not spread to other parts of her body. The tumor in her colon, however, had to be removed and the surrounding tissues had to be checked. We were told that, as with all surgeries, there were risks with recovery and infection.

By the quiet power of her faith, our mother was the comforter instead of the one who needed comfort. She was the one facing cancer, and yet she was the one with the most hope and serenity.

We knew there were long public hospital waiting lists and that if we opted for private care, the potential costs could be astronomical. There was much to consider and organize. Where could we start? As we faced each new hurdle, we could only keep praying and hoping for God's mercy and guidance.

GOD'S GUIDANCE AND GRACE

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

(Prov 3:5-6)

At every stage, we found that our loving Lord did not fail us. Surely, it must have been God's arrangement that the old primary school teacher on our parents' home island, Ap Chau, had a son who was an oncologist in Hong Kong. After a consultation with him in the morning, he arranged for our mother to be registered at a well-known hospital through his contacts that same afternoon.

The following week, the hospital's colorectal surgery team examined our mother. She was then approved for

surgery and placed on the waiting list. Furthermore, they said that only keyhole surgery was needed, which was much less invasive. We had heard that local patients in our mother's situation could wait up to two years for surgery. Yet we were told to expect a surgery date within the next four to six weeks!

Everything proceeded well, beyond our expectations. In our weakness, slight doubts started creeping in when we did not receive a confirmed operation date. Once again, when we started to become anxious, our mother remained quietly patient and faithful that God would arrange.

God's grace is indeed great and more than we deserve. It turned out our

mother went into hospital on the day that one of us began a two-week Easter break from school. We could make the long daily trips between home and the hospital with our father, keep him company, and help our mother before and after surgery. God's wonderful arrangement enabled us to do this without the added stress of juggling work commitments and requesting leave.

Thank God, after a successful operation and a week's recuperation, our mother was discharged. We decided to have lunch in the hospital canteen before taking a taxi home. Whenever we got up to leave, she would tell us to wait a little longer. Later, she told us that she had a feeling she should not leave. Then, on our way out, she suddenly collapsed and fainted in the hospital lobby. Thankfully we were supporting her at the time, so she did not fall and hurt herself. Our mother had to be readmitted, but, by God's arrangement, she had collapsed in the same hospital, so her records were on file for doctors to follow. If she had fainted in the taxi, we would not have been able to get her help straightaway. If she had collapsed at home, she would have been admitted

into a different district hospital, which would not have her medical history.

Our mother had to stay overnight in the general ward. Although it was sad to see her undergo more discomfort, it was yet another part of God's providential arrangement. After various tests, the doctors said our mother's collapse was due to her anti-hypertension medication. Consequently, her medication was adjusted and reduced. Our mother had been worried about her levels of medication, and now, through God's blessing, her worries were resolved.

The final hurdle was whether our mother needed chemotherapy. We were told that the tumor had been caught early. It was growing on the surface of the colon wall and had not penetrated beneath, so no chemotherapy was required. She was now clear of cancer, although she would need regular check-ups in the future. We praise and thank God.

After years of training her faith, our mother had succeeded. When tested, she prevailed and was not found wanting. We thank God for the blessing He bestowed upon our mother and for her example of faith in adversity. Our family experienced God's power and grace and learned to entrust. We also thank everyone who sustained us through their prayers and words of encouragement. May all glory be given to our almighty Lord Jesus, who holds not only life and death in His hands, but also mercy and grace. ★

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The screenshot shows the newsletter interface for 'the true vine' by True Jesus Church. The header includes the church's logo and website URL. The main content area is titled 'April 2013' and features several articles with accompanying images. The first article, 'An Admirable Faith', discusses Joshua's leadership. The second, 'Living a Meaningful College Life', addresses student challenges. The third, 'The Broken Glass', uses a metaphor for life's fragility. The fourth, 'On the Origin of Footwashing', discusses a religious custom. A footer encourages readers to share the newsletter if they find it valuable.

If you would like to receive a monthly supply of spiritual encouragement, please subscribe to our e-newsletter, The True Vine! You will find helpful articles and testimonies to uplift your faith, and this electronic version is both easily accessible and available for your convenience.



The Great Physician

Lock Chin Wong—Sydney, Australia

The professor picked up the results of my angiogram. He had ordered this final check before we went in for stent surgery. The surgery was critical for me as my artery had been diagnosed as ninety-five percent blocked. This very experienced surgeon looked utterly surprised. He turned to me, "The blocked artery can't be found; have you healed yourself?"

Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I bear testimony. Thanks to the mercy of God, I am able to share His wonderful grace with you.

COUGH, CLOT AND CHEST PAINS

In January 2009, I suffered a harsh cough and felt very uncomfortable. I went to see a general practitioner (GP) who then sent me for an X-ray; the X-ray result showed a dark shadow in my lung. The doctor said that an old scar probably caused the shadow, and he prescribed some antibiotics.

On January 19, while out for a walk with my grandson, I felt dizzy and so physically uncomfortable that I went to see the GP again. This time the GP immediately gave me a referral to see a lung specialist.

Two days later, the lung specialist suggested that I undergo a CT scan. While I was driving home after my

appointment, the specialist rang and urged me to go to the emergency ward of the hospital straight away—they had found a blood clot in my lung.

When I reached the emergency ward, the doctor checked and confirmed there was indeed a blood clot in my lung. After this test, I had intense pain in my chest, and I found it very difficult to breathe. The doctor told me that the blood clot would not cause such pain. He immediately diagnosed this as a heart problem and prescribed medicine to thin my blood viscosity.

On the evening of January 22, I was transferred to the cardiac ward. That night, worried by this series of events, I turned to the Bible to find comfort in the word of God. Peace came into my heart when I read:

And these signs will follow those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

(Mk 16:17–18)

The next day, the doctor decided to do an angiogram. An intern was assigned to do this. I recall that the tube

that was to be inserted into my vein was as thick as a straw. As my veins were very thin, the intern had difficulty finding my veins. His repeated attempts caused severe bruising of my veins and so much pain that I prayed to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, I know your suffering on the cross was much greater than the pain I have now, but please have mercy on me." Suddenly, the pain was gone!

A BLOCKED ARTERY DISCOVERED

The angiogram showed that I had a blocked artery; about ninety-five percent of my right artery was blocked. According to the doctor, the best treatment would be a simple dose of aspirin to dilute the blood viscosity. Unfortunately, I was severely allergic to aspirin, so I was in a dilemma. Should I proceed with the next stage treatment? There was an alternative drug that they could and did put me on. However, the specialist said that aspirin was still most effective. The drug allergy specialist thus suggested that I start with a small dosage and then gradually increase the dose if I could tolerate the drug.

From January 24–26, the doctor in the emergency ward was off-duty, and it was left to the nurses to monitor my condition. I had two injections in the stomach and took oral medication every day. During that weekend,



Sis. Lock Chin Wong

family, friends, and church brethren visited me. Also, the ministers came to pray and lay hands on me. With their intercession, I knew that God would take care of me and be with me.

On January 27, the drug allergy specialist came by. He said that besides using aspirin to thin my blood viscosity, I would need to undergo stent surgery to address my heart problem. By God's grace, I was by then able to take the smaller dosage of aspirin without my normal allergic reaction; it truly was as if my aspirin allergy had gone. In fact, I even testified to a friend who visited me how God had healed my allergic reaction towards aspirin. She was skeptical and questioned me, "If your God is so marvelous, why don't you ask God to heal your blocked artery, and you can then avoid the operation." At that moment, I could only pray to God to open her heart.

On the evening of February 1, the church ministers visited me again. Before they left, we prayed together. When they laid hands on me, I felt a warm wave coming from above—going from my head to my feet, and my whole body became warm. I felt comforted and very relaxed. After the ministers left, I slept really well that night.

GRACE AND PEACE

My surgery was scheduled for February 2. The surgeon was a very experienced professor. Before the surgery, he came by and told me that the surgery was absolutely necessary to clear the blockage in my right artery. However, he also warned me that since the walls of my veins were thinner than normal,

the stent operation was also more risky for me. He asked if I was afraid. I told the professor that I was not and would like to proceed with the operation. In my heart, I prayed to God and asked for His guidance for a smooth operation. I did not want to be paralyzed and asked the Lord to keep me according to His will. I then signed the surgery consent form.

To be extra cautious, the professor did another angiogram to check the condition of my blocked artery. When the results came, he looked at it and turned to me in surprise, "The blocked artery can't be found; have you healed yourself?" The nurse quipped, "Have you performed a magic trick?" I replied to both of them, "This is the grace of the Lord."

"If your God is so marvelous, why don't you ask God to heal your blocked artery, and you can then avoid the operation."

On February 3, the doctor came to check on me. He gave me the all clear and said I could be discharged from the hospital. All I needed to do afterward was to take some medicine for the blood clot in the lung area.

Thank the grace of God; my health is now much better than before.

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(2 Cor 12:9)

My testimony ends here—may all the glory and honor be unto God's name. Amen. ★



Miraculous Escape from Shipwreck

C.G. Chen—Taiwan

Adapted from *Holy Spirit Monthly*—Issue 423

Hallelujah, in the name of Jesus Christ, I bear this testimony. On March 19, 2012, at 2:42 a.m., gravel ship Haixiang 8 set off towards Hualien Harbor, carrying about 4700 tons of earth and a total of fifteen crew members.

I worked as a helmsman on board. That night, I was on duty from 12:00 midnight to 4:00 a.m. At about 3:45 a.m., the next crew member (who happened to be my cousin) took over. Before I handed over my shift duties, the captain specifically reminded me to pay attention to the tilt angle on the right side of the ship.

After returning to the bedroom from the cockpit, I prayed and went to bed. Somehow I was filled with a foreboding and dared not fall asleep. Unexpectedly, about half an hour later, I heard the captain's announcement: "Attention all crew, wear your life jackets and report to the cockpit to receive further instructions!" The captain also told my cousin to rush to every bedroom to wake up all the crew members. The crew bedrooms were two to four floors below deck, which meant all the members were in great danger.

When I heard the radio announcement, I knew that disaster had struck. In panic, I hurriedly put on

my diving suit, stuffed some important documents and a bottle of mineral water into my pockets, and pulled on the life jacket as I ran upstairs. It was then about 4:45 a.m., and the ship had already tilted fifteen degrees to the right. Sensing the critical situation, the captain had already alerted the Port Authority Coast Guard to summon help.

My cousin, who had experienced shipwreck before, immediately ordered us to head to the stern (the rear part of the ship) to escape. Seeing that the ship was about to capsize, we held tight to the barrier cables and swayed with the vessel. The ship was traveling at seven knots, and it went bow first into the water. The hull of the ship looked as though it would also sink in a mere six seconds. Everything was a stunning repeat of the sinking of the legendary Titanic, except that our ship was going under at an alarming speed.

Just before the ship sank, my cousin shouted: "Jump! Jump!" and disappeared as he leapt into the water. As I was about to jump, the front cable came loose and dangled down. I hesitated and waited for the cable to detach completely for fear of being entangled by the cable. Once the cable was completely detached, I released my grip on it and jumped into the water

shouting: "Hallelujah, Lord! Save me!"

When I entered the water, a powerful wave of water swept me far away from the sinking bow of the ship. Before I knew it, I was just next to my cousin. When I touched his shoulder, he turned around and was shocked to see me. He said: "Are you such a good swimmer you could catch up with me so quickly?!" My cousin had been swimming desperately away from the ship since hitting the water.

As seamen, we had often heard veterans explain how a sinking ship would create a whirlpool effect and suck everything down with it in a spiral as it sinks into the ocean. That was why everyone had been desperately swimming, trying to get as far away from the sinking ship as possible. As my cousin and I turned around, we saw the lights of the sinking ship disappear. Almost like a movie scene, the whole sea was suddenly plunged into darkness, eerie silence punctuated only by the sound of waves, gusts of wind, interspersed with our shipmates' sorrowful shouts for help.

The temperature of the water was about ten degrees Celsius; the sea waves were about four to six meters high (very rough conditions) while the

wind speed was about sixty to seventy kilometers per hour (equivalent to a gale). The water felt bitterly cold. My cousin and I took out the distress lights from our life jackets and waved them about, hoping to attract attention to ourselves. Not too far away, we spotted some other distress signals, probably from some of our shipmates who were also floating in the sea, struggling to survive while waiting to be rescued. Gradually, these intermittent shrill cries for help became softer. Then it was all quiet, and we could only hear the sound of the waves and the raging winds. My cousin muttered: “Dead!” At this point, I was both sad and terrified, and I felt myself trembling helplessly.

My cousin and I were wearing wetsuits, anti-freeze caps and lifejackets, and all these had temporarily kept us warm. We redoubled our efforts to swim farther away from the shipwreck site, all the while praying, “Dear Lord, save us!” I thought to myself, “I have fallen so short of the glory of God, how can I face Him now?” I pleaded in my heart, “Dear Lord, give me one more chance, let me do more work for You!” I started to sing the hymn “Jesus Loves Me” over and over, alternating it with prayers of supplication as I swam along. I do not remember now how long this went on.

I was so cold and scared; I could feel my lips trembling and my teeth rattling. So I shouted out the hymn “Lead me, lead me, Savior, lead me, lest I stray; gently down the stream of time...Lead me, Savior, all the way.”

Then, something miraculous happened—a strong wave swept toward us a plank of wood about forty-

I thought to myself, “I have fallen so short of the glory of God, how can I face Him now?” I pleaded in my heart, “Dear Lord, give me one more chance, let me do more work for You!”

five centimeter wide, two hundred fifty centimeter long, and about five centimeter thick. Since I had no energy left to swim towards it, I asked my cousin to swim and grab the piece of wood. Both of us then gripped the plank on both sides with our left arms. This helped us to stay afloat without too much effort, and we could finally relax a little. We continued to pray and sing hymns, and, in our hearts, we were jumping for joy and thankfulness to the Lord Jesus.

About fifteen minutes later, another wave swept over an identical plank of wood, and once again, my cousin retrieved the plank, and we used two instead of one piece of wood for improved stability. At that moment, our distress lights stopped working. We were not sure how long we would have to wait before someone discovered us. So to conserve energy, we did not attempt to swim anymore, but simply let our bodies float in the water, swaying with the waves.

Again I prayed earnestly: “Dear Lord, save us, save us!” I thought of the divine work to be done. Then, after about twenty minutes, another wave brought along a long bench, floating inverted with its legs in the air. Since it was not far from us, I urged my cousin to go grab it for us. When we put the two wooden planks perpendicular to the long bench in between the legs of the bench, the bench suddenly flipped

into an upright position. Amazingly, the two planks remained firmly in place. We quickly “sat” astride the bench. In this way, though our bodies were still immersed in water, our heads were above water and we did not have to risk swallowing more seawater.

After more than an hour, a shimmer of light appeared in the horizon, and the sky started to brighten. We could see the surroundings, and saw that the sea was a dense mass of grease. My cousin said: “When a ship sinks, all the oil and grease will surface to the top.” Indeed, this was true for us; we let out a sigh of shock when we saw that our hands and necks were all covered with black oil.

Soon, the sky had completely brightened. Suddenly we saw a freighter in front of us—Asia Cement No. 3 had come to render help after the distress signals were dispatched. Hope gave us new strength—we waved, shouted for help, and swam energetically towards the freighter. Finally, the crew aboard Asia Cement No. 3 spotted us and threw us life buoys. But the current was too strong, and we could not grab hold of the life buoys. Asia Cement No. 3 then tried to approach us stern side, but the rotation of the rear blades formed strong currents and carried us even farther away from the freight. However, this also meant that the black oil was effectively dispersed from the water around us. Once the freighter realized this difficulty, it decided to remain stationary. Thank God, at this time, although we were still bobbing in the water, the sea around us had been rid of the black oil and grease, so we did not inhale any more toxic fumes.

Finally, at 6:13 a.m., the coast guard rescued my cousin and me. Our hearts were full of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. As it turned out, we were the first crew members to be rescued. The Lord Jesus had preserved us, so we could

Bro. Chen and his cousin are being rescued.



respond to the questions posed by the examining doctors. We went through X-rays, electrocardiogram, blood tests, and blood pressure monitoring. The blood pressure actually soared to two hundred millimeter mercury, but the doctor reassured us and said it was due to the state of fear we had been in, so there was nothing to worry about. After a series of thorough checks, we were diagnosed with aspiration pneumonia.

As for the other crew members, our captain died from hypothermia, while a few of our colleagues who were rescued had to be treated in the intensive care unit. The final tally revealed that, out of fifteen crew members, seven were rescued, six died, and two were still missing.

During our hospitalization, my cousin and I received much care and prayer support from Zheng Bin church. May the Lord Jesus remember their love. I also thank the Lord for somehow arranging for my cousin to be on the same ship with me, for the instruction to run to the stern during the emergency and for providing me

with earlier opportunities to work at sea. The latter had taught me to take precautionary measures during shipwrecks, e.g. putting on a wetsuit, taking along mineral water, and keeping a life jacket by my bed so that it would be ready to be grabbed at a moment's notice.

While we were waiting to be rescued, my cousin and I had drunk mineral water to replenish water in our body. To keep ourselves calm, we sang and prayed together, relying on the promise that God would deliver us. This greatly helped us to overcome the extreme cold and fear and to survive the dark and long night.

Praise the Lord! I was sixty-two years old when the disaster struck, and without God's love and care, I could not have taken only one minute to wear the diving suit, don the lifejacket, and run to the cockpit. It took less than five minutes for the ship to tilt from ten to fifteen degrees, and then to forty-five degrees. In that moment of life and death, God enabled me to calmly see the loosening cable and prevented me from being entangled—what amazing grace!

"But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord!" (Ps 115:18)

May all glory and honor be unto our Lord and Savior. Amen! ★

Want to know if there's a new issue? GET NOTIFIED!

The screenshot shows the Manna website interface. At the top, the word "MANNA" is displayed in large white letters on a blue background. Below it, a mission statement reads: "The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths." There are two main sections: "FOR ARTICLES" on the left and "Manna Survey" on the right. The survey section includes a "SHARE YOUR IDEAS WITH US!" button and a "Click here to begin" link. Below the survey is a "Notify me of a new issue" button. A preview of the "latest issue" is shown, featuring a yellow pencil graphic and the title "Succession: Generation Next". The preview includes a quote: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Tim 2:2) and a description of the World Delegates Conference in 2011. At the bottom of the preview, there is a "Read online" button and a small text snippet: "Two veteran ministers share their views on succession. 'Identify-Equip-Handover' outlines the approach of one writer. He

«« click to get notified



Introduction to the General Assembly of the United States (USGA)

by USGA

The True Jesus Church in the Western Hemisphere was first established in Honolulu, Hawaii, but it was not until 1967, after the first World Delegates Conference in Taiwan, that church activities started in mainland United States (US). Upon their return, two US delegates—a deacon from the east coast and a deaconess from the west coast—began to congregate some members and to spread the gospel.

From the mid-1970s, there was a steady increase of immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong, bringing new momentum to the sacred work in America. To effectively utilize human and financial resources, the US church held its first National Delegates Conference under God's guidance in El Monte, California, from 24–26 July, 1976. At the conference, the Evangelical Coordination Council (ECC) was established to actively mobilize the sacred work in the US.

At the time, the US church did not have any full-time ministers. However, thanks to the arrangement of God, by 1986, three full-time preachers had joined the ministry. To expand His kingdom, God prepared suitable servants at various stages. These workers dedicated their gifts and labored in unity to lay the foundation for the sacred work and church

organization. Under God's gracious guidance, churches were established one after another. In accordance with the by-laws of the International Assembly, the General Assembly of the United States (USGA) was officially established on January 1, 1986, setting a new milestone in the development of the sacred work in the US.

There are currently nineteen churches and six houses of prayer in the US, with a total membership of about 3,460. Most churches started off with foreign students who had a sense of commission. They conducted family services and membership would grow to a point where they were able to establish houses of prayer. When they had church buildings, these officially became churches.

ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS

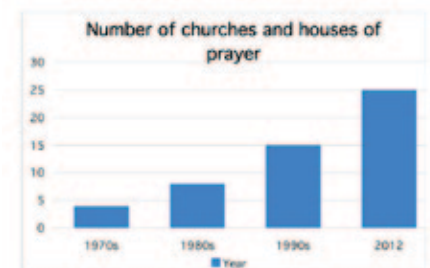
The USGA council comprises eleven council members, including the chairman. There are five departments: the Department of Evangelism, the Department of Pastoral Ministry, the Department of Training, the Department of Literary Ministry, and the Department of Administration. Each department is managed by one director and one or two assistant directors, who are responsible for mobilizing the work of the church on a national level.

Presently, the USGA is subdivided into four regions and one special region (Hawaii). Each region has a regional coordinator, who is responsible for developing the work of the region and coordinating the local ministry and human resources.

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

Growth of the Churches

The graph below shows the number of churches and houses of prayer established since the 1970s. Starting from only four, their numbers have increased steadily over the years. Today, there are twenty-five churches and houses of prayer in the US.

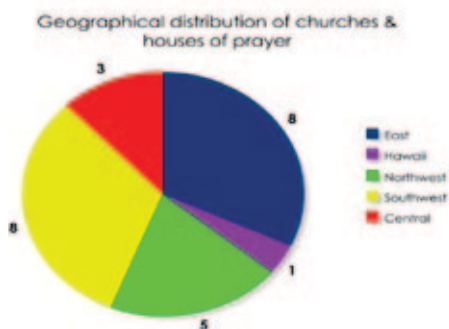


Geographical Distribution of the Churches

The chart below shows the geographical distribution of the churches and houses of prayer in the US. With the exception of one church in Hawaii, the rest are



on the mainland, with the majority (sixteen) located in the southwestern and eastern regions.



CHALLENGES

a. The prevalence of ecumenical views among Christians in America hinders our efforts in preaching the truth. The results from the semi-annual evangelical services and spiritual convocations can be limited. Unless truthseekers receive the Holy Spirit and believers persistently pray and carry out personal evangelism, it is difficult for the church to grow quickly. The pastoral care required for new believers is also challenging. If the church and its workers do not truly pay attention to caring and praying for them, these new members are likely to stop attending church after the first year or so, or to remain weak in faith, unable to mature spiritually. As the end time draws near, people are less inclined to obey the truth of the Bible. Yet, despite the challenge we face in the end time, God's grace is sufficient. We often witness how God miraculously guides His church to overcome these hindrances.

We must pray earnestly, be watchful, continue to ask God to open the door for the gospel, and preach the truth of salvation by the Spirit in season and out of season.

b. The US covers a vast area, and this poses a great challenge to both evangelistic and pastoral work. Most of our churches are in cities. Therefore, it has been difficult to follow up effectively with truthseekers who are from other parts of the US. Although the USGA currently has eleven full-time ministers who are responsible for the twenty-five churches and houses of prayer, we still lack human resources. These ministers usually take care of geographically dispersed churches and therefore find it difficult to carry out pastoral work.

In addition, most members do not live near their local churches, and therefore a large majority attends church services only on Sabbath days.

Hence, we thank the Lord that the USGA launched its English website in February 2012 and its Chinese website in October 2012. Besides church news and announcements, the site also provides members with abundant material for spiritual nourishment at home. Anyone willing to benefit from these resources may take advantage of the content on these websites for daily devotion and strengthening of faith.

c. To train full-time workers for the ministry in the US, the USGA established its theological training program in 1993. To date, there have been seven batches of trainees—a total of nineteen students—from UK, Canada and USA, who have completed the program and been ordained as full-time ministers.

To cater to the needs of the ministry in the US over the next ten years, it will be necessary to recruit five additional trainees to undergo the program, but this will be a challenge. "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." We need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out the workers into the field (Mt 9:37–38).

d. Multimedia content in English is scarce. Information technology has made great strides in recent decades, and the majority of the US population consumes a large variety of media daily. However, most of the church's English publications are still only available in print. Therefore, it is vital to expedite the production of much more multimedia content in the next five years for the purpose of evangelism.

Greater effort to proactively plan for and produce multimedia content that caters to the needs of members and truthseekers in various locales is needed. This will enable us to preach the truth to a global audience more expeditiously.

e. Membership in the US has been predominantly Chinese. However, in recent years, we have seen members from other ethnic groups gradually being added to the church. English is used as the primary language of the

younger generation, even among the Chinese members. Consequently, there is linguistic and cultural diversity in the church.

To reach out to the English-speaking population, various regions have been holding English hymnal evangelical services, locally known as "Hosanna outreach." Some churches also encourage speakers to deliver their messages in English. Based on current trends in the composition of the members, sermons delivered in English look set to become the norm.

Nevertheless, many new believers have testified that language is not the greatest obstacle in evangelism. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even sermons in which English is not used as the primary language can move a person to believe in the Lord. In smaller churches or places of worship where members relate well with one another and the church is like a big family, cultural differences are no longer significant. Only the new culture created in Christ, which incorporates all ethnic groups and transcends differences, can effectively overcome the many hurdles we face in the work of evangelism.

Retracing the footsteps of the True Jesus Church in the United States, we can only thank God for His amazing guidance in the growth of the church. On this land, through sweat and tears, the workers of God have offered their time and effort in numerous areas of holy work. However, regardless of what we may have accomplished, it is the future that is of greatest importance. We pray that the Lord will continue to strengthen the brethren's faith and love. May the Holy Spirit guide the church in its future path, so that the gospel preached by the true church may reach every part of this land and bring glory to the name of God. Amen. ★



Grow in Tears to Reap in Joy— Reflections from a German Youth Fellowship

Heidelberg Youth Fellowship—Heidelberg,
Germany

In 2009, Heidelberg Prayer House formed its first youth fellowship group, with eleven youths aged between eighteen and thirty-three years. Things were not easy in the beginning. We had fears that the fellowship would not survive, let alone grow, due differences in the ages, personalities, and backgrounds of the youths. At first, we had neither clear objectives nor a fixed organization—everything was new to us. Thus, the early days of the youth fellowship were marked by long discussions.

Almost four years on, the fellowship gathers every Sabbath between 6 and 8 p.m. without fail. We have studied a range of topics from the Old to New Testaments, from Bible history to comparative religion etc.

Each member of the youth group has learned to appreciate the fellowship as an opportunity to reinforce his or her faith through deeper study of the Bible and other faith-related topics. Activities and trips have strengthened the youth group as a whole, bringing much joy to the entire church. By God's grace, we have gained much experience through serving God and preaching the gospel together.

In the following paragraphs, seven youths share their personal reflections on the fellowship. We hope this will

encourage other youths around the world and prompt them to think about themselves and their own fellowships.

APPRECIATING THE COMMUNITY IN CHRIST

*"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."
(Acts 2:42)*

The first community in Christ is an example of the perfect church. The brethren gathered with one accord and enjoyed each other's companionship with gladness and simplicity of heart. These people were kept together by the word of God, His love, and prayer. What keeps our youth fellowship together and makes us gather with one accord? Is it just one zealous person within the group who is keeping the group united? Our youth fellowship started through the efforts of a very dedicated youth group leader. But a fellowship cannot last for long if it depends on a single person.

In our case, we were tested after less than a year, when our first group leader had to move away. What kept our group together then, and continues to do so today is that which kept the

first apostolic community together: God's word, His love, and prayer. Each and every one of us must put time and effort into the fellowship. It requires motivation to give and contribute to a group, and this is not natural for most of us. But when we learn to do so, our fellowship will slowly be built up.

Being able to attend a youth fellowship is a gift from God. We should treasure it because there may not always be a youth group in every church. Moreover, as youths, we have a great deal of time for fellowship, but this period of our lives is brief and will soon come to an end. May we find blessings of all kinds in our local youth fellowship, and may God be the one who joins us as one.

- *What is our fellowship based on?*
- *How can we contribute to make it a perfect one?*

STUDYING GOD'S WORD

"... they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11)

Why do truth-seekers and the newly-baptized seem more diligent in studying the Bible than regular church



Being able to attend a youth fellowship is a gift from God. We should treasure it because there may not always be a youth group in every church. Moreover, as youths, we have a great deal of time for fellowship, but this period of our lives is brief and will soon come to an end.

members? They want to know the truth. Desperately. They want to make sure that everything that has been told to them is biblically sound. Thus, they "test all things [and] hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:21). In contrast, some long-time believers are too lazy or are reluctant to search into the words of God; they just accept everything that is preached.

To have a deeply-rooted faith, we must understand what we believe in. Only then can we preach the gospel wholeheartedly, convicted that it is the God-given truth. While fellowships must not replace personal Bible study, our fellowship provides us with the opportunity to search the Scriptures weekly "to find out whether these things [are] so." Not only do we study the basic doctrines, we also have special seminars during which a preacher delivers lessons on certain topics, such as "The flaws of trinity." These are precious opportunities for us because preachers are available in Heidelberg on fewer than ten occasions per year.

- *Have we ever searched the Scriptures with all our hearts in order to find out whether what we believe in is true?*

- *Have we ever experienced the indescribable beauty of God's words?*

SUPPORT

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Prov 17:17)

We all need spiritual friends to support us in times of need. If we do not have anyone to support us in our spiritual battles, we will be easily defeated by the devil and lose our promised inheritance.

To support one another, we need to trust one another and be familiar with one another's circumstances. We can

achieve this through regular fellowship and by opening our hearts to sincerely share and take advice.

Real friendship is built on the truth. By studying the Scriptures together every Sabbath, we strengthen our faith in God and our trust in other members. Every week, we take turns to lead the fellowship sessions. Preparing for the sessions allows us to refine our own faith, so we can help others draw nearer to God. We sometimes discuss topics that have not been covered in sermons in order to gain a better understanding of biblical concepts. Our weekly Bible studies also provide an opportunity for us to reflect on ourselves and to examine whether we have put God's words into practice. As we sit together and learn more about our heavenly Father, we experience harmony, peace, and fun. This atmosphere draws us closer together, so we can identify when and how to help one another.

- *Are you strong enough to edify other children of God?*

- *Are you able to share your problems with others and accept help?*

FELLOWSHIP

"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." (Acts 2:46)

The early apostolic church lived together joyfully and served God with one accord. As the body of Christ, we should be of the same mind (1 Cor 1:10). Doing God's work and attending Sabbath service is more joyful if the church is united.

Besides the weekly fellowship sessions after Sabbath service, we have activities at the prayer house, at one another's homes or outdoors. Our

activities include having barbeques, making dumplings or watching fireworks. These activities often involve the older generation and give us the opportunity to share our faith and lives, laugh together or just enjoy one another's company.

- *When was the last time your whole church joyfully came together?*

- *Are you involved in planning for the next church event?*

TRAVELING

"How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage." (Ps 84:1,5)

Although we love to be in His tabernacle—the church building—we can share God's words and have fellowship elsewhere too. Summer is the best time for outdoor activities; this is also when visitors from different places tend to come, and this gives us the opportunity to take them around Heidelberg city.

In addition, we can travel to other countries and learn from other brothers and sisters.

In March 2011, our youth group made its first journey abroad. We went to Paris for four days, visiting the church and the city. Many of the local brothers and sisters took us around—thank God for their abundant love. We also experienced traveling as a group and representing the church for the first time.

The following year, we visited our brethren in Spain, who are scattered around Barcelona, Madrid and Albacete. Spain is a pioneer area, and volunteer workers, mainly from the German-speaking regions, are regularly sent there to support the pastoral work. During our seven-day trip, we met up with a volunteer worker and helped her conduct a total of five services, fellowships, and Bible studies at three different places—thank God, we gained much from sharing our faith with others.

During both trips, we saw brethren in other places living out their faith under different circumstances, and this also strengthened our own faith. We thank



God for granting us the opportunity to visit our brothers and sisters abroad, to have fellowship with them, and to bond with one another during this precious time. These trips also taught us much about being patient and caring for one another, just as God is patient with us and cares for us.

- Are you prepared to represent your church?
- When was the last time your youth fellowship gathered in one accord to pray, eat and laugh?

CHURCH WORK

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."
(1 Cor 15:58)*

As youths, we are well-placed to give of our time, strength and talents. Every youth in our fellowship participates in regular church work and cleaning duties, but we also have some sessions dedicated to church work in our youth fellowship. Some work has to be done frequently, like changing bed sheets before the convocations, some types of work are unique, such as changing the carpet and wallpaper in the service room, and others happen spontaneously, for example, cleaning areas that we do not have time to clean after the Sabbath service. With a watchful eye, it is easy to spot work that needs to be done and corners in the church that need our attention. The more we involve ourselves in church work, the more we see what needs to be done. Church has become a very familiar place that we care about, just like our homes. While this is good, the real challenge is to learn to take good care of the church in a manner that our fellow workers, the young and the elderly feel comfortable with.

We can achieve this goal if we work, not for ourselves, but for the Lord. He is the reason why we serve and are not discouraged. In the end, when we have done all that the Lord has commanded, may we say: "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do" (Lk 17:10).

- What is your attitude towards church work?

- Has every youth in your church developed the eye of a watchman who watches over the well-being of the church?

EVANGELISM

"And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk 16:15)

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. As soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must preach the gospel diligently, so that more people will know the love, might, and salvation of God.

Although Heidelberg prayer house is small, and material and human resources limited, our youths still have the heart to carry out the great commission.

It is not easy to grow, but if you grow in God, there will be abundant joy on the way.

Soon after the establishment of our youth group, we went out to preach the gospel by singing hymns in the most frequented pedestrian area in Heidelberg's city center. It was tough and challenging because we did not have any experience in this area of work. Relying solely on a pure heart to work for God, we prepared for the "hymnal evangelism." When we faced difficulties, we knelt down and prayed with one accord. Indeed, "as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have" (2 Cor 8:11–12).

Thank God! After this first experience, we started to organize gospel tea fellowships and invited friends to come. Over time, the youths have become more mature and united in evangelism. Only God can unite people; what is impossible with men is possible with God!

- What obstacles stand between us and our mission from God?
- Have you ever experienced the joy of preaching the gospel?

Over the years, God has given and taught us much through our youth fellowship. We have grown and will continue to grow and give of our best according to His will. It is not easy to grow, but if you grow in God, there will be abundant joy on the way. May God guide and unite His youths in every church to help them have a fruitful fellowship. May all glory be unto His name! ★



Service that Is After God's Own Heart

Enoch Hou—Cerritos, California, USA



"[God] said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'" (Acts 13:22)

David was a man after God's own heart. Yet even such a person may serve God in a way that is not according to His will. This can be seen in the events surrounding David's attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem—a lesson for us when serving God. We learn what displeases God even while we serve Him, how heavy a price we have to pay for displeasing God, how to return from error and to continuously adjust our servitude to God's commandments. Most importantly, we learn about the need to change our mindset so that we can truly be people after God's own heart and serve Him even better.

LOVING GOD IS NOT ENOUGH

After years of suffering and persecution, David had finally become king over the whole Israelite nation (1 Chr 12:38–40). His reign had a positive impact on the faith of Israel: one of David's first projects was to bring the ark of God to the new capital, Jerusalem. During the reign of Saul, Israel had not inquired of God. So David hoped to enable and encourage the people to draw near to God once again by bringing the ark to

Jerusalem (1 Chr 13:3–4).

More than sixty years earlier, the ark had been taken away by the Philistines (1 Sam 4:22) and then sent back to Israel because the LORD had made them suffer from tumors. When the Philistines sent the ark of God back to Israel, they put it on a new cart, pulled by two milk cows (1 Sam 6:7). When the cart had crossed the Israelite border and arrived in Beth Shemesh, some of the local people curiously looked into the ark (something not even the high priest was permitted to do) and were subsequently killed by the LORD. Therefore, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh sent God's ark to Kirjath Jearim to Abinadab's house (1 Sam 6:14–15, 19–21; 7:1–2).

Almost seventy years later, David not only wanted to bring God's ark to Jerusalem, he also wished to build a temple for it because the ark had been sitting in a tent ever since the time of Moses. This was a good intention indeed because David was truly concerned about God's ark and the matters of God.

Before embarking on this "project," David consulted all the military men and leaders in Israel about bringing the ark back to Jerusalem. Then he discussed with the people (1 Chr 13:1–2). When everybody agreed with the

idea, David proceeded with his plan. In contrast, David had often inquired of God for instructions before he became the king of Israel (1 Sam 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Sam 5:19, 23). It is therefore surprising that David not only forgot to consult the priests but also forgot to inquire of God, especially in this work that was directly related to God.

On the appointed day, many people came to accompany God's ark from Kirjath Jearim to Jerusalem (1 Chr 13:3–6). In fact, David gathered thirty thousand choice men for this occasion (2 Sam 6:1) and created such pomp that his own glory surpassed the glory of God.

The problem was that David cared very much about men's opinion and used a very democratic way to find a consensus among the people; however, he didn't respect or care about God's law or commandments. If we want to serve God, it is not enough to love God. We have to know God's law; God wants us to serve Him according to His way. Therefore, in all things, we have to seek first the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2).

THE PRICE OF SERVICE THAT DISPLEASES GOD

After they had arrived at Abinadab's house, they set the ark on a new cart



(similar to the Philistines' way) and appointed Uzzah and Ahio to drive the cart (1 Chr 13:7). But when the oxen stumbled and Uzzah touched the ark to support it, God's wrath was aroused. As a result Uzzah was struck to death and David became afraid to bring the ark to Jerusalem; the blessings that were originally to come upon the whole nation were only given to the household of Obed Edom (1 Chr 13:9–14). What had made God so angry?

If we look into Numbers, we will notice that God had originally prescribed a very different way to handle the ark. He especially appointed the sons of Kohath from among the Levites to carry the things that are in the tent of meeting. As a rule, Aaron and his sons had to cover all the holy items, including the ark, before the Kohatites could carry them. If the Kohatites looked at any of the holy things or the ark while they were not covered or if they touched them, they had to die (Num 4:15,18–20).

David and his people did what was contrary to God's will; they did not even inquire about the proper procedure (1 Chr 15:13). They had departed from the laws of God for too long, so even the Levites had forgotten how to handle the ark correctly. It is true that David had good intentions but that did not please God because he served God according to his own heart. Uzzah's death shows God's strict requirements, especially towards the Levites and priests who should have known the Law of God, for Uzzah was punished "for his error" (2 Sam 6:7). For the Levites who carried the ark, their service concerned a matter of life and death, yet they did not serve God according to the way He had prescribed it.

As for David, Uzzah's death caused him to worry; the initially happy and fervent atmosphere had suddenly changed to fear and doubt. Moreover, his view of the ark also changed because he did not understand why God was so fierce. What did God want him to do? In his doubt, he concluded: "How can the ark of the LORD come to me?" (2 Sam 6:9) Since David did not dare to receive the ark anymore, he sent it to the house of Obed-Edom.

God's strike caused David to examine himself and turned his focus

away from self-glorification back to considering God's will. So here we see the consequences of a servitude that displeases God: God was angry, a man died, the people were frightened, and the king was worried and afraid of God. Thirty thousand people returned home disappointed, and the ark was unable to move to Jerusalem.

SERVING GOD WITH A RENEWED MINDSET

When David was told that the family of Obed-Edom was blessed because they hosted the ark in their house, David realized that he had made a mistake. He had been afraid of the LORD and the ark because of the death of Uzzah. David thought that God would naturally guide and bless him in all that he did for Him. But, in fact, neither God nor His blessing can be found in this kind of grand show of extravagance. Instead, God's blessing is upon those who fear God and upon the family who hosts the ark of covenant.

Subsequently, David made a second attempt to bring God's ark to Jerusalem. This time, he sought and found the correct way of handling the ark (1 Chr 15:1–3). David conferred with the priests and Levites first (1 Chr 15:11). He asked them to consecrate themselves before bringing the ark to the city of David (1 Chr 15:12–14), and "the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD" (1 Chr 15:15).

This time, David did not care about the glory that the ark would bring about, but about the God who sits above the two cherubim. He no longer followed his own heart but God's heart. He understood that he should serve God and God alone. He humbly obeyed God's law, sent the Levites to carry the ark to the City of David, and enthusiastically danced and sang, offering sacrifices before God (cf. 1 Chr 15:25–16:3).

Moreover, David did not only offer burnt and peace offerings. This time, he offered himself as a living sacrifice to God. He no longer pursued his own glory; instead he only wanted to humbly obey God. By commanding the ark to be carried, he set a good example in fearing God, led the people to walk in God's way, and blessed the

people in God's name—this type of servitude is pleasing to God and after God's own heart.

From David's transformation, we see that God used Uzzah's death to correct David's misconception of the ark and his mindset as a king. Initially, David thought that bringing the ark to the City of David would definitely bring peace, blessings, glory, and God's presence. He thought that welcoming the ark of God with pomp to inaugurate his reign would please God. But God was not pleased, and this spectacle could not obtain God's blessing.

Subsequently, the Lord taught David that the glory of God's kingdom depends on the king's ability to understand and carry out God's law and to lead the people to worship God according to His instructions. Since David had already stepped up to manage state affairs, God wanted him to confirm that this was God's kingdom and God's people; apart from zeal and love for God, he also needed to have true wisdom (God's law) to manage God's household. As the king, he was to manage God's kingdom on God's behalf and he needed to "write for himself a copy of this law... and...read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment" (Deut 17:18–20).

SERVICE THAT IS AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

Today, we often do things based on what we think is right. But in Deuteronomy 12:8 we are told that we should not serve according to our own judgment and mindsets: "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes."

So today, when we serve God, we must do what is right in the eyes of God. What we think is right is usually derived from our background and education. If, in addition, everyone around us agrees with our ideas, we think them to be right. But we have to think about whether God really wants us to serve Him in this way.

"Carting the ark" and "carrying the ark" can be seen as a parallel of man's



“Carting the ark” and “carrying the ark” can be seen as a parallel of man’s ways versus God’s ways. Moving the ark with a new cart was more efficient. That is conventional wisdom. Who would have thought of carrying this “wooden box” that was so heavy? But this was God’s law. God does not care about efficiency or professionalism. What He wants is our heart—a heart to serve Him and to love one another.

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God does not care about efficiency or professionalism. What He wants is our heart—a heart to serve Him and to love one another. Through the four Levites who carried the ark together, the people could learn how important it is to work together as a team, share each other’s burdens and have fellowship with one another. In addition, they could receive God’s blessings by carrying the ark with all their strength and all their heart (1 Chr 15:26).

To prevent the ark from falling off, those who carry it must be of one heart and move in unison (Amos 3:3). They would need to consider one another and adjust their steps according to each one’s strength so that none would stumble. Today, we can only achieve such mutual understanding through regular fellowship (Acts 2:46).

This fellowship in Christ can’t be achieved just through large-scale activities in the church. If we are constantly busy with meetings and church events, we may have the misconception that this is all that God’s work comprises. But actually church work and service should be based on fellowship, not activities. When we show our love for one another through fellowship, God is among us. We should therefore not neglect or underestimate the importance of spiritual fellowship within the church: Every call now and then, every greeting, every visit, every intercession, regardless whether it is among worker or believers—all these actions are God’s will working in our hearts to accomplish His work.

For this reason, we need to be willing to invest time in establishing a deep

and solid spiritual fellowship in Jesus Christ (the truth), bonding with our co-workers, fellow believers and family members. In addition, we need to be willing to put effort into deep prayers and mutual intercession. Only then can we “carry the ark” in the fear of God and with one heart, bearing each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2).

If we compare David’s two attempts to bring the ark to Jerusalem, we see that God did not want all the pomp and those thirty thousand spectators in the first attempt. Instead, God was pleased with the second attempt. He wanted David, the Israelite elders and leaders as well as the Levites and priests to really know him (1 Chr 15:25). Sometimes we think that we have to do great things to glorify God, e.g., large-scale evangelistic services, hymnal outreach or other events that will potentially attract many people. However, from David’s experience, we learn that God actually wants us to understand His will and to serve and worship Him according to His way. The scale of events and number of people are only superficial and cannot please God. As long as our actions are pleasing to God, He will work with us; whether it is pastoral or evangelistic work, God will bless and guide us, and God’s word will grow and multiply (Acts 12:24).

Perhaps, out of our heart to love God, we want to raise money for a church-building fund through investments to ease the members’ financial burden. But has God not promised to bring all the riches of the world to the house of God in times of need?

Maybe we want to hire cleaning or catering professionals to ease the believers’ workload. But does God not want us to practice the truth by serving one another and to show God that we love Him by offering our time and energy?

Maybe we think that it is easy to get church work going, as long as we have a complete organizational structure and come to a consensus through discussions and voting. But have we considered whether our consensus is truly God’s will? If this consensus is merely human will and not God’s will, our work will not bear any fruit.

The church is God’s household and her master is God. Therefore, whatever we do, we need to first seek God’s will lest we displease God or even arouse His anger and suffer loss.

May we always serve the Lord as a servant after His own heart. ★

Manna is looking for certain types of articles, or article genres. Each genre constitutes a different subject matter and writing approach. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.

Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.

Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.

Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org.

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #72:

Topic: A Church for All Nations

Articles due: August 15, 2013

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to all the world, He had hoped to transform the hearts of man through the Word. Since then, people of all races and cultures have embraced Christianity; but instead of man's transformation, we often see the word of God being altered. The truth has been "adapted" to fit local customs, traditions, religious practices or personal needs and preferences.

Today, such acculturation and syncretism present a great challenge to the True Jesus Church as we preach the complete and pure gospel of salvation. How do we present the gospel's relevance to different cultures, without changing its nature and message? Moreover, how do we explain the importance of preserving the word of God in a world, which promotes flexibility, diversity and personal freedom?

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- Article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide in its latest edition.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.

Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.

Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.

Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face downward.

Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Footwashing

The sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever is appropriate.

Holy Communion

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion with Him so that we can have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall be used.

Sabbath Day

The Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and salvation and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.

Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

Last Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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