

MANNA

ISSUE 75

Towards Maturity

**A Mature Church—the Church in Antioch •
Overcoming Trials and Temptations (I) • Healed from the
Inside Out**

“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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Editorial

by Sharon Chang

Towards Maturity

Growth—science tells us—delineates the living and non-living. All living things grow; the non-living do not. A pebble does not grow up to become a rock and then a mighty boulder. But little acorns become tender saplings and, in time, great oaks. Newborns become adolescents, adults, and eventually the aged.

Generally, when physiological growth is accompanied by intellectual, emotional, or social development, we say that the person has matured. In particular, parents hope that children do not just grow, but mature because then, these offspring will make the right choices to give themselves a good life.

Growth and maturity are just as indispensable in the spiritual sense. Before we came to know Christ, we were dead in sin. But the Lord Jesus' sacrifice has given us life anew. Since we are spiritually living, then we ought to spiritually grow. And like any anxious parent, the heavenly Father hopes that we not only grow but attain spiritual maturity for there is much at stake. The mature will know the right path to take towards eternal life. The immature are easily led astray and quickly devoured by the evil one.

But precociousness is sometimes mistaken for maturity. A child who dresses like an adult and parrots adult speech is still not a true adult. So what is true spiritual maturity? How can we attain it?

The writers in this issue tell us that the marks of maturity are seen in how we live our lives. The spiritual infant is self-centered, but the spiritually mature understands God's will and willingly submits to God's higher purpose, even if he has to suffer disadvantage and loss. Such a

true spiritual adult demonstrates his reverence for God in concrete ways—he lives peaceably with man, showing genuine love towards all, particularly those who are often overlooked. Importantly, he recognizes that it is not life on earth but eternal life that is most precious. Hence, he proactively fulfills Jesus' commission to preach the gospel of salvation wherever he goes. In short, the true spiritual adult conforms to the image of Christ, bearing good fruits to glorify God and edify man.

Attaining spiritual maturity—much like the physical—takes time, the right conditions, and consistent care. Lifelong spiritual cultivation is indispensable if we want to grow as a Christian. We must remove the thorns of complacency and hypocrisy lest these choke our faith. We must grow deeper roots of faith by studying God's word and through sincere prayer and godly living. It is often tempting to judge our closeness to God by how many miracles He has performed through our hands. We are so focused on the strong wind, earthquake, and fire that we forget to listen to His still small voice (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11–12). As an adult, we must seek not just the height of spiritual experiences but the depth of communion with God. Connected to and rooted in God, we will never lack in spiritual vitality, strength, and courage. Instead, we shall mature "... to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

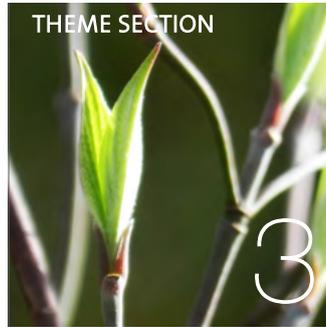
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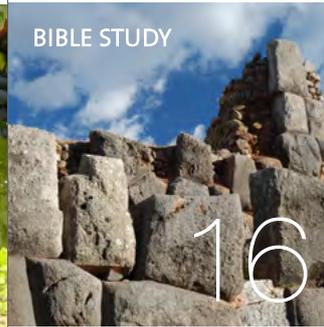
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Towards Maturity



Striving Towards Maturity

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

INTRODUCTION

Chapters Two and Three of the Book of Revelation record the seven epistles that the Lord Jesus had instructed John to write to the churches in Asia. These reveal the different levels of maturity in and key characteristics of each of these churches. Furthermore, the epistles reveal the will of God: He requires the church as a whole to strive towards maturity—to be fully prepared so that she can belong to Him forever.

The church should strive towards perfection—prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2). However, this requires every believer to realize his own spiritual shortcomings and then do his utmost to be mature. Maturity is the goal for the church but the extent to which it can be attained depends on the individual spiritual pursuit of every believer within the congregation (Eph 4:11–16).

BE MATURE IN UNDERSTANDING

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. (1 Cor 14:20)

We can determine a person's maturity from his understanding: whether he recognizes his weaknesses, learns God's word willingly, meditates on His will, and draws near to Him, thereby cultivating his spiritual character. What are the signs of a person who is immature in understanding? These include being jealous of or belittling others, being

easily offended, harboring hatred, bearing grudges against fellow workers, and refusing to forgive. It is thus with good reason that Paul exhorted the believers in Corinth to be mature in understanding and in spirituality.

An example of someone who lacked spiritual maturity was King Saul. In the beginning, he was an outstanding young man with a pure and humble heart. That was why God chose him to be the first king of Israel. After taking on the role, he experienced military success and won the hearts of the people.

Unfortunately, such success soon led to the loss of humility, and Saul began to despise even God's command. When Samuel instructed Saul to proceed to Gilgal and wait seven days for him to arrive to sacrifice the burnt offering and peace offering, Saul lost patience and made the offerings himself (1 Sam 13:5–9). When God helped him to defeat the Amalekites, Saul had become so complacent that he took it upon himself to spare the king of the Amalekites along with much of the spoils of war, all of which should have been destroyed according to God's command (1 Sam 15:3; cf. 15:9). These repeated acts of disobedience eventually lost him God's favor and abidance.

Saul's immaturity was especially obvious in his attitude towards David. After David killed Goliath, Saul became jealous because he felt he was no longer in the limelight (1 Sam 18:8). He became obsessed with the thought of killing David. This incident

shows that a spiritually immature person does not understand the will of God and allows himself to be controlled by his own desires and emotions.

Throughout the history of salvation, God has sent countless servants to carry out His work which includes guiding and governing His elect. God's only requirement is that these servants realize their mandates and work with God. After all, it is God's work, and only He is able to bring it to completion. What a servant needs to do is to strive towards maturity in the course of serving God.

FEAR GOD

The LORD forbid that I should do this thing... (1 Sam 24:6)

David was pursued by Saul and faced continual danger. In a cave at En Gedi (1 Sam 24:1–7) and in the wilderness of Ziph (1 Sam 26:6–12), he was presented with opportunities to kill Saul and end the threat to his life; his followers even offered to kill Saul on his behalf.

Yet David chose to fear God; he refused to lay hands on Saul, the anointed one of God. It was not that King Saul did not deserve to die. Rather, David believed in the righteousness of God and chose to obey His will (1 Sam 26:10–11). This chapter in David's life portrayed genuine maturity.

Rehoboam, David's grandson, failed to heed the counsel of the elders when he became king, choosing instead to listen to the impetuous and ruthless advice of the young men who had grown up with him. As a result, his words caused the departure of ten tribes, and the division of the kingdom into two (1 Kgs 12:13–14). Had Rehoboam been more mature and possessed greater foresight, the history of the Israelites might have been altogether quite different.

When the word of God is not planted within the heart of man, man can only see what is right before him. He will neither be able to look beyond

the obstacles that he faces nor see the purpose of God, who is behind all things. He will make judgments based on his own opinions, like Saul; or rely on the opinions of others, like Rehoboam. Therefore, learning to fear God and obey His commands are the first steps to be taken in the pursuit of spiritual maturity.

A Copy of the Law Book

Before the Israelites entered Canaan, Moses gave them the following instructions from God:

"When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; ... when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall 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 to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

(Deut 17:14–20)

God was the king of the Israelites (1 Sam 12:12); His people need not have followed the other nations in appointing a king to govern them (1 Sam 8:4–9). Nevertheless, before they entered the Promised Land, God already knew that the Israelites would ask for a king. So He instructed that the king should make a copy of the law for himself and read it all the

days of his life. This ensured that the human ruler of God's people would learn to fear the LORD his God and to observe the law and the statutes. He would be able to use the word of God to examine himself and to discern the counsel of men. He would also be able to use the word of God as his guide so that all his decisions would be pleasing to God.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Prov 9:10)

Wisdom stems from the knowledge of God and from a God-fearing heart. A person who does not fear God will do things that displease God and thus reveal his immaturity.

INCREASE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Spiritual growth should occur in tandem with physical growth.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9–10)

Paul interceded for the believers in Colossae, asking God to fill them with the knowledge of His will and with spiritual understanding. In this way, they would be able to make decisions according to God's will. A person with such resolve will seek to please God in all things and to increase in the knowledge of God. To "increase" signifies a process of growth—with a starting point and an ultimate goal. Similarly, spiritual maturity is attained through step-by-step learning.

Learning to fear God and obey His commands are the first steps to be taken in the pursuit of spiritual maturity.

Spiritual maturity is not determined by the number of years we have believed in the Lord, but by the effort we put in to learn God's word and to transform ourselves in accordance with His teachings (Col 2:6–7).

and remains unshaken in his faith. Therefore, let us strive to join the ranks of such mature Christians. ★

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (or: age), and in favor with God and men. (Lk 2:40,52)

After Jesus was born, He grew in wisdom and stature, exemplifying the growth of a person who loves God. Physical maturity can be observed outwardly; spiritual maturity is, however, an inner transformation that can only be gauged by oneself.

Spiritual maturity is not determined by the number of years we have believed in the Lord, but by the effort we put in to learn God's word and to transform ourselves in accordance with His teachings (Col 2:6–7). Therefore, our chronological age is irrelevant. Instead, maturity is based on how well we use our time to learn to view situations holistically and to comprehend our lowliness before God.

In addition, maturity in our service to God is not just about efficiency at completing a job, but even more importantly, it is the need for foresight, the ability to control our temper, and the ability to curb our impulsiveness (Ex 14:11–14).

Maturity can also be seen from the level of commitment and responsibility we bring to the roles and duties—no matter how small—assigned to us. For example, there are some believers assigned with church work, be it religious education, hymn leading, or church cleaning, who do not turn up for their duties. While there may be genuine reasons for their oversight, such as prior commitments, the responsible thing to do is to inform others in advance or make alternative arrangements. In contrast, there are exemplary believers who carry out

every assigned duty faithfully. They need no repeated reminders to carry out their duties; they do their best, endeavor to resolve any issues along the way and do not shirk responsibility. Such workers are a great comfort to the church.

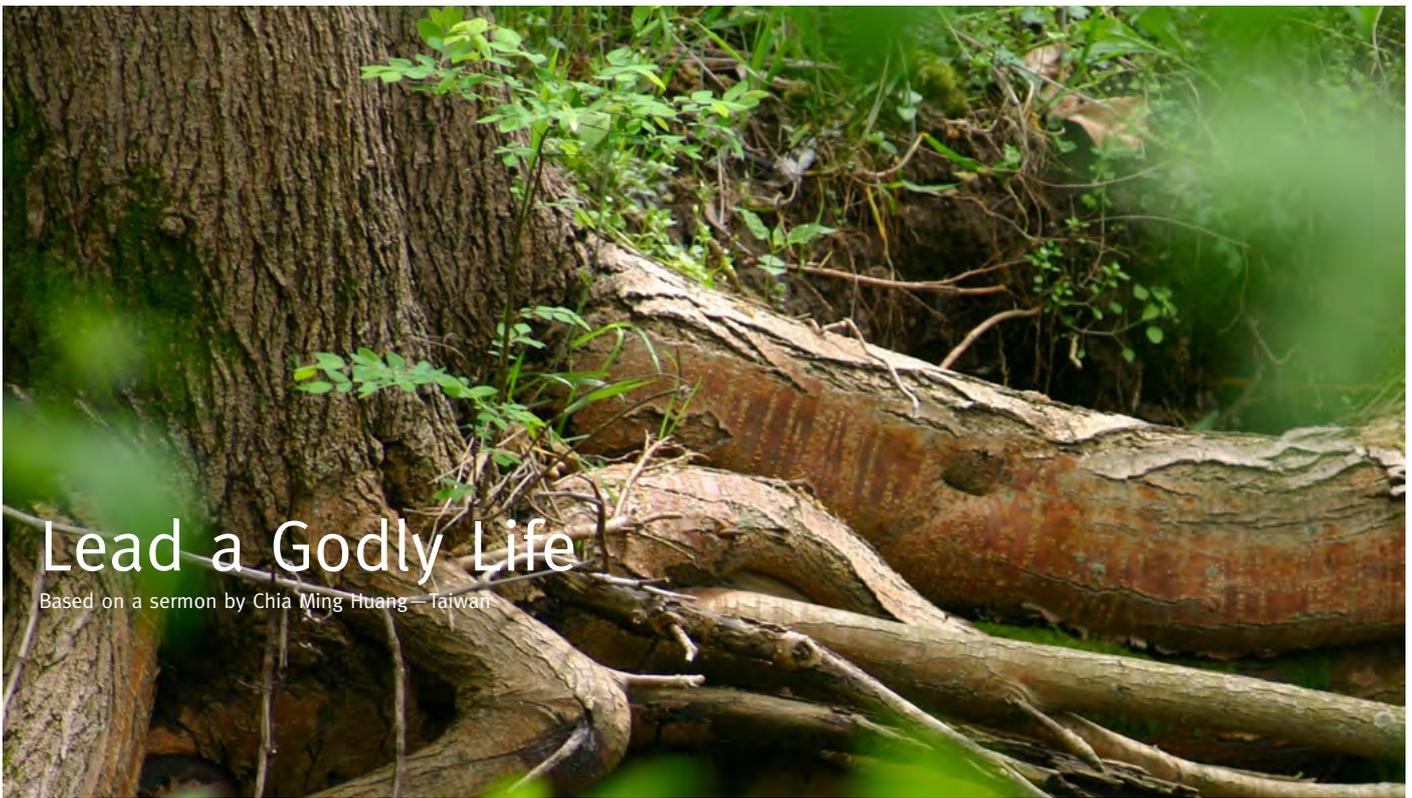
CONCLUSION: DEPART FROM THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE TRUTH

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

(Heb 5: 12–14)

The author of the book of Hebrews exhorts believers to become of full age in terms of the truth and not stop at the stage of “the first principles of the oracles of God.” The latter refer to the basic faith, which includes repentance, belief in God, the sacraments, resurrection, judgment, and so forth—analyzed by “milk for babes.” The author encourages the believers to progress from these teachings and to grow up. Then they will partake of solid food, which is for those who “by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

Those who are of “full age” are skillful in the word of righteousness. A truly mature person meditates on the word of God daily and uses it to make his decisions. With God's word, he overcomes hardships and trials



Lead a Godly Life

Based on a sermon by Chia Ming Huang – Taiwan

In the preceding article, we have read about the importance of spiritual cultivation in our pursuit of spiritual maturity. This article takes it one step further and discusses another aspect of spiritual maturity—godliness.

But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. (1 Tim 4:7–8)

Paul's reminder to the young Timothy is still relevant to us today. Most people recognize that physical exercise is important to help us maintain good health. Relatively however, exercising ourselves towards godliness is even more critical, because godliness not only benefits us in this life, but also enables us to receive the promise of that which is to come. It is thus necessary for us to understand what godliness entails and learn how to lead godly lives.

UNDERSTANDING GODLINESS

The dictionary¹ defines "godliness" as "the quality of being devoutly religious; piety." Clearly then, "godliness" is only applicable in religious contexts, and not to humans

or human activities. For example, we may hold great respect for an elder in church or a public figure, but we are not godly towards them. In short, godliness refers to a person's attitude towards God.

Since God is the object of our reverence, we should seek to understand how He wants us to demonstrate our godliness. Most people associate God and the worship of God with the place where they think God is found. Therefore, in every religion, adherents regard their places of worship as the place to show their godliness or profound reverence for God.

In the True Jesus Church, children are taught not to run up and down the aisles or talk loudly during church services. They are reminded that not treating the chapel as their playground is one way of showing their reverence for God and courtesy to brethren who are there to worship God.

While encouraging appropriate behavior in church is correct, leading a godly life is more than just what we do within the church building. The

Bible urges us to lead a godly life that is manifested both in and outside the church. In other words, while godliness is defined as an attitude or behavior that is directed towards God, we obey God's command for godliness to characterize every single moment of our lives; we live such that we are truly accountable to God in whatever we do and say.

LEADING A GODLY LIFE

Directed Towards God, Demonstrated Amongst Man

The structure of the cross provides a good framework for godliness. The vertical part reminds us that godliness is directed towards God, and the horizontal part, that our reverence for God should be translated into how we deal with people.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (Jas 1:27)

Elder James teaches us how to

¹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>

be truly reverent before God, the Father. Pure and undefiled religion should not be limited to a feeling of reverence for or a fear of God. Instead, God wants us to channel our reverence into practical application in our lives; our love for God should motivate us to love man. Thus, true religion should be demonstrated through visits to orphans and widows in their trouble; that is, helping those who are helpless. Godliness must be linked to our way of life.

The Lord Jesus once referred to Himself as the True Vine, and His disciples, the branches. In other words, once we are connected to Christ, we are also linked to other brethren. We are all members in and of that one body of Christ. Jesus Christ also reminds us that whatever we do for our brethren is equivalent to doing it for Him. He said, “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Mt 25:40). The “least of them” could refer to the weakest, the youngest, or those who are generally overlooked by others. Showing these people love through concrete actions of assistance and concern is, in Jesus’ eyes, showing Him love.

Another way of showing reverence to God is to co-exist peaceably and responsibly with others. One practical and easy application of this is to be very careful about the way we interact and communicate.

But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Mt 12:36–37)

The original Greek word for “idle” is ἀργός (argos), which means “thoughtless, unprofitable or injurious.” Simply put, if we have wronged others with our words, causing them to stumble, we will have to account for these on Judgment Day.

Established on Fear, Remembering That God Sees

The term for godliness in Chinese is

敬虔 (jingqian). The first character 敬 (jing) connotes honor and respect as well as fear and reverence. Not only do we honor our Creator, we must revere and fear Him, because He has the power to judge us. Ironically, people in the world today are afraid of many things—robbers, murderers, terrorists, the supernatural, etc.—but they are not afraid of God. Jesus Himself reminds us not to fear those who can only kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, we should fear God in heaven who can either destroy both body and soul in hell or deliver us unto eternal life (Mt 10:28).

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. (Eccl 12:14)

Our whole life is in the hands of God. There is nothing we can hide from Him. Hence, fearing God should be the core of our lives, because the fear of God ensures that our faith is rooted and our lives upright. True godliness established on the fear of God means that we walk in His ways all the time. Even without anyone observing us, we continue to do the right thing, because we know that God is always there and He sees and knows all.

Joseph truly understood this. His life story was fairly dramatic. Once the favored scion living in the comfort of home, he was sold into slavery by his own envious brothers. Later, his good work attitude and integrity earned him his master’s trust, but his good looks led to his mistress’ attempted seduction of him. Not many virile and ambitious young men could have withstood the daily ego-boosting invitation—“Lie with me.” But, out of his fear for God, Joseph refused. He knew that even if there

were no human eye-witnesses, God could see. So his adamant answer to his master’s wife was, “How can I do this kind of thing, this wicked thing and sin against God?” His desire to do the right thing ended up with him being thrown into jail (Gen 39).

The Bible repeatedly declares that God was with Joseph (Gen 39:2, 21, 23). Our general impression of a person enjoying God’s abidance is someone enjoying a peaceful and comfortable life. In contrast, Joseph’s circumstances fluctuated wildly. On all these occasions, Joseph could have questioned, perhaps even doubted, God. He might have wondered why his fear of God had not only *not* safeguarded him, but worse, had caused him to run up against wall after wall. But importantly, Joseph’s faith in and fear of God remained steadfast.

Such is true godliness. It stems from a fear of an unchanging God. The truly godly person knows when no-one else is looking, God is looking. And even though he is not immediately rewarded for his godliness, he knows God is there and will not fail.

Many people can be godly before others. However, the greatest temptations, those which will clearly reveal our faith and godliness, are those that appear when no-one is around. During these moments, do we still firmly believe and remember that God sees? If the fear of God fills us, even when no one else sees, we can still reject evil.

Maintaining Sincerity, Avoiding Hypocrisy

The second character of the Chinese term for godliness is 虔 (qian), which also means reverence or sincerity. True godliness is manifested in honesty; the thoughts and actions

The structure of the cross provides a good framework for godliness. The vertical part reminds us that godliness is directed towards God, and the horizontal part, that our reverence for God should be translated into how we deal with people.

of a godly person are consistent with each other.

Jesus once told a parable of two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, and their contrasting prayers. When the proud and haughty Pharisee prayed, he did not humble himself before the almighty God. Instead, he boasted of his pious acts for God, listing his fasting and tithing, while deriding the tax collector. In contrast, the tax collector, head bowed in guilt, just beat his own chest, saying, "Lord have mercy on me for I am a sinner." Unfortunately for the Pharisee, Jesus saw right through his hypocrisy, declaring that it would be the tax collector's sincere prayer that would be heeded by God (Lk 8:9–14).

The Pharisees were widely-respected for their devotion to the Law, but Jesus stripped them of this mask of superficial religious piety. He constantly and sternly urged the people not to be like the hypocrites, the Pharisees:

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." (Mt 6:5–6)

These hypocrites are double-faced—what they present to the world is different from what they truly are and truly think. Their prayers are designed to elicit not the pleasure of God, but the praise of man. This is why they choose to stand at prominent places like street corners—so that people can both see and hear how "devout" they are. Such prayers are meaningless and in vain before God, because they do not come from the heart. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

In contrast to the public-praying Pharisee, Cornelius—Roman centurion and the first Gentile convert to the apostolic church—prayed at home (Acts 10:30). He did not have to list his own virtues and good deeds. His sincerity and his quiet charity bore testimony to his godliness (cf. Acts

10:2,4,22). His true piety was why God chose him and his family.

Growing Strong and Deep Spiritual Roots

Roots, Not Just Fruits

In our life of faith, we are often encouraged to bear fruits so that others can see these fruits and glorify God (Mt 5:16). However, before we can bear good fruits, our tree must be a healthy tree, and a tree can only be healthy if its roots are healthy. It is the roots that link the tree to water and nutrients, enabling it to have life. Thus, godliness is not just about bearing fruits for others to see; it also entails ensuring that our roots—buried in the ground and invisible to others—are thriving.

The truly godly person knows when no-one else is looking, God is looking. And even though he is not immediately rewarded for his godliness, he knows God is there and will not fail.

One such unseen aspect of faith is our personal relationship with God. We may appear to be very zealous in the work of God but is our relationship with God thriving? Are our hearts truly filled with God? Deceiving other people is not difficult. We constantly read of people who have fallen victim to scams; some, even repeatedly. Man tends to be misled by the superficial. However, God is never deceived, because He knows our very heart. This is why we must guard our hearts above all things, because out of it spring the issues of life (Prov 4:23). It is our hearts that will determine our value in God's eyes.

On one occasion, Jesus observed people making their offerings. There were many wealthy people who offered much. No-one there knew or cared about a poor widow who gave two mites. But to Jesus, this poor widow had put in more than anyone else; others had given out of their abundance, while she, out of her

poverty, offered her whole livelihood. The Lord saw her heart (Mk 12:41–44). To God, it is not the quantity, but the quality that matters.

Spiritual Depth, Not Height

A godly life must be manifested from within, from the roots. Outward godliness without constant inner renewal and closeness to God is meaningless. Hence, a godly person focuses on depth—enhancing his spiritual growth through spiritual nurture; he is not interested in pursuing spiritual "heights"—that is, visible achievements such as status in church, eloquence, or a large base of "disciples" (cf. 1 Cor 1:12; 3:4).

In terms of buildings, height without depth leads to a very flimsy structure. Hence in Taiwan, a skyscraper must be constructed according to certain norms in the ratio between its height and the depth of its foundation to prevent it from toppling during an earthquake. Similarly, people who only pursue spiritual highs may present a false impression of godliness. When a tremor comes along to shake their faith, they topple and fall.

In addition, from the perspective of the church, spiritual height will not necessarily edify the church. Worse, if the church emphasizes visible achievements, her members may compare and compete. And for church ministers, this is an important reminder that spiritual virtue and leading a godly life are more important than gifts or eloquence (cf. 1 Cor 14).

The rejection of Saul by God is a case in point; illustrating the ironies of height and the pursuit of it. Saul was literally a man of great height. He was the tallest and most handsome man in Israel (1 Sam 9:2). Initially, he was humble and self-effacing (1 Sam 9:21). But after he became king, he tried to look for ways to further elevate himself.

Saul's jealousy was first roused when the praise accorded to David was higher than that for him. Without much spiritual depth, he did not seek to overcome his jealousy. Instead, he sought ways to kill David. Worse, at

the close of his life, he even turned to a spirit medium. Finally, this king who tried so hard to raise himself up was beheaded after death (1 Sam 31:9). Most tragically, the first man whom God raised to “save [God’s] people from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam 9:16) did not strengthen the kingdom of Israel during his reign, because his spirituality was too shallow.

To reiterate, godliness is about nurturing inner virtues, not displaying a pious facade. This is especially challenging in contemporary society.

Firstly, our world today highly esteems attractive packaging. Grooming and presentation courses, image consultants, and so forth, abound so that people can present their best face—literally and figuratively—to the world. So while we know a person’s looks well, we can never know his or her heart.

Consider Judas Iscariot. The devil picked him to betray Jesus because of Judas’ greed and hypocrisy. When Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with spikenard oil and wiped them with her hair, Judas immediately commented, “Why wasn’t this fragrant oil sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” At that moment, Judas would have appeared most charitable and “godly.” But in reality, he did not care for the poor, but “he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it” (Jn 12:6).

Secondly, we live in a society that constantly urges us to promote ourselves and trumpet our achievements. While such strategies may be necessary to ensure that we get our due appreciation from our bosses, or secure the job we want, it would be tragic if these become part of church life. For example, a believer may ask esoteric questions about the Bible, not because he genuinely has a heart to learn and to improve, but just out of a desire to show that he is more knowledgeable or to contend with the Bible study leader.

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord

Godliness is not just about bearing fruits for others to see; it also entails ensuring that our roots—buried in the ground and invisible to others—are thriving.

Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

(1 Tim 6:3–5)

EXERCISING UNTO GODLINESS

Godliness is not just a concept we can think ourselves into having. As Apostle Paul said, we must exercise ourselves unto godliness. Many would consider Paul the epitome of the strong or even perfect Christian. Yet he says, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27).

It is a truism that we are our own greatest enemy. Consider the warriors in the Bible. Samson was one, if not the, most valiant. He killed a thousand Philistines with a single donkey jawbone. But Samson was powerless over his own lust. In this context, Delilah was superior, for she was able to twist him and his heart around her little finger. David defeated Goliath but was himself defeated by his own lust. The moment he saw Bathsheba bathing, he was lost. Indeed, from ancient times, mighty warriors have been felled by their weak hearts.

To attain godliness, we must be able to see our own weakness and to overcome it by God’s word. The word of God should be directed at ourselves, not others. The standard God expects of us is clearly set out in the Bible, showing us how much we have fallen short. Our next step

is then to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to help us systematically overcome each flaw. It is human nature to hide behind the excuse that these shortcomings are part of our personality, and that others should just accept us as we are. We must be determined to clean up our hearts, exercising ourselves towards godliness.

CONCLUSION

Putting all these together, godliness refers to man’s deep respect and obedience to God. Such deep reverence is meant only for God. However, God wants us to manifest this godliness in our lives through word and deed. Showing love to not just those whom we love, but for brethren whom others have forgotten, is tantamount to doing it unto the Lord. To complement shining for the Lord, we must also tend our spiritual roots. No-one will see us undertaking spiritual nurture in order to improve our personal relationship with God. However, deep roots are critical because they provide spiritual sustenance. May our Lord help us to do everything from our hearts and to deepen our spiritual roots.

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

(Col 3:22–24) ★



A Mature Church—the Church in Antioch

Samuel Kuo—Flushing, New York, USA

The immigrant experience is familiar to some readers of *Manna*, many of whom are of Asian descent, living in western countries such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, or elsewhere. Some of us personally made the decision to migrate; others followed our parents and experienced the highs and lows of settling in a new country; and the rest, while born in a western country, are no more than one or two generations removed from the relatives who decided to immigrate there.

According to the Bible, shortly after the church in Jerusalem was established, many Jewish-Christians decided to emigrate because of severe persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19). One of the churches established through this migration was the church in Antioch. In many regards, this church serves as an example for churches everywhere. Even if we relocated to wherever we are for better opportunities, rather than to escape persecution, and even if our church was not established by immigrant believers, development in the church in Antioch serves as a vision for every church. Antioch grew to be a mature church. It behooves us to follow her footsteps.

CARRY THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD

One of the characteristics of the early church was that her members brought the gospel wherever they went (Acts 8:4). Though persecution caused them to flee for their lives, the gospel was never silenced. Samaria received the gospel because of this evangelistic spirit (Acts 8:5), as did Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire at the time.

When the evangelizing members reached Antioch, the Bible purposely indicates a contrast between two types of Christians. The first only preached to their own people—the Jews. They were comfortable with them. They knew the vernacular. They knew the culture. This is natural. However, the second group was marked by their willingness to preach to people who were different from them. They spoke to the “Hellenists,” the Greek-speaking non-Jews (Acts 11:19–20).

The spirit in which they witnessed for Christ stands out in a number of ways. First, their personal evangelism wasn’t just directed at family, relatives, and people they already knew. They preached to non-Jews—people very

different from them. It required them to overcome their timidity and shyness. Second, they were in a brand-new environment, in a brand-new country, confronted with foreign customs. They had to adapt quickly. Third, preaching to non-Jews was a very new, even revolutionary, idea at the time. (Peter had just preached to Cornelius in the previous chapter of Acts. It is possible that Cornelius’ conversion had not even happened yet). They had to overcome their prejudice and traditions.

In other words, their immigrant status did not serve as an excuse for them not to preach to the locals. Instead, they were so moved by the message of the gospel that they had to share it with everyone. And God was pleased, so “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

Today the True Jesus Church in many countries is following the same blueprint. Just like the church in Antioch, many of our churches were planted through immigration. And over the decades, the church has grown further through personal evangelism. But we must place more

effort into reaching out to those who have different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnic origins. It is easier to stay within our Asian social circles, but our call is not only to them. We were called to preach to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; 13:47). Let us grow into maturity. Let us overcome timidity and habit. Let us take the gospel with us wherever we go.

BE KNOWN AS CHRISTIANS

When the church in Jerusalem heard of the growth in Antioch, they sent a worker to visit and encourage the members. You can see the unity, fellowship, and organization of the early church, which we aim to emulate today. The worker they chose was Barnabas, “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24a). The primary criteria used were not of talents or eloquence, but of spiritual character. Additionally, he had a more encouraging and accepting personality—when all the other disciples were afraid of the newly-converted Saul, Barnabas was the first to accept him (Acts 9:26–27).

So when Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he “encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (Acts 11:23b). God was pleased and “a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24b). Most likely because of the growing needs of the church, Barnabas went to seek out Saul in Tarsus. With the arrival of Saul, and their ensuing year-long ministry, the church was greatly edified.

It is at this point in the narrative that the Bible records a most remarkable statement: “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26b). This is significant for several reasons: the statement immediately follows the description of Barnabas and Saul teaching in the church, indicating the importance of sending faithful workers to developing areas. It was through their labor that the members could truly manifest Jesus Christ in their lives, so much so that outsiders called them “Christians.”

The fact that they used “Christians” is significant as well.

The term “Christian,” from the Greek Χριστιανός, *Christianos*, literally means one who is associated with Christ; a Christ-partisan. Therefore, it serves as a commentary of how the believers carried themselves within Antiochian society. They weren’t a secret, hidden assembly; there were many actions that people saw them doing naturally. Perhaps they witnessed how often the believers gathered for fellowship and services, how they ceased from working on the Sabbath, and how they would proclaim Christ wherever they went. To outsiders, it was obvious that the members in Antioch followed Christ. “Christians” fitted perfectly.

Finally, the statement in verse 26 is a commentary on the diversity of the church. The church in Antioch comprised members from many nationalities, ethnicities, and languages—Jews and non-Jews together in one assembly. It wasn’t possible to identify the group by only one category, because they were not a homogeneous group of people. The world had never seen anything like this before, so they had to coin a new term in order to classify them. They decided to call them “Christians.”

So a pressing question for all of us is: can others see Christ in our lives? Or is Christ completely hidden from our public lives? When we gather, would others call us Christians? Or do they only see our ethnic origins? When we “remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23; NIV), people will be able to tell.

GENERATE RESOURCES FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

More workers eventually visited Antioch. One of them, Agabus, was a prophet from Jerusalem who spoke of a famine that would spread across the Roman Empire (Acts 11:28). The Bible did not elaborate on what Agabus said, only that he prophesied that hardship was coming. It did not state he called for specific action. However, the members in Antioch had an immediate response. Even though the famine would affect them too, they considered their brothers in Judea; they prepared financial aid, each giving according to their own ability. This was an act of immense love.

Every so often, we hear of church news from around the world. Developing areas often express financial need. When we hear such news, we might not respond; but on the other hand, we could empathize and help with what we can. This is what the church in Antioch did, even when it wasn’t asked of them. Eventually, Barnabas and Saul brought the aid to their brethren in the south (Acts 11:30).

Presumably, Antioch started as a church in need. But in the end, they were not only self-sufficient, they could also help other churches. This is often the trajectory of our churches around the world. Typically, each local congregation begins in financial deficiency, requiring funds to build, purchase, and to furnish their church facilities. But through God’s abundant

Just like the church in Antioch, many of our churches were planted through immigration. And over the decades, the church has grown further through personal evangelism. But we must place more effort into reaching out to those who have different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnic origins. It is easier to stay within our Asian social circles, but our call is not only to them. We were called to preach to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; 13:47). Let us grow into maturity. Let us overcome timidity and habit. Let us take the gospel with us wherever we go.

grace, after reaching sufficiency, they are able to help others in need. We should strive to continue this culture of giving and supporting one another.

However, financial resources are not the only means by which we give; we should aim to contribute human resources. In Acts 13:1, we see that within a short number of years, the church in Antioch gained many powerful workers. The diversity of this list is noteworthy. Barnabas was born in Cyprus (Acts 4:36); Simeon, who was called Niger, likely received this nickname because of his darker skin (*niger* being Latin for black or dark); Lucius was from Cyrene, the northern part of Africa; Manaen grew up with royalty; and Saul was from Tarsus, the southern part of Asia Minor. In the end, the Holy Spirit chose and sent two of them to other areas for ministry work. This was the first of many missionary journeys that Saul (or Paul) embarked on.

This is the aim of every church that strives for maturity. Where do the workers come from? At first, they may come from other areas, like Barnabas who was first sent to Antioch from Jerusalem. But after a period of time, they should come from within. We cannot persistently rely on outside help; we must aim to support ourselves. Eventually, after reaching self-sufficiency in workers, we must seek to generate help for other needy areas. Therefore, in order to meet this aim, each church has to emphasize comprehensive training of her members. Antioch's contribution to the church was incredible—think of all the wonderful works Barnabas and Saul (Paul) did to expand the kingdom of God in the Roman world!

Consider a final illustration. Conspicuously, China and India routinely fail to qualify for the FIFA World Cup every four years, even though they are the two most populous countries in the world. This raises the question: can they not find eleven men to field a world-class team among their billion-plus? Then again, where will the players come from? Surely, from among themselves; it is not as if they can hire non-nationals to play for them.

Therefore, more investment and interest is needed within their own national soccer leagues.

So it is with the church. Are there needs within our local churches? Are we short of pianists? Bible study leaders? Visitor attendants? Sermon deliverers? Interpreters? It seems like we often lack manpower. But where do we think workers will come from? Surely from amongst ourselves. As individuals, we may also have to look within. But beyond these local needs, if local churches can contribute human resources to full-time ministry, as the biblical precedent has shown, it would greatly aid the expansion of the kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

As the remaining chapters of Acts unfold, the story of the church in Antioch fades into the background of the narrative. We are only told that she continued to serve as a base for Paul's missionary journeys (Acts 14:26; 18:22). Nevertheless, she left an indelible example for us all.

May our churches continue to mature and grow more in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And may we establish little churches of Antioch everywhere. ★



The Holy Communion Sacrament – What Is It All About?

FF Chong – London, U.K.

A sacrament is defined as follows:

- it is a practice instituted by the Lord Jesus Himself;
- it is directly related to receiving salvation;
- Jesus explicitly commanded His disciples to practice it.

The True Jesus Church has three sacraments, and these are entirely based on the teachings of Christ and the apostles. The Holy Communion is one of these.

There are two parts to this sacrament. Paul referred to the cup as “the communion of the blood of Christ” and the bread as “the communion of the body of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16). The Greek word for communion has the meaning of “having fellowship, participating, and sharing.” The use of the term – *the Lord’s Supper* – to refer to the Holy Communion is found only in 1 Corinthians 11:20. Other terms are *the Lord’s Table* (from 1 Cor 10:21), and *the Eucharist* (from the Greek word for “giving thanks”; Lk 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24). Some believe that the expression “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11) probably refers to receiving the Lord’s Supper with a common meal known as the

Love Feast (2 Pet 2:13; Jude 12).

ORIGIN

The institution of the Lord’s Supper (Mt 26:17–30; Mk 14:12–26; Lk 22:1–23; 1 Cor 11:23–25) took place on the night before Jesus died, at a meal commonly known as the Last Supper. Some have suggested that the Last Supper may have been the Jewish Passover meal, first instituted by God in the days of Moses (Ex 12:1–14; Num 9:1–5), although there continues to be considerable debate over this. What is indisputable, however, is that the Lord’s Supper was instituted at the time of the Passover feast (Lk 22:17).

Jesus is the Paschal Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Instituting the Holy Communion during the Passover feast typifies the suffering and death of Jesus. The slaughter of a lamb on the Passover was intended to save God’s people from being killed together with the Egyptian firstborn. The angel of destruction passed over all the blood-marked houses. Peace, protection, and redemption were thus produced by the sacrifice of the lamb. Analogously, Jesus’ death frees us from the snare of death.

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS

Jesus’ words about the Holy Communion, recorded in the three Gospels, put beyond any shadow of doubt that the bread and cup are truly His body and His blood (Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–24; Lk 22:19–20). Paul confirmed that he directly received the teachings on the Holy Communion from the Lord (1 Cor 11:23). What he shared with the church in Corinth was basically a reiteration of Christ’s teachings on the Holy Communion (1 Cor 11:24–25). Hence, the words of Christ and the teaching of Paul were completely consistent with one another.

In other words, it was never a problem for the Gospel writers and the apostles to understand exactly what Jesus taught. However, after the turn of the first century, especially after the demise of all the apostles, the church began to have deep problems understanding the truth on the Holy Communion. With the departure of the Spirit from the church, different schools of thoughts rapidly sprang up, producing complex explanations, which obscured the essence of the Lord’s teachings. These varying

concepts include *Transubstantiation* and *Consubstantiation*.

Transubstantiation, a concept used in Roman Catholic theology, is the change of “bread and wine,” in substance, into the flesh and blood of Christ, even though the elements appear to remain the same. Consubstantiation was the concept developed by Martin Luther who believed that Christ’s body and blood are truly present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine. However, the elements do not actually change into Christ’s body and blood.

So, how do we explain the mystery of the Holy Communion? Physically and visibly, the bread and cup (juice) remain unchanged after the consecration. But in the Spirit, the bread and juice are respectively the body and the blood of Jesus. The key difference between the True Jesus Church’s view and those of others stems from the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The word that I speak to you is “Spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). In the True Jesus Church’s view, it is the Spirit that makes the difference—without the presence of the Spirit, no transformation would occur; and it is in the Spirit, that these ordinary elements become the body and blood of Christ.

When we believe and follow exactly what the Bible teaches, we allow the Spirit to work; He thus gives us spiritual life through our physical participation in the Holy Communion. This can be further explained by using the example of baptism. During baptism, the water remains physically as water. However, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, when the baptismal mode is adhered

to, blood in the water is availed for the forgiveness of sins. It is the abiding presence of the Spirit that transforms sacraments, achieving the necessary spiritual effects when these sacraments are performed physically in strict adherence to the teachings of the Bible.

PARTAKING OF THE FLESH AND BLOOD OF JESUS

After conversion, we are given a new lease of life. By partaking of the body and blood of Christ, this life grows unto eternity. However, the extension from temporal to eternal is only made possible by the working of the Spirit.

Critically, we must respond to the Spirit’s work by keeping ourselves holy in the Lord while waiting for His second coming. Doing this extends our life after physical death. Remaining in the Lord with the help of His Spirit, we will be raised on the last day to receive eternal life (Jn 6:53–57, 61–63). This is why Jesus says, whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood shall have eternal life (Jn 6:54).

Partaking of the Holy Communion also enables us to abide in the Lord—“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in Him” (Jn 6:56). There are three parts to this relationship.

The Bible tells us that Jesus has given us His life. In reality, this act of giving is achieved by the Spirit when we partake of His flesh and blood. The inseparable relationship that we have with Christ is reflected in the life we now live; our life is the very life of Christ and is Christ Himself.

By partaking of the Holy Communion, we feed on Jesus. We live His life because He is alive in us

(Jn 6:57–58). Through the incessant work of the Spirit in us, our lives are constantly energized and sustained by keeping the word in our hearts.

Partaking of the Holy Communion is, on our part, a conscious choice to abide in Him. Remaining in Him requires us to keep the truth, which then enhances the abiding presence of the Spirit in our life (Jn 15:7). Essentially, practicing the word in all conceivable aspects of life is to imitate the life that Christ lived while He was in this world.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Holy Communion is a constant reminder of the death of Christ. There are two key aspects that we must remember. One is the great love of Christ demonstrated by His unconditional sacrifice of His life (Rom 5:6–11). It was no mere physical death that He suffered (Mt 10:28; Lk 12:49–50; Mt 16:21; Jn 12:23–25; Heb 10:5; Mt 20:28). Instead, it involved the excruciating experience of being deserted by God while shouldering the sins of humanity (Heb 2:9). Such saving love is beyond anyone’s ability to repay.

The second aspect concerns how—knowing that He has so willingly died for our sins—we should always live for Him and not for ourselves. The knowledge of His unconditional sacrifice should be an internal geyser, propelling those who truly fear and resolutely remain in Him to faithfully serve Him in the way He wants us to. Like Paul (cf. Gal 2:20–21), by partaking of the Holy Communion in truth and in Spirit, we are invigorated and more motivated than before to better ourselves to fulfill the divine purpose that He has for us and His church.

So, what exactly is that purpose? In his message to the church in Corinth, Paul declares succinctly and powerfully: “We proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor 11:26). The most direct and important message from this timeless reminder is our commission to reach out to the unbelieving world. Evangelism

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must always remain the top priority on the long list of church work. Nothing can or should ever replace it. In all circumstances, the church must remain focused on spreading the complete gospel of salvation entrusted to her.

WHO ARE NOT ALLOWED TO PARTAKE?

The Holy Communion after consecration is the body and the blood of Christ. The sanctified bread is the body (1 Cor 11:24) in the Spirit. The body of Christ is the church. This fact naturally disqualifies those who are not baptized from sharing the bread since they are not members of the body of Christ. Jesus also says that the cup is the New Covenant in His blood (1 Cor 11:25), which He has shed for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28). For a non-baptized person, his sins are not forgiven, which makes it unacceptable for him to partake of the Holy Communion.

In addition, partaking of the Holy Communion imparts eternal life (Jn 6:54), which is only possible once we have been made alive with Christ. When a person undergoes a correctly-performed baptism, with the presence of the Spirit, he is raised from spiritual death (Rom 6:3–5; 8:11). In the light of Christ's sacrificial work, it would thus be inconsistent to permit a person who is not baptized to partake of the Holy Communion, since he has not even chosen to be in Christ by accepting the one correct baptism.

Solemnity is the most appropriate tone for sacraments, especially one in which the great sacrifice of Christ is commemorated. Those who partake of the Holy Communion are asked to examine themselves—another indication that the Holy Communion cannot be partaken in

a casual or flippant way. According to the teaching of Paul, anyone who partakes of the Holy Communion in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27). Prior to partaking, forgiveness of sins is to be sought to ensure the wrath of God will not be poured upon us. The telling examples in Corinth serve as a stern warning—some became sick and even died because they took the Holy Communion lightly (1 Cor 11:30).

Based on Paul's above teaching, it is biblically sound to forbid those who have committed mortal sins from taking the Holy Communion. A person who has committed a mortal sin has cut himself off from the life of Christ and from His body, the church. Would it be right for one who has chosen to turn his back on Christ to partake of the body and blood of Christ? Doing so would be tantamount to treating the body and blood of Christ as common (cf. Heb 10:29) and not giving due reverence to Christ's sacrifice. This would be a profanity in the eyes of God.

CONCLUSION

The partaking of the Holy Communion goes beyond the physicality of the ritual. We partake of the flesh and blood of Christ in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. The life imparted in partaking of the Holy Communion is eternal and only given to those within the church. Those who are joined to the body of Christ through baptism (1 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:27) are raised from spiritual death. They have been transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of light and are completely liberated from the inextricable grip of sin. They are thus eligible to share in the life of Christ by partaking of the Holy Communion.

As partakers, we should not only reciprocate Jesus' love with thanksgiving. Since we have been delivered from destruction, our span of life on earth must always reflect God's purpose for individuals and the church as a whole. This means that, on a personal level, the will to live for God in holiness and the commitment to serve faithfully should always be our chief priority. On a collective front, the church has been commissioned to preach the gospel to every nook and corner of the world in all circumstances. Summoning every ounce of strength to do this work well is perhaps the least the church can do to repay the immeasurable love of Christ. ★



Conquest of Canaan—Jericho (II)

Based on a sermon by Caleb Lee—Singapore

In our previous issue, we studied two of the protagonists of the conquest of Jericho: Rahab and the inhabitants of Jericho. The latter serves as a reminder to us to quickly repent when we have stepped out of God's love. In contrast, Rahab serves as an example of faith that is demonstrated through immediate action. Part 2 of this article focuses on Joshua and the people of Israel who went to war.

JOSHUA

Acknowledging the True Leader

So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so. (Josh 5:14–15)

Being the leader of the people of Israel, Joshua may have considered himself to be the commander of the LORD's army. But this encounter reminded him who was actually in charge. Joshua might have been appointed to lead the people of Israel, but God was the true ruler and commander. To his credit, Joshua responded immediately and appropriately to acknowledge God as

the commander of the Israelites.

The consequences of being too presumptuous can be deadly, as the following example illustrates.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" ... And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

(Isa 6:1–5)

In this passage, there are two persons who had made the same mistake. One of these is King Uzziah who started off as a very good king. He did what was right in God's eyes; he sought out the LORD (2 Chr 26:4–5). He modernized agriculture and improved the nation's economy; he was a brilliant military tactician and weapons inventor (2 Chr 26:6–15). Unfortunately, he let fame get to his head; he forgot who the true ruler of the Israelite nation was. He overstepped the boundaries of his royal office by burning incense, which was the exclusive duty of priests. When warned of his error, he reacted by losing his temper. Consequently, he died a leper (cf. 2 Chr 26:16–23).

The other is Isaiah, narrator of the above passage. Being the prophet entrusted with the task of proclaiming judgment on the people of Israel and reprimanding them for their sins may have led him to think more highly of himself than he ought (cf. Isa 1–5). But at the sight of God's awesome

Doubting God's support is tantamount to making ourselves—instead of God—the center of our faith. In contrast, we can make God the center by asking whether we are on His side.

glory, he realized his own lowliness and immediately acknowledged his uncleanness (Isa 6:5). In response, God sent a seraphim to touch his mouth with a piece of coal, and he was cleansed of his iniquity.

We can thus see the dramatically different ends befalling two leaders. Both had received reminders of their error. But one persisted in pride and died; the other realized his error and was cleansed.

Taking God's Side

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" (Josh 5:13)

Joshua's question "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" is a very natural one. Humans are wont to divide the world into different camps—friend or foe; ally or competitor. Such categorization may be useful in society or at the workplace to help us guard against danger. However, we may unknowingly bring such a mindset into church—dividing our brethren into "friend" or "foe" camps, depending on whether their stances on issues align with ours; or claiming our spiritual "lineage" from different leaders (cf. 1 Cor 3:4). Worse, we begin to think of God in this way as well. When things go well for us, we are full of praise and thanksgiving. When we encounter obstacles, we wonder whether God is on our side.

Doubting God's support is tantamount to making ourselves—instead of God—the center of our faith. In contrast, we can make God the center by asking whether we

are on His side. This question can also help us examine ourselves to see whether we have unnecessarily placed ourselves in different camps. The most important position for us to be in is to be on the side of God. How do we do this?

When the Commander of the LORD's army replied that He had come "as Commander of the LORD's army," Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped. He did not stop there but continued to ask what God's command was and went on to fulfill it. Because of his obedience, the walls of Jericho crumbled before Israel.

Besides acknowledging his true leader, Joshua's example highlights what a person on God's side will do—he seeks to know what God wants and immediately does what God commands. And each time we take God's side, we shall fell the strongest of walls; the seemingly impossible becomes possible.

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Obeying God's Word

At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. ... So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed." (Josh 5:2–3, 8)

Besides acknowledging his true leader, Joshua's example highlights what a person on God's side will do—he seeks to know what God wants and immediately does what God commands.

It took a certain amount of faith for the men of Israel to obey God's command to be circumcised at that particular moment. Geographically, they were very near the city of Jericho. It does not take a veteran soldier to know that alertness and top-level fitness would be absolutely critical if one's enemies were just a stone's throw away. While these able-bodied men were recovering from circumcision, their enemies could have easily attacked and slaughtered everybody. Despite such a risk, the Israelites obeyed God's command, for they understood that circumcision was the sign of the covenant between them and God, which the LORD had established with Abraham (Gen 17:10–14). Wandering in the wilderness, they had no chance to be circumcised. This would have rendered them ineligible to receive God's promised blessings under the terms of the covenant between God and Abraham.

Apart from physical circumcision, God also expected His people to circumcise their hearts:

"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. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer." (Deut 10:15–16)

When the people of Israel willingly subjected themselves to God's command and underwent physical circumcision at Gilgal (Josh 5:9), their hearts were also truly circumcised.

After their circumcision, the people were able to partake of the Passover (Josh 5:10–11). The purpose of the Passover was to remind the Israelites how God had delivered them from Egypt. But this particular Passover in

The Christian journey requires not just obedience but also endurance. We must have the faith not just to do, but to persist in doing what God has commanded. We must continue to hold fast to the promise of God, even if our efforts appear to have changed nothing and our present difficulties have not been resolved. ... When the urge to give up seems strongest, recall how the Israelites kept marching yet another round, on yet another day. And trust that our God is a faithful God who is true to His promises.

Joshua chapter 5 was more significant: during the first Passover, the people of Israel had physically come out of Egypt, but their hearts had remained there. In contrast, during this particular Passover observance, Egypt had been totally removed from their hearts, and the people finally enjoyed true deliverance.

This incident reminds us that if we want true blessing and deliverance, our obedience to God must not be contingent on the surrounding conditions. Even though it may be inconvenient or even dangerous to fulfill God's command, we must still do it, for God neither speaks nor commands frivolously.

Listening and Persisting

And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him. (Josh 6:4–5)

The people of Israel were commanded to circle the city for a total of thirteen times. Even more unusual, the people were to remain silent as they walked. Why was silence so important?

There are two possible reasons.

Listening to God's Signal

First, silence was crucial so that the people could hear the trumpets sounded by the priests. The function of the trumpets was to rally the people to march as well as to shout (cf. Josh 6:4–5, 8). Although it was the same trumpets, different sounds signaled different things. The people had to know what they were supposed to do. Today, are we familiar with the sounds of God's trumpets? Are we able to hear God's voice? Do we understand what God wants us to do?

Test of Faith

Second, God commanded the people to be silent in order to test their faith. Imagine walking around a city for six days without anything happening. The people of Jericho may have initially wondered what was going on and perhaps even had been slightly fearful. But as the days passed without any attack, they may have started to mock the Israelites.

If we were the people of Israel, would we have endured the mockery and the seeming pointlessness and just carried on fulfilling the routine until the seventh day? On the seventh day, the Israelites still had to endure Jericho's derision and go round the city another seven times. But relief soon came—after the Israelites had completed their seventh circuit of the city, the trumpets blasted, a signal to the Israelites to shout. The power of God was manifested and the walls of Jericho collapsed.

The Christian journey requires not just obedience but also endurance. We must have the faith not just to

do, but to *persist* in doing what God has commanded. We must continue to hold fast to the promise of God, even if our efforts appear to have changed nothing and our present difficulties have not been resolved.

An oft-cited but still highly important example is praying for the Holy Spirit. We may have been praying for decades without apparent effect. We may have fasted, wept, pleaded, or knelt for hours; we may have been ridiculed by friends who do not believe in the Holy Spirit or tongue-speaking and been urged to leave the true church. Through these, God seems to be keeping silent. When the urge to give up seems strongest, recall how the Israelites kept marching yet another round, on yet another day. And trust that our God is a faithful God who is true to His promises.

Thoroughly Removing Sin

When the Israelites finally took Jericho, they killed all the men and women, the young and the old, and the animals. They had to destroy all the accursed things and burn down the entire city. They were warned that anyone who tried to rebuild the city would lose his son (Josh 6:16–21, 24, 26).

Many are puzzled by these extremist instructions; some point to this as evidence that the Jewish / Christian God is a cruel God. Understanding history and the context will give us a clearer picture.

Jericho belonged to one of the seven nations that God had marked for destruction in the land of Canaan. One of these nations, the Amorites, can be taken as an example of God's intention. The wickedness of the Amorites can be inferred from God's comment to Abraham that the Amorites would be destroyed when their iniquities exceeded God's tolerance (cf. Gen 15:16). Far from being cruel, God had been forgiving and longsuffering towards Jericho. However, finally, their sin and recalcitrance reached a point where God had to execute justice.

The people of Israel were thus God's instruments for punishment.

The command to kill everyone in the city ensured that there would be a thorough removal of all the iniquitous practices and culture that had so displeased God. In addition, it also served as a reminder to the Israelites:

"Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God." (Deut 8:19–20)

God had promised that the Israelites would be able to conquer nations much more powerful than they (Deut 9:1–4). This was not because the Israelites were righteous, but because the Canaanites were unrighteous. So when God used the Israelites as an instrument of judgment, He also wanted to remind them that if they were wicked and sinful, they too would be removed from the land.

The holy God cannot tolerate any sin. Hence, extreme measures must be taken to combat it. Jesus once taught that if the right eye caused us to sin, it ought to be plucked out; a hand that caused us to sin must be cut off. The Lord stressed, "It is better for you to enter heaven blind or maimed, than to not enter heaven at all" (Mt 5:30; Mk 9:34). Therefore, sin must never be treated lightly; indeed, we must go to extreme efforts to thoroughly remove it from our hearts and lives.

CONCLUSION

God had promised the Israelites to help them conquer Jericho. Likewise, God has promised us victory over sin and eventually, eternal life. However, we must also do our part. Joshua, the great general of the Old Testament, teaches us to recognize who our Leader is; ensure that we are on His side always by being

eager to know and do His will. From the Israelites, who successfully conquered the bastion of Jericho without a single offensive blow (except on the trumpets), we learn to obey God by faith, even in the face of inconvenience and danger. If we make an effort to listen to His voice, persist in doing His will, and quickly remove sin from our hearts, God will surely give us the victory. ★



Overcoming Trials and Temptations (I)

Based on a sermon series by Aun-Quek Chin—Singapore

Two words familiar to Christians are “trials” and “temptations.” An indication of the importance of these can be gleaned from how Elder James plunges straight into these two areas right from the start of his epistle. He provides several key concepts in order to help us overcome trials and temptations. In the first part of this series, we look at the distinctions as well as linkages between the two.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

The Elder first teaches us that we have to distinguish between temptations and trials (cf. Jas 1:13) and how to do so. There are three major differences.

Source

The source of trials and temptations differ. The former comes from God (Zech 13:9) while the latter originates from the devil. The devil started out tempting the first woman to be created and even tried to tempt Jesus. Unsurprisingly, Matthew calls Satan the “tempter” (cf. Mt 4:1–2).

Nature

Since God is good and He is the source of trials, it stands to reason that the nature of trials must also be good. In other words, when God gives a trial, it is underpinned by His good will and good intentions; He does not derive perverse pleasure from just watching man suffer. Understanding this fact enables us to accept these trials with equanimity.

For example, if we were told that the only way to save our lives was to undergo a painful and expensive surgical procedure, we would not quibble with the doctor. We willingly agree to undergo surgery because we understand the necessity. We know the doctor is not a sadistic torturer who enjoys our pain, but instead is doing his best to save our lives.

It is the same when the Lord sends us trials. Although there is temporary and even intense pain, the ultimate outcome is good, because God is good and every intention of His is good. In contrast, the nature of temptation is evil, because temptations come from the devil, and the devil is the evil one. His intent behind his temptation of man is evil. He seeks to make man doubt God, go against the commandments of God, and even leave God.

Purpose

The aim of God's trials is for us to mature in faith and become perfect. But the goal of the devil's

temptations is to destroy our faith. Satan will prompt us to go against the commandment of God so that we will lose our spiritual life and face God's judgment.

Hence, when we go through God's trials, we must submit ourselves to God and endure. However, when we encounter the temptations of the devil, we must resist and overcome them.

LINKS BETWEEN TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

Although trials and temptations are different, the two are linked. When God gives us a trial, the devil can take that as an opportunity to tempt us as well. Conversely, God may also use temptations to try and teach us. We look at two illustrative examples—the temptations of Eve and Jesus.

1. Temptation of Eve—The Devil Uses Trials as Opportunities to Tempt

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the

garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:16–17)

This passage has provoked many questions and created much doubt about God’s inherent goodness. The following answers three common questions, which has implications on our belief in God and His words:

Why did God name the tree “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”?

Why did God forbid Adam and Eve from eating only this fruit?

What does knowing good and evil really mean?

• **How did the Tree get its name?**

People generally believe the tree was so named because its fruit could give humans the divine capability of discerning between good and evil—“For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). This appears to be confirmed, perhaps even expanded, in the subsequent verse. Not only does man receive knowledge of good and evil, he becomes wise: “... the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen 3:6).

Careful reading of these two verses will reveal that it was not a fact that the fruit from the tree could give discernment. The words in Genesis 3:5 had been spoken by the devil through the serpent. The devil was trying to tempt the first couple into disobedience by insinuating that God forbade man from eating the fruit because He did not want them to be like Him. Likewise, Genesis 3:6 describes Eve’s perception of the tree.

When God allows the devil to carry out his works of temptation, it does not mean that God is collaborating with the devil. Instead, God allows the temptation to go ahead because God wants to work with His people to overcome the devil’s wiles. God wants to help His beloved children to overcome these temptations and become more mature.

She saw that it was good for food, saw that it was pleasant to the eyes, and saw a tree desirable to make one wise. While it was indeed correct that the tree was pleasant to the sight and good for food like the rest of the trees in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9), the idea of the wisdom-conferring ability of the fruit did not come from God!

All God had said of the tree was “You shall not eat of this tree, for the day you eat of it you shall surely die.” God had issued this stern warning to protect them from death. But the devil twisted God’s words to make it look as if God did not want man to become as wise as He. We should not believe a single word spoken by the devil, for he is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Unfortunately, Eve swallowed the devil’s plausible explanations. Her concept of the tree and God’s words changed. In the end, both Adam and Eve allowed themselves to be persuaded that God did not want them to eat of the fruit because He did not want them to know good and evil and did not want them to be wise.

This is one of the devil’s oft-used devices for temptation—sowing the seeds of doubt in a person and leading him to misinterpret God’s word, nature, and intention. We must thus always be vigilant to avoid being similarly deceived. In this specific context, we should not fall into the trap of thinking that God forbade man from eating the fruit to prevent him from gaining knowledge of good and evil, and becoming wise.

• **Why did God forbid Adam and Eve from eating only this fruit?**

A natural question that many then ask is why God would go to the trouble of putting the Tree in the Garden of Eden. If God had not wanted man to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, why did He even place the tree within the Garden?

God established this rule of a forbidden fruit in order to test the people, to determine whether they would keep His commandments. All commandments of God are good, because they are given to preserve our lives. The people of God must be willing to keep the commandments of God. That was why Moses took pains to remind the Israelites that they must be careful to observe all the commandments of God (Deut 6:1–2).

God gave Adam and Eve only one commandment in the Garden of Eden. We can imagine God saying: “You may eat fruit of every tree in the Garden of Eden, but from *that* tree you shall not eat; are you willing to keep My commandment? The day you eat of it, you shall surely die. Do you believe my words?”

Had Adam and Eve believed the commandments and words of God, they would have strictly complied with God’s instructions not to eat the forbidden fruit. Their obedience would then have justified them in God’s eyes. Since God is good, His commandments are good. It follows that keeping God’s commandments would show that one is on the side of goodness. In contrast, flouting God’s commandment by eating the forbidden fruit would render one evil in His eyes. Eating the fruit was equivalent to listening to the words

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of the devil, the evil one.

Therefore it is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that separates good and evil. It is not the fruit of this tree that gives a person the knowledge of good or evil. Instead, it is the choice or act of eating that determines whether one is good or evil. Choosing to eat is a deliberate act of disobedience against God, which renders a person evil. Similarly, choosing not to eat out of conscious obedience to God renders a person good in God's eyes.

The Devil's Strategy: Sow Doubt and Confusion

The whole event had started with God setting a test for Adam and Eve; He gave them this commandment to establish the extent of their obedience and thus ascertain whether they were good or evil. It was during this trial that the devil tempted and deceived them.

God's words were clear and direct—*the day you eat of it, you shall surely die*. If we believe in the word of God and have unshakeable faith in God's unchanging goodness, regardless of how other people choose to interpret His word, we would treat the word of God as the only standard and would never ever consider eating the forbidden fruit.

In contrast, there is only pure evil in the heart of the devil. He twists God's word, slyly sowing doubt, planting wrong concepts, and leading people astray. Eventually, lies are perceived as truth; and the good God suspected of evil intent. This was what led Adam and Eve to erroneously concur with the devil's version. They might have thought: "God is trying to threaten us. He told us eating of the fruit will cause us to die so that we won't eat it and know the difference between good and evil. He just wants us to remain fools! We do not want this; and we certainly wouldn't want to worship such a mean-spirited God!"

Many today have allowed themselves to be persuaded to doubt God's absolute goodness. Consequently, they are skeptical when God says that doing something will lead to certain death. In fact, they

What does "knowledge" of good and evil really mean?

The English translation of the name of the tree—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—seems to imply that eating the fruit of the tree enables one to acquire knowledge of good and evil. Is this proof that it is really the fruit of the tree that gives wisdom?

In the original language, the word "knowledge" can be interpreted as "being aware" or "to know" whether a person is good or evil. Refraining from eating the fruit is a reflection of the person's belief in and practice of God's word; hence, he is deemed good. Conversely, eating the fruit expresses a person's disbelief in the words of God; and this transgression of God's word is what renders him evil.

defiantly declare that if God expects such unquestioning obedience, they would rather die than worship such a God!

Learning to See Through the Devil

Had Adam and Eve paused to think more deeply, they would have seen the inconsistency of the devil's claims. If God were intent on keeping the knowledge of good and evil to Himself only, why would He even bother to place the tree in the garden in the first place? Logically, He would have hidden the tree and never even mention the existence of such a "wonder fruit"! Unfortunately, Adam and Eve did not stop to think deeply enough. After eating the fruit, they realized that they had been deceived, but it was too late. They did not become all-wise like God, but they certainly knew that they themselves were evil! We can see this realization of their own evil from two actions.

First, they felt ashamed. Shame arises from wrongdoing. No-one feels ashamed when he or she is doing the right thing or a good thing. However, when we have done something evil, although no-one else knows about it, our conscience will rebuke us, making us feel ashamed. In the case of Adam and Eve, they were not ashamed originally (Gen 2:25). But after eating the fruit, they knew that they had done an evil act. They were thus introduced to the concept of shame, which, in turn, led to them taking the fig leaves to cover themselves (Gen 3:7).

Second, they hid from God when they heard Him walking in the garden (Gen 3:8). No-one who has done a good deed would need nor want to hide from God. We only try to avoid God if we have done something evil and do not want God to find out.

In summary, if we want to avoid falling into the trap of being evil, and thus feel ashamed, we must be ever vigilant and discerning. We must believe absolutely in the word of God and hold on tightly to it. We must be ever wary of the devil's deceptions and stay away from people who twist the word of God.

2. The Temptation of Jesus—God Uses the Devil's Temptations as Opportunities to Try

In general, it is true that we must flee temptation. The Lord Jesus Himself teaches us to pray to God to "lead us not into temptation." However, in Matthew 4:1, we are told that Jesus was led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. God does not tempt man, so why did He lead Jesus to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? Similarly, in the case of Job, when the devil requested to tempt Job, why did God allow it? Although God does not tempt man, God can and does make use of the devil's temptations as opportunities to try man.

There thus appears to be some symmetry. When we undergo trials, there may be temptations from the devil; and when we are tempted by the devil, these temptations can

be used as trials, allowed by God. However, some people then use this fact to claim that God and the devil are actually collaborating with one another! This is wrong because God will never collaborate with the devil.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (Jas 1:13)

Why would some people say that they are tempted by God? These people see that God allowed the devil to tempt Job. Since God allowed it, God must be in cahoots with Satan. However, James reminds us that God cannot be tempted by the devil to work with him. God Himself does not tempt anyone; neither will He collaborate to tempt someone.

When God allows the devil to carry out his works of temptation, it does not mean that God is collaborating with the devil. Instead, God allows the temptation to go ahead because God wants to work with His people to overcome the devil's wiles. God wants to help His beloved children to overcome these temptations and become more mature. This was what happened to Job. Job was already an upright man. But with God working together with him amidst the devil's attacks, Job matured through the process.

CONCLUSION

Trials and temptations are different. But when we undergo trials, there may be temptations from the devil, and when we are tempted by the devil, these temptations can be used as trials, allowed by God. Importantly, through trial and temptation, we must continue to have absolute faith in the word and love of God and to obey Him whatever the cost. ★

Five Loaves and Two Fish

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Love as Brothers

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"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." (1 Pet 3:8 | NIV)

We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Jesus Christ as the founder and foundation. Everyone in this community is related – we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God. God teaches us to love one another. But sometimes we may feel that it is much easier to love God than to love others. It is easy to say that we love God when it doesn't cost anything more than weekly attendance at church services. But the real test of our love for God is how we treat the people in front of us – our family members and fellow believers. We cannot truly love God while neglecting to love people around us in God's family.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 Jn 3:15)

Does this mean that if you dislike someone, you aren't a Christian? John's words focus on the attitude that causes us to ignore or despise others, to treat them as irritants, competitors, or enemies. Christian love is not a feeling but a choice. [Continue reading →](#)

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The Practice of Love – Humility

"Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." (1 Cor 13:4 | NIV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to love one another. What is brotherly love? It goes beyond our affection for each other, our sense of belonging, or our social group. Biblical love is not envious, proud, or self-centered. The practice of brotherly love encompasses humility.



Love does not envy. Do we bicker out of jealousy? When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He addressed him as an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. This is a compliment to the honesty and sincerity of Nathanael. We need to affirm the good qualities and achievements of our fellow believers. Rather than criticize each other, we should encourage and become advocates for each other. [Continue reading →](#)

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Five Loaves and Two Fish

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In August 2014, True Jesus Church Nigeria held a five-day youth camp for youths from Port Harcourt, Delta state, and Akwa-Ibom. The camp provided an opportunity for the thirty-four participants to get to know each other better, work together, share with each other, and most importantly, learn the Scriptures. In particular, participants learned about ways to overcome the challenges and temptations of this critical stage of their lives by using the whole armor of God, particularly God's word, the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:10–18).

The youths also prayed earnestly, especially on the last day of the camp. Through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit, the youths experienced God's glory and power in prayer and came out of the camp, feeling a closer bond of unity in Christ. In the following, two participants share their experience of prayer.

TESTIMONY 1: TRUE JESUS CHURCH—THE TRUE CHURCH

by Sister Hope Ononuju from Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Editor's note: Sister Hope is 16 years old and was baptized after the youth Bible camp in August 2014.

When I came to the True Jesus Church (TJC) with my parents, I really felt that I was in the wrong church. The doctrines of the TJC are very different from those of my previous church, e.g., the mode of baptism, prayer, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. I did not understand the teachings of the true church, and frankly, these often seemed like fables and mere rituals to me. So I told people I believed that there were other true churches besides the TJC, and one such true church would be

my previous church.

Despite my skepticism, I still participated in TJC activities. From August 3 to 7, 2014, I attended the TJC Nigeria youth camp. For me, the camp passed fairly uneventfully until the final prayer session on the last day.

As was the usual service procedure, before we knelt down to pray, Pastor Robinson exhorted us. He urged us to pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit, explaining to us the blessings of the Spirit. A few minutes into the prayer, I suddenly had a vision. I saw darkness in the midst of the brethren. When I worriedly asked God why it was dark, I heard a voice telling me that it was because some of us youths still lacked love for one another. I continued praying. After a while, there was a great light; it was so bright that I could not directly look at it. Puzzled,

I asked God why there was light after the darkness. Once again, I heard His voice saying that these brethren had earnestly repented and thus love now dwelt in their hearts.

As I went deeper into prayer, I saw four men dressed in white robes, two at the back door and another two at the front. They were holding something in their hands. Looking more intently, I realized these were white cups. The men distributed these to everyone praying in the church except me. I wept bitterly, asking why I was left out since I had been attending the youth camp right from the beginning. I wept, shouted, and begged tearfully for my cup.

Through my tears, I heard God asking how long I had been in the TJC. "Six years," I responded. He then said that He had been waiting for me to accept the church and her

doctrines. He explained that He had given me all this time to believe, but I had refused. He had sent me His Holy Spirit but because of my love for the things of the world, I had rejected His Spirit. After saying all these, He turned His back on me.

I cried out for mercy and forgiveness. Finally, He turned and asked me if I fully believed in the true church. I replied “Yes.” It was then that I was finally given my own gift—a cup and a Bible.

Then as I continued praying, this verse from the Scriptures came to my mind:

These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. (Jn 16:1)

Thank the Lord, during that prayer, I finally received the promised Holy Spirit.

Guided by this Spirit of truth, and with such a personal experience of God, I now truly believe that the True Jesus Church is the only true church. Hallelujah, Amen.

TESTIMONY 2: DRAW NEAR TO GOD AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU

by Sister Torju Edafe, from Delta state, Nigeria

Editor's note: Sister Torju is 17 years old.

It has always been my desire to work for the Lord. But although I had received the Holy Spirit in 2011, I knew that God had to send me before I could serve Him. So three months before the TJC Nigeria youth camp, I began to ask the Lord for the power and approval to work for Him.

During the final prayer session on the last day of the seminar, Pastor Robinson asked us to step forward to pray. A struggle began within me; there was an inner voice that urged me to obey the pastor to move to the front to kneel and pray. But there was another dissenting voice telling me that it did not matter where we pray and thus I could stay put and pray.

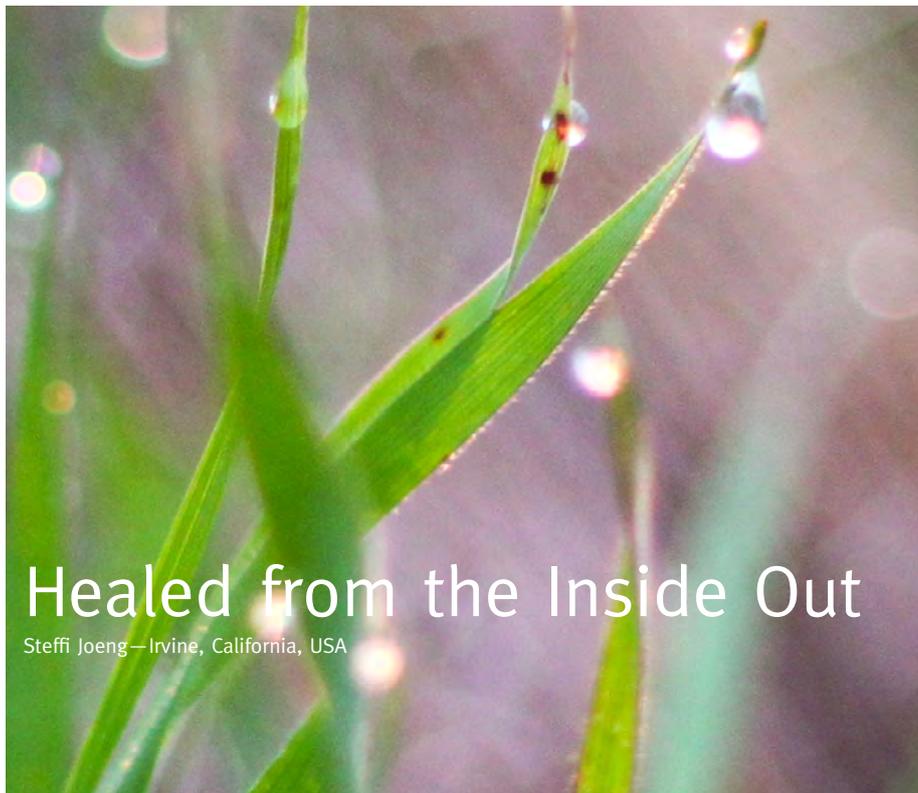
Eventually, I heeded the latter.

In my prayer, I told God how I wanted to work for Him. After some time, I suddenly heard an actual voice telling me to go and preach, to tell people about the kingdom of God, and to win souls for the house of God. I truly felt unworthy of God's calling. I was deeply touched that God had listened to my prayers despite my reluctance to go to the front to pray. Enjoying the deep communion with God in prayer, I prayed on. When I finally arose from the prayer, I realized that everyone else had already stopped praying and was seated.

This wonderful experience has taught me precious lessons. While we can indeed pray anywhere and at any time, God looks at our hearts. Our willingness to come humbly to the front to pray reflects our desire to draw close to Him. God delights in this simple offering of our hearts. Blessings await those whose hearts are close to the altar.

May the Lord help us to do His will, and may He give us the wisdom and power to proclaim Jesus' name. Hallelujah, Amen. ★





Healed from the Inside Out

Steffi Joeng—Irvine, California, USA

In the name of the Lord Jesus I testify to glorify His name. I've been in the True Jesus Church (TJC) since I was born. I was baptized and grew up in the church, attending religious education classes, and even receiving the Holy Spirit when I was young. Because my childhood was so rooted in the faith, everyone thought I would grow up to be an exemplary TJC teenager, but that was not the case.

“I DON'T NEED GOD”

When I started high school, my behavior and spirituality were good. However, my spiritual life spiraled downward as my freshman year progressed. By my junior year, I quarreled with my family daily, went wherever I wanted to go, lied constantly, and made bad friends. I began to hate church and my brothers and sisters in church. My own thoughts and desires consumed me. It progressed to the point where I thought about quitting church because I couldn't understand why I was bound by so many rules when all I wanted was to be free. I felt ostracized and judged at church, and I felt that God didn't love me.

Pride also began to grow in my heart because everything else in my life was so good. I was young and doing well in school. Nothing bad had ever happened to me. I felt untouchable.

During this time, the relationship between my mother and me was also deteriorating. Often, I would be doing work and she would randomly enter my room to ask if I had been praying. Every time she entered, I would angrily snap at her, saying, “No. Why would you think I'm praying?” I would shoo her away because her very presence annoyed me. What I didn't realize was that even though I was very much alive on the outside, inside I was dying.

I GAVE UP, HE DIDN'T

One morning in October 2012, during my junior year, I woke up with a very stiff neck. When I went to the bathroom and looked in the mirror, I saw a lump the size of a gumball, sticking out of my left clavicle. As I continued to observe the lump, I didn't even think of cancer. The pride in my heart told me that that was out of the question—it could never happen to me. A week passed and the gumball had swollen to the size

of my fist. As the weeks passed, the lump seemed to grow bigger and bigger.

After seeing a series of head and neck specialists and oncologists, I was diagnosed with stage II Hodgkin's lymphoma, which is a cancer of the lymph nodes. Finally, the panic set in. I think anyone would be scared after being diagnosed with cancer. My faith was weak, so I neither blamed God nor sought His help. It seemed pointless because I thought that God didn't love me.

After being diagnosed with cancer, it is standard procedure to undergo several body scans. It turned out that there were two tumors in my body, one on my left clavicle, and another large one, about 9 cm in diameter, in the middle of my chest, just above my heart. Thank God, though I had two large tumors, the lymphoma was only at stage II, meaning that it was discovered early and very treatable. In fact, without the appearance of the little gumball to tell me that something was wrong with my body, I would never have known that there was a larger mass in my chest.

As I lay there, I started to reflect on how sinful my life was. I recalled that, “For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov 3:12). As I thought about this verse, my prayer started to change. I began to understand that God was chastising me, and I accepted His actions.

FAITH REBORN THROUGH SUFFERING

This testimony is not about huge miracles, but the small blessings I received during my treatment, through which God slowly trained up my faith and perseverance. Through these little lessons, I learned that God indeed loves me. He wanted me to go through this trial, but He never gave me more than I could handle.

My chemotherapy took place about once every fortnight. Though it was tough to face, it was milder and less frequent than the treatment the children in my neighboring bed area had to undergo. However, I still had moments of great physical pain. I had to receive special shots to replenish my white blood cells. White blood cells are made in our bone marrow, so there were countless nights when I was jolted awake by a painful burning sensation in my spine. In one particular instance, I asked God why He would bring me this suffering, and I pleaded for Him to take away the pain. As I lay there, I started to reflect on how sinful my life was.

I recalled that, “For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov 3:12). As I thought about this verse, my prayer started to change. I began to understand that God was chastising me, and I accepted His actions, like the people of God did in the latter part of Zechariah 1:6:

*“So they returned and said:
'Just as the LORD of hosts
determined to do to us,
According to our ways and
according to our deeds,
So He has dealt with us.'”*

In my prayer, I started admitting my wrong. I recognized that this

was something I deserved and I accepted it. When I returned to God, He showed His faithfulness and lessened my suffering. Thank God, my treatment took about six months in total, a comparatively short time in terms of cancer treatment.

God also protected me psychologically. Throughout my entire diagnosis and treatment, I cried only once. After that, I never felt scared or depressed, because I knew that God had put me into good human hands while covering me with His own hand. I had a great support system consisting of my parents, friends, family, and church. I felt a peace and joy washing over me, which could only have been possible through hope in God.

BLESSINGS AT CHURCH AND AT HOME

Another blessing was that I was able to go to church throughout my illness, even though I was housebound. The cancer affected my immune system, so I had to be home-schooled. I was not allowed to go out much, because even a common cold could kill me. But when Saturdays came around, I would get dressed and go to church to keep the Sabbath. I could continue to do holy work and have fellowship with my brothers and sisters. I was supposed to wear a protective mask when I went out so that I wouldn't get sick, but I didn't bother to wear one at church. I had no fear because I felt that God was protecting me,

God was detoxifying me spiritually, and at the same time, He was filling me with His love and mercy through church members and my family. I no longer felt the need to be sinful or to fulfill my own pleasure, because I felt filled already.

that He would not allow anything to happen to me.

Because of this, church was my only source of influence during that six-month period. This was another blessing, because it meant that I was removed from the darkness I had been living in. I was no longer surrounded by bad friends or negative influences at school. God was detoxifying me spiritually, and at the same time, He was filling me with His love and mercy through church members and my family. I no longer felt the need to be sinful or to fulfill my own pleasure, because I felt filled already.

The greatest blessing was that cancer transformed my relationship with my family. After six months of being sick and spending every day with my parents, I experienced their love more than imaginable. They supported me throughout my chemotherapy, as they accompanied me to every session, made me feel comfortable, cleaned me up after every long day, and helped me recover. They dropped their entire lives to take care of me and make sure I was okay. I really thank God for giving me such amazing parents.

I reflected on why I used to fight with my family and realized the reasons were selfish and pointless. I decided to stop fighting with my family because they did not deserve my harsh words after showing me so much love and care. Thank God, since then, we haven't had any serious fights, and I even tell my parents that I love them all the time. I also don't have the heart to lie to them anymore, because I now understand how much they love me. In this way, cancer was God's wake-up call to me.

After everything was over, my mother told me that before the cancer diagnosis, while she was cooking or cleaning, she would hear

me praying in tongues, but when she came to check on me, I would just be sitting there doing work. In her confusion, she would ask me if I had been praying, only to receive a rude reply. She told me that this was God's way of telling her that something bad was going to happen to me and that she should pray for me. God was preparing my whole family for this trial.

SPIRITUAL CHEMOTHERAPY

As the chemotherapy was working to shrink the malignant cells and tumors, I also felt my evil desires, anger, and weaknesses diminishing. It was spiritual chemotherapy. I found it especially interesting that I had a huge growth right in front of my heart, as though it was a physical manifestation of all the evil that was covering my heart. It had brought me so much anger and emptiness, preventing me from seeing God and other people in a good light. During my treatment, even though I felt like my outer body was dying, my inner person was slowly being brought back to life, being strengthened and restored on the right path.

Thank God, I was declared cancer-free in April 2013. Since then, I have not ceased in trying to bolster my faith. Even though I suffered, I came out practically unscathed. Even now, my experience of having cancer feels like a dream that I can hardly remember. My only reminders of ever being sick are the scars on my body. God really protected me and showed me His mercy and love. He placed me in the fire in order to refine me so that I would be a more complete vessel. He showed me His righteousness. Even more, He showed me He is my heavenly Father. He took me back and saved me from being lost. Now I feel that I should do everything for the glory of God to repay His love.

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ... For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit,

that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(Heb 12:7, 10, 11)

Through this experience, God told me that I am His child and that He loves me. I learned that when we suffer, it may be because we are disobedient. When God chastises us, it is to show us His love and mercy so that we will return to Him. I'm very thankful that He saved my life. May all glory and praise be unto His name. ★

A Bystander's Perspective by Raymond Chou

To Sister Steffi, her illness is just like a dream. She may not remember the details, but I do. As a resident preacher, I was under so much stress because the church council wanted me to comfort her. But what can you say to a young, bright, and beautiful sixteen-year-old girl who had just been diagnosed with stage II cancer?

After much prayer and walking back and forth, I picked up the phone to call her. "Hi Pastor!" she said. She sounded happy and I could hear the sound of a video game in the background—maybe she was playing with her brother. I asked if she was okay. "I'm okay, I'm okay, but I'm busy now. I can talk to you later." She sounded fine, so I wondered if there had been a mistake. But at church on Saturday, I sat next to Steffi's mother during lunch time to find out more. Before I could say anything, she started crying. It was not easy, especially for her parents.

As bystanders, we saw God demonstrating His miraculous guidance, helping a little seed to grow, and grow strong. Once, I asked Steffi how the chemotherapy was going. She said, "Thank God it's going well. On Thursday, I do chemotherapy. On Friday, I vomit all day. But thank God, on Saturday, I get to go to church!" I didn't know how to respond to such a positive answer. It's amazing how a person can so comfortably face such a dire and drastic situation in life. She was even leading hymnal worship sessions when she had no hair. Seeing this, I would think that it could only be through the power of God—there's no other reason.

There were times when Steffi was in great danger of losing her life, when her blood cell count dropped so low that she could depart at any time. But the whole ordeal not only greatly edified her family, but also the local church. Many members started pondering on the meaning of life and diligently prayed for her. We really thank God that we are able to see such a great transformation in her. It is a miracle that has inspired the whole church. May God continue to help and guide Sister Steffi.



A Holy Calendar

Based on a sermon by Peter Shee—Singapore

Every year, around October or November, we see calendars for sale in stores. Most of us will have one at home or in our office, reminding us of significant dates, such as public holidays, annual leave, school holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and appointments.

Different countries and cultures may have different calendars, depending on whether they follow the cycle of the sun or the moon, and which take into account local customs. The calendar of ancient Israel particularly stands out, because it was devised by God to include seven feasts to be observed by the chosen people each year in order to commemorate significant events in their history.

We may wonder what relevance Israel's history has for us today. Indeed, it has great relevance, because Israel was God's channel of blessing for the whole of mankind. Through them, we have come to know the one true God and Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind. The seven feasts in the holy calendar point to the story of God's salvation and His love—how He sent His only begotten Son to die for us, and how

He has prepared a glorious eternity for us to enjoy.

THE PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

The Passover

"On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread." (Lev 23:5–6)

For those of us with Jewish friends, we understand the importance of the Passover for their community. In the Bible, it is listed as the first feast in the Hebrew calendar, celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month, marking the beginning of the year (Ex 12:2).

The Passover is followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread from the fifteenth to twenty-fourth day. Hence, these two feasts are sometimes mentioned together as if they were one. They are important because they commemorate one of the most

significant events in the history of the Jewish people.

On the day of the Passover, God delivered Israel out of Egypt and the bondage of slavery. That evening, just before they departed, every Hebrew household had to slaughter a lamb without blemish at twilight and smear the blood on their doorposts and lintel (Ex 12:5–7).

"For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." (Ex 12:12–13)

Since God had warned Pharaoh nine times without success to allow Israel to leave Egypt, God resolved to kill the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast. Even Pharaoh's firstborn son would have to die. However, since the Israelites obeyed God to smear the blood of the Passover lamb

The seven feasts in the holy calendar point to the story of God's salvation and His love—how He sent His only begotten Son to die for us, and how He has prepared a glorious eternity for us to enjoy.

on their doorposts and lintel, God protected them, and the angel of death passed over their houses. For this reason, this first feast came to be called the Passover.

The sacrificial lamb prefigures Jesus Christ, who was crucified on the day of the Passover. He shed His blood and died to deliver the people of the world from sin and death (Ex 12:5–13; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18–20). Through the Passover, God delivered Israel, His firstborn (Ex 4:22–23), out of Egypt. Today, Christians experience spiritual exodus when they are delivered from sin's bondage through baptism. In God's eyes, they are His firstborn (Heb 12:22–23).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Israelites ate the Passover meal in a great hurry. As soon as they were to hear the sound of the Egyptians weeping and wailing over their firstborns, Pharaoh would decree that Israel should depart. Therefore, God instructed them to be ready: they were to put on their sandals and belts and hold on to their walking staffs while eating (Ex 12:11).

The Israelites also had to prepare for the journey ahead, making sure they had supplies of food to take with them, including bread. Normally, they would bake leavened bread, but since they were making haste, there was no time to wait for the bread to rise; they had to make unleavened bread.

"Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name. You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the

day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life." (Deut 16:2–3)

Unleavened Bread—Purge Ourselves from Sin

In the Bible, leaven refers to sin, wickedness, pride, and hypocrisy. This was another reason why the Passover had to be eaten with unleavened bread. We must purge our hearts and lives from leaven so that we become like a new lump of dough—without malice or wickedness, but having sincerity and truth.

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor 5:7–8)

Since Jesus was a perfect man who died for our sins, He was like the unblemished lamb and the unleavened bread. He set an example for us to emulate, and so we should strive to be clean and spotless.

Seven Days—an Entire Life

Jesus lived and died without sin, although He was like us in every way (cf. Heb 2 and 4). As was evident from His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, He had the same human weaknesses as us: He was afraid to suffer and to face death. Hebrews also says that He was tempted in every way, but was able to overcome.

Seven is a complete number: the seven days of eating unleavened bread represents the entirety of Jesus' life. We must follow His footsteps to flee from sin. Imagine what a pity it would be if we had

kept ourselves pure and faithful to God, only to fall at the last hurdle by committing a mortal sin. We must take care to discipline ourselves so that we partake of unleavened bread for seven whole days.

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (1 Pet 4:1–2)

Sometimes, God allows us to experience suffering and affliction to purify us. Since Christ suffered for our sins and overcame all that came His way, we can be confident that, by relying on the Lord, we will definitely overcome sin. In short, the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread signify the sinless life of Christ and serve to remind us to remove sin during the course of our lives.

THE FEAST OF THE FIRSTFRUITS

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.'"

(Lev 23:9–11)

On a Sunday after the Passover, the Israelites had to take the first fruits of their harvest, to wave them before the LORD. In fact, the Feast of Firstfruits coincided with the barley harvest, and so the Israelites would offer the first ripe sheaves to God.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor 15:20)

Jesus Christ died on the day of the Passover, which was a Friday. Early on

Sunday morning, when a few people went to His tomb, they could not find His body, because He had already resurrected. That day was also the day of the Feast of the Firstfruits.

Paul says Jesus is the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep. In other words, He is the first person to come back from the dead and never having to die again. The Bible records that, after His resurrection, He ascended to heaven and will come again on the Last Day.

In God's eyes, those who die in the Lord have but fallen asleep. When Jesus comes, they will experience the same resurrection as He did. He will wake them up with the shout of His voice, and they will rise to live with Him forever. Knowing this gives us great hope.

THE FEAST OF WEEKS (PENTECOST)

"And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD." (Lev 23:15–16)

Fifty days after the Feast of the Firstfruits, God's people were to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost.¹ During this time, the Israelites had to offer another kind of first fruits, which was wheat.

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:23)

Paul tells us that, like Christ, we identify with the first fruits of the Spirit. Historically, on the day of Pentecost, when the Jews were

offering up their first fruits of wheat, about 120 Christians gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem to pray. Suddenly, they all began speaking in tongues. This event confirmed that Jesus had resurrected, ascended to heaven, and was now pouring out the promised Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:1–4, 33). By receiving the Holy Spirit, we, as Christians, have the first fruits of the Spirit.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

(Rom 8:11–13)

While we are living in this world, we may suffer pain and sicknesses; yet we have hope, because Jesus' resurrection assures us of what we can expect. We know that the Holy Spirit will raise us to life when Jesus comes again. In the meantime, we should rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to purge our lives from any leaven, not obeying the impulses of the flesh, but walking according to the Spirit.

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a

holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.' "

(Lev 23:23–25)

After a three-month break, the Israelites were to blow trumpets on the first day of the seventh month. The purpose was to announce another two festivals within the same month—the Feast of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The sound of a trumpet draws the attention of people and makes a proclamation. In a similar way, Jesus came to the world to preach and to put into action the gospel of salvation—to proclaim liberty to the oppressed, to give sight to the blind, and to heal the brokenhearted (Lk 4:18–19). He promised to give rest to all those who would come to Him (Mt 11:28). In this way, He fulfilled what was foreshadowed in the Feast of Trumpets: the Messiah's gospel call (cf. Isa 18:3; Jn 12:32; Isa 58:1; Jn 7:37–39).

Today, we have received the commission to continue blowing the trumpet. Hence, we must preach the gospel so that people can enter the heavenly kingdom (Mk 16:15; Acts 26:18; Rev 14:6–7).

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

"Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God." (Lev 23:27–28)

The sound of a trumpet draws the attention of people and makes a proclamation. In a similar way, Jesus came to the world to preach and to put into action the gospel of salvation—to proclaim liberty to the oppressed, to give sight to the blind, and to heal the brokenhearted (Lk 4:18–19). ... In this way, He fulfilled what was foreshadowed in the Feast of Trumpets: the Messiah's gospel call.

¹ Pentecost: Middle English, from Old English *pentecosten*, from Late Latin *pentecoste* and from Greek *pentēkostē*, literally, fiftieth day. (Source: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pentecost>; February 5, 2015)

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would go into the innermost part of the holy temple, which housed the ark of the covenant and the throne of grace, or mercy seat. This Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the temple by a curtain. Normally, nobody was allowed in; only on the Day of Atonement did God permit the high priest to enter in with the blood of the sin offering, in order to sprinkle it onto the mercy seat (Lev 16:14).

Hebrews 10:19–22 tells us that Jesus is our High Priest. When He died on the cross, the curtain before the Holy of Holies was torn into two, signifying that He had opened the way into God's presence. In a spiritual sense, that was the Day of Atonement for all Christians.

Just as the blood of the animal sacrifice was sprinkled onto the mercy seat, so the blood of Christ is now sprinkled onto our hearts at the point of water baptism (cf. Heb 10:22), cleansing us from sin and enabling us to keep God's commandments (cf. Rom 2:15). While the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread point to the historical one-time death and shedding of blood by Jesus, the Day of Atonement points to the effect of His shedding of blood in the lives of Christians throughout history. Since we have been sanctified through the blood of Christ, we should strive to lead a godly life as we wait for Jesus' return (2 Pet 3:11–13).

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD.'" (Lev 23:34)

The final feast in the Hebrew calendar was the Feast of Tabernacles. Aside from resting from their work and offering sacrifices, God also commanded the Israelites to live in tents for seven days. The reason was so that they would remember that they were once sojourners in the wilderness (Lev 23:43). To conclude the festivities, there would be a great

celebration on the eighth day.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1–4, Paul likens the body to a tent or tabernacle. Inside this tent, we groan in anticipation of the time when Jesus comes again to give us a new habitation, which is a spiritual, incorruptible body. We are assured of this because the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, serves as our guarantee (2 Cor 5:5). Therefore, the Feast of Tabernacles points to the continual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which gives us a foretaste of heaven (Rom 14:17).

Today, the Holy Spirit enables us to have fellowship with God, to endure trials and tribulations, and to give us hope in the midst of suffering. If we can preserve ourselves for seven days—that is, for our lifetime—Jesus will take us home when He comes again. We must therefore constantly remind ourselves that we are but sojourners in this world, living in tents, and set our sights on returning to our heavenly home (2 Cor 5:1; Rev 21:3–5).

Jesus resurrected from the dead and, on the day of Pentecost, poured out the Holy Spirit. Today, the Holy Spirit enables us to have fellowship with God, to endure trials and tribulations, and to give us hope in the midst of suffering. If we can preserve ourselves for seven days—that is, for our lifetime—Jesus will take us home when He comes again. We must therefore constantly remind ourselves that we are but sojourners in this world, living in tents, and set our sights on returning to our heavenly home (2 Cor 5:1; Rev 21:3–5).

Moreover, the Bible links the tabernacle to the church—the tabernacle of David and New Jerusalem, the tabernacle of God with men (Amos 9:11–13; Zech 14:16; Acts 15:16–17; Rev 21:3). Those who wish to receive the Holy Spirit need to enter the New Jerusalem, which is the true church:

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations

which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain" (Zech 14:16–17).

CONCLUSION

Jesus fulfilled the seven feasts in Leviticus 23, which served to point to His work of salvation. Have we heard Jesus blowing the trumpet? Have we responded to His call to take up His commission? May we purge ourselves from sin, have fellowship with the Holy Spirit, pursue godliness, and set our hope on the heavenly kingdom all the days of our lives. ★



Christian Viewpoint on Festivals

Adapted from lecture notes from Singapore

INTRODUCTION

Festivals confront Christians at every turn. At home, we observe various festivities as part of our family traditions. At school and at work, local festivals may be officially celebrated. Our friends may also invite us to join in their festivities. But which festivals can Christians participate in and which ones should we avoid?

Our guide is, of course, the Bible, but before we search the Scriptures for answers, we need to understand that there are two different types of festivals: religious and cultural. Religious festivals are held to honor deities or to perform religiously significant rituals. Cultural festivals commemorate momentous events or heroes of the community, or celebrate joyous occasions such as harvest-time and change to benign season (e.g., Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, etc.).

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Feasts of the Lord

A look into the Bible reveals that the Israelites too had both religious and cultural festivals. In the Old Testament, God Himself instituted seven religious festivals for the

Israelites. They are laid down in Leviticus 23 as the (1) Feast of Passover, (2) Feast of Unleavened Bread, (3) Feast of the Firstfruits, (4) Feast of Pentecost (also called Feast of Harvest¹ and Feast of Weeks²), (5) Feast of Trumpets, (6) Day of Atonement, and (7) Feast of Tabernacles (also known as Feast of Ingathering³).

Christians are not bound to observe them, because they are only a shadow of the things to come (Col 2:16–17; cf. Heb 10:1). These festivals foreshadowed the salvation that would be given through Jesus Christ, the downpour of the Holy Spirit, and Christ's gospel call. All these have been fulfilled through Jesus Christ, hence we do not need to keep these feasts anymore.

Festivals in Honor of Idols

Moving on to the New Testament, we find that neither Jesus nor the apostles established any festivals; therefore, Christianity as such has no festivals. Needless to say, Christians are strictly forbidden from participating in festivals dedicated to false gods. It is an abomination to God. In Leviticus 18:3–30, God issued this injunction:

“According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. ... Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.”

Colossians 2:8 warns against being spoiled by the “tradition of men.” 1 Corinthians 10:18–22 warns against having “fellowship with demons” and instructs Corinth members that “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.”

The command to Christians to separate themselves from the practices of other religions receives even stronger emphasis in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion

has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

Paganistic Festivals in Honor of the True God

However, people love festivals. If God has not provided any and celebrating a religious festival patently dedicated to a false god is wrong, it is very tempting to adopt a proscribed but popular religious festival and celebrate it in honor of the true God. In history, Aaron was the initiator of such assimilation. When the Israelites grew restless from waiting too long for Moses to descend from Mount Sinai with God's laws, they revered a golden calf idol as the god who rescued them from Egypt. Exodus 32:5–6 records this innovative and masterful maneuver that would be copied by the apostate church thousands of years later:

So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

History has shown that God does not want His people to honor Him in the way of the Gentiles. God is to be honored only in the way He Himself has set out. Therefore, Christians are not allowed to adopt a pagan festival, mask it with a Christian name, force Christian meanings into its centuries-old customs and celebrations, and then celebrate it in honor of Christ.

Note that he was still faithful to the LORD. His intention was to honor the LORD; the entire shenanigan was a "festival to the LORD"! Only that he adopted a pagan celebratory format. But unlike the apostate church, he knew of no other form of celebration, for Moses had not yet returned with God's blueprint of how the people ought to worship. Nonetheless, God was incensed:

"And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them." (Ex 32:9–10)

In the face of this threat, Moses interceded forcefully. God relented and spared the Israelites. Otherwise the entire Hebrew race would have vanished in the sands of time.

So it is very clear that not only the celebration of paganistic festivals per se is prohibited; the celebration of paganistic festivals reinterpreted to honor the true God is also prohibited. This is because God not only detests the worship of false gods but also people worshipping Him in the way of other religions. The form or manner of honoring God is important. In Deuteronomy 12:3–4, God commanded:

"And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things."

And in Deuteronomy 12:29–32, He added:

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

Jeremiah 10:2 warns, "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles...." History has shown that God does not want His people to honor Him in the way of the Gentiles. God is to be honored only in the way He Himself has set out. Therefore, Christians are not allowed to adopt a pagan festival, mask it with a Christian name, force Christian meanings into its centuries-old customs and celebrations, and then celebrate it in honor of Christ.

Examples of such adopted festivals are Christmas, Easter, Halloween, etc. These festivals have pagan roots. Christmas, for example, originally celebrated the birthday of the sun god, Easter originated in a festival honoring the deity of fertility, and Halloween initially honored the god of death and is openly associated with the works of the devil. Although some of these festivals may be so ingrained in certain cultures that their original pagan roots are lost, we cannot and must not have anything to do with these festivals, lest we incur the wrath of God.

CULTURAL FESTIVALS

As for cultural festivals, peoples of all races everywhere have their own. The Jews are no exception. They have two—Purim and Hanukkah.⁴

Purim is celebrated on the thirteenth to fifteenth day of the

We must never compromise our principles in order to please man. Instead, we ought to remember that our God is a jealous God, and that He has chosen us to be separate and holy so that we may glorify and proclaim His name.

proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Pet 2:9) ★

month Adar (roughly March).⁵ It commemorates the deliverance of the Jews in the Persian Empire wrought by Esther⁶ during the reign of Ahasuerus [probably Xerxes (486–465 B.C.) but possibly Artaxerxes II (404–359 B.C.)].

The name originated from the Hebrew word *pur* used in Esther 3:7; 9:24–26 as “lots.” It may also have been derived from the Assyrian word *puru*, meaning pebble or small stone, which would be used for casting lots. Lots are associated with this festival because Haman, the vizier who masterminded the plot to massacre all the Jews, cast lots to find an auspicious day, as he was a superstitious man, to carry out the pogrom.

Hanukkah (also known as the Feast of Dedication) is celebrated beginning from the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev (December) and lasts for eight days. It originally celebrated the winter solstice but later commemorated the dedication (or cleansing) of the temple and altar by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 B.C. following his victories over Antiochus Epiphanes who had desecrated them for three years.⁷ Hence the name. *Hanukkah* in Hebrew means “dedication.”

The prominent feature of this festival is the lighting of a candle on each of the eight nights of festivities. There is neither partial or total abstention from occupation nor is there any holy convocation at the beginning or the end.

Both these festivals were actively and widely celebrated in Jesus' time. Jesus criticized many practices of the Jews in His time but never once questioned the propriety of celebrating Purim or Hanukkah. The gospel writer John mentioned Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication,

in John 10:22 without adverse comment. It may be inferred therefore that the celebration of cultural festivals is permitted.

CONCLUSION

In the Old Testament, God personally instituted religious festivals for His chosen people, the Israelites. However, since these were only a shadow of the things to come through Jesus Christ, we are not obliged to keep them today.

Christianity itself is a religion without festivals, because Jesus did not institute any. Yet the Lord did not condemn the celebration of cultural festivals. Hence, it is not wrong to participate in festivals that are not religiously pagan in nature.

However, it is important to realize that pagan practices permeate every aspect of life—from birth to death. “Culture” in itself inevitably includes pagan aspects and “cultural” festivals will likely involve pagan practices. In celebrating these cultural festivals, we need to abstain from pagan elements and superstition. Inevitably, our refusal to join in the festivities may raise questions, make us appear boring, unadjusted, or even extreme and intolerant. Yet we must never compromise our principles in order to please man. Instead, we ought to remember that our God is a jealous God, and that He has chosen us to be separate and holy so that we may glorify and proclaim His name.

For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; There! A people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations. (Num 23:9)

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may

Footnotes:

1 Ex 23:16

2 Ex 34:22; Deut 16:10; 2 Chr 8:13

3 Ex 23:16; 34:22

4 See generally Tenny, M.C., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976; *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, InterVarsity Press, England, Leicester, 1980, 1994.

5 Originally, it was celebrated on the fourteenth day by those in villages and unwallied towns and on the fifteenth by those in fortified cities (Est 9:18–19; Jos. *Antiq.* xi. 13). Around 161 B.C. a decree was made to celebrate annually the defeat of Nicanor, the Syrian general, by Judas Maccabaeus on the thirteenth day of Adar (1 Macc 7:49; 2 Macc 15:36). Incidentally, the record in 2 Maccabees 15:36, believed to have been written by 50 B.C., noted that Nicanor' Day was the day before “Mordecai's Day,” referring to Purim. The famous Jewish historian Josephus, at the end of the first century A.D., stated that Nicanor's Day was kept on Adar 13 (*Antiq.* xii. 412) and Purim on Adar 14 and 15 (*Antiq.* xi. 295). After the 7th century A.D., the observance of Nicanor's Day faded and Purim extended itself forward to the thirteenth.

6 Est 9:16–18

7 1 Macc 4:41–59; 2 Macc 10:6–8



True Jesus Church in Australia —History, Organization, Challenges, and Developments

Australia Coordination Board

THE FIRST TRUE JESUS CHURCH MEMBERS IN AUSTRALIA

1980s

In the early 1980s, True Jesus Church (TJC) members, primarily students and immigrants from various countries, started to gather in Melbourne and Sydney for family services on Sabbath days. Later, TJC members staying in Brisbane and Perth also began to gather for Sabbath services.

In Melbourne and Sydney, overseas students and immigrants were predominantly from Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Indonesia. Perth had a similar composition. In Brisbane, immigrants were mostly from Taiwan. By the mid 1980s, the Melbourne church and the Sydney church were established and registered as legal entities. Brisbane and Perth followed suit in the late 1980s.

1990s

Over time, the congregation at the Australian churches grew, as more overseas members moved to Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, and Brisbane, and more truth-seekers (being immigrants or overseas

students) were baptized. In the late 1990s, the gospel reached Darwin. When relatives of Melbourne brethren residing in Darwin joined the true fold, a local place of worship was established.

2000s

In the mid 2000s, some overseas students and immigrants moved to Adelaide. Family services soon started and the Adelaide House of Prayer was formally approved by the Australian National Church Conference in May 2014.

2010s

As of December 31, 2014, the Australian churches have a total registered membership of 732.



The churches in Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney currently have two church buildings (but not all of them are fully functional yet), and the Adelaide House of Prayer has purchased its own church premises in late 2014.



The Australian churches have a multi-cultural congregation, from different backgrounds, including Australian Caucasians, locally born Australian children and youths, and immigrants from countries such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, Timor, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN COORDINATION BOARD (ACB)

1980s

In the late 1980s, a proposal to form a coordination board incorporating churches in Australia and New Zealand was presented to the True Jesus Church in Auckland, New Zealand. At that time, the purpose was to organize and coordinate the visits of overseas ministers assisting the holy work in both countries. Subsequently, in 1990, the Australian New Zealand Coordination Board (ANZCB) was formed.

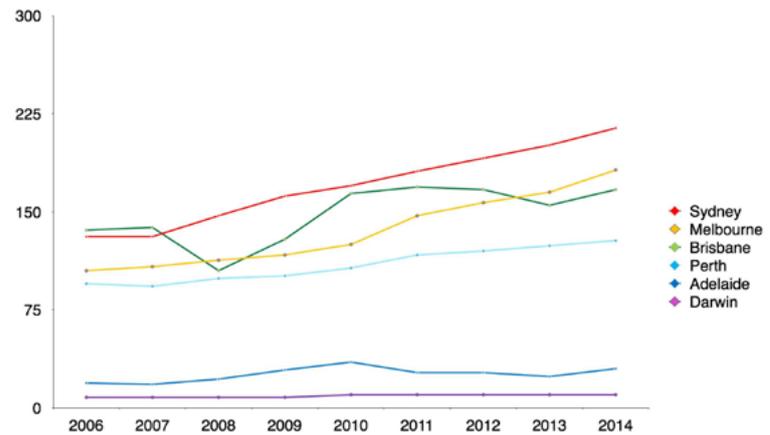
1990s

The first Australian New Zealand Coordinating Committee (ANZCC) meeting was held on November 10, 1990 in Brisbane, Australia. Its first executive committee comprised Sydney church committee members, with Deaconess Priscilla Kong as the chairperson.

However, on February 20, 1993, the churches in New Zealand opted out of the ANZCB. As a result, the ANZCB was dissolved and the Australian churches (Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth) then formed the True Jesus Church Australian Coordination Board (ACB)

Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney churches ... are in the process of branching out into two churches in their respective cities. Each local church has a succession plan to train as many youths as possible to enable them to step up and actively participate in the holy work. The increasing number of churches in Australia has also created more opportunities for every brethren to serve in their respective local churches.

Membership Changes from 2006 to 2014



on April 9, 1993.

On March 31, 1994, the ACB held its first ACB Delegates Conference (ACBDC) at Brisbane church. This was later followed by the first ACB Executive Committee meeting and the first National Church Conference.

2000s

The ACB and the Australian churches are governed by the ACB by-laws, which are updated regularly. On October 5, 2009, the ACB became a legal entity as an Australian Public Company, Limited by Guarantee.

The ACB Activities

1992

The ANZCB held its first Bible camp in Sydney in January 1992 with the assistance of ministers sent by the International Assembly/South East Asia Evangelical Centre. The camp's main purpose was to promote fellowship among the youths from the Australian and New Zealand churches and at the same time, to provide spiritual nourishment.

1995

In January 1995, the ACB conducted its first Short-Term Theological Training Course (STTTC) in Melbourne. The purpose was to have a structured curriculum to nurture and train youths in their faith. The STTTC is a three-week course held annually, with the venue rotated among the Australian churches. Participants are students aged sixteen and above.

2004

The ACB introduced a one-week National Working Youth Seminar (NWYS), held concurrently with the STTTC.

2010

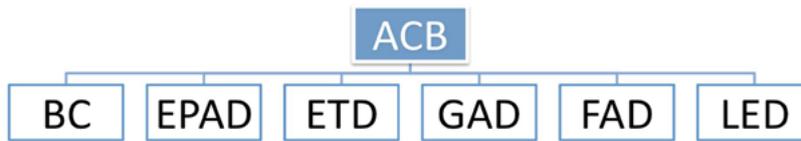
The ACB engaged Preacher Zephaniah Wei Sheng Li (on loan from Taiwan General Assembly) as the full-time resident preacher for Australia.

Summary

The ACB has established several mission committees to assist the holy work in local pioneering areas, such as Adelaide and Darwin as well as in other countries, such as Fiji. The ACB also assists in the holy work in Papua New Guinea. However, no mission committee has been formed so far—only the ACB resident preacher and another brother have been visiting local members in Papua New Guinea. The high crime rate in that country has hindered the dispatch of workers there.



Current (2014) ACB Organisational Structure



Australia Coordination Board (ACB)

Bylaw Committee (BC)

Evangelical and Pastoral Affairs Department (EPAD)

- Australia Youth Ministry Committee (AYMC)
- Darwin Mission Committee (DMC)
- Papua New Guinea (Coordinator)

Education and Training Department (ETD)

General Affairs Department (GAD)

Financial Affairs Department (FAD)

Literary Evangelism Department (LED)

.....
Fiji Mission Committee (FMC) - under IA/EHDWM

CHALLENGES AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

• **Full-time Ministry:** The Australian youths have yet to respond to the call of full-time ministry, despite the extensive training provided by the church for them. The level of commitment and dedication required for a potential preacher is still absent.

Notwithstanding, the ACB continues to focus and emphasize on training Australian youths. This is accomplished through the annual Short-Term Theological Training Course (STTTC), which has a six-year syllabus, and the annual National Working Youths Seminar (NWYS). The STTTC and NWYS train, equip, and help youths to participate in church work at the local level. This includes sermon speaking, pastoral work, and evangelism. Suitable youths are also encouraged to participate in the Fiji missionary work.

• **Church Branching:** To date, the Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney churches have purchased second church buildings and are in the process of branching out into two churches in their respective cities. Each local church has a succession plan to train as many youths as possible to enable them to step up and actively participate in the holy work. The increasing number of churches in Australia has also created more opportunities for every

brethren to serve in their respective local churches.

• **Married Youths:** One specific group of youths who requires attention and encouragement are married youths. Married youths tend to shy off from church work once they have children. They should be encouraged not to stop their life of service after they marry. The church needs more zealous married youths to set good examples by continuing in their service to the Lord, even when they start a family.

• **Marriage Counselling:** Active national and international marriage facilitation is needed to ensure our youths marry within the Lord and to cater for the increasing number of youths of marriageable age.

• **Care Groups:** A significant percentage of the congregation in Sydney and Melbourne are from China. To earn a living, many of them need to work on Saturdays and are unable to attend Sabbath services. To pastor these brethren, the church has established dedicated care groups and conducts family services.

• **Strong Pulpit Ministry:** Australia is an affluent country and her citizens enjoy a good life. It is important to have strong pulpit ministry to remind our members not to focus on material enjoyment and possessions but to

strive to nurture their spiritual life.

Although the Australian churches face various challenges, we thank the Lord for continuously adding souls to the true fold in Australia and for giving us the opportunity to care for the Lord's sheep in other regions. May God continue to strengthen and guide the evangelistic and pastoral work on this continent. Amen. ★



Personal Evangelism— The Example of Jesus

Based on a sermon by Derren Liang—Irvine, California, USA

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Mt 9:35)

GOING ABOUT

A comparison of the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist reveal interesting similarities as well as differences. Both proclaimed the same message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Mt 3:2; cf. Mt 4:17). However, they differed in the extent of their community interaction. John the Baptist chose an ascetic existence in the wilderness, surviving on locusts and honey, and making a habit of fasting. To pave the way for Jesus, John the Baptist had to undertake the difficult but necessary task – like Elijah—of turning “the hearts of the people ... the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” He was the lonely voice in the wilderness preaching repentance in order to bring people closer to God’s kingdom.

In contrast, as Jesus went about different cities and villages, He made a conscious effort to enter into and

participate in people’s lives. He regularly dined in people’s homes and attended wedding feasts; He met people from all walks of society. When He was criticized for eating in the company of tax collectors and sinners, Jesus pointed out, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mk 2:17). Clearly, Jesus deliberately associated with the spiritually needy in order to save them.

The lives of Jesus and John highlight two key aspects for our life of servitude. First, we should aspire to a simple life where we can find quiet moments to draw close to God. This will then help us cultivate the determination to serve Him. Those preoccupied with multiplying their financial worth or climbing the corporate and social ladders will have little energy or will left to serve God. But those who are contented with their simple lives will find it easier to focus on the matters of God.

Second, we need to work by God’s power (cf. Zech 4:6). As humans, we are often tempted to fall back on our own abilities, experience,

or human contacts. But these are limited and often unsustainable over a long period. If our ministry is to grow sweeter the longer we serve Him, then we must be connected to an eternal and unchanging source of power. When our hearts are focused on God, we can draw divine power from Him. But when our hearts are in the world, we lose this connection to Him and His power. Jesus regularly retreated to the wilderness for prayer and communion with His Father. This was how He gained divine power and determination in order to walk tirelessly through the cities and villages, preaching the message of the kingdom.

ALL THE CITIES AND VILLAGES

Following Jesus’ evangelistic footsteps does not necessarily mean we have to give up our careers and devote our lives to full-time ministry. What His example does teach us is that we must spread the gospel wherever we go. If we relocate for reasons of work or study, we must always remember our higher purpose, which is to bring the Lord’s chosen flock into His fold. When each of us preaches in our respective localities, it will be as if



Jesus Himself is walking through the cities and villages.

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). We should not passively wait for people to seek the truth; instead, we must be proactive in bringing people to God’s church, guiding them to learn the truth, and interceding for them. We must feel the same urgent sense of mission that Jesus felt when He preached in all the cities and villages. By preaching the gospel of God’s kingdom, we bring peace, hope, and salvation to a spiritually impoverished world.

PREACH WITH AUTHORITY

Through every account of His evangelistic sessions, Jesus preached with power and authority. The church, which is the body of Christ and the dwelling place of God, should have the same authority. Authority from God is manifested in three ways:

Words that Cut to the Heart

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Mk 1:21–22)

What does “having authority” mean? It means that the Lord’s words were like a sword that cut to His listeners’ hearts, moving them to confess their sins, deny themselves, and follow Christ. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he spoke with such authority. Three

thousand people were cut to the heart by his sermon and were compelled to believe in Jesus (Acts 2:37–41).

The church today must also be able to manifest God’s authority in her evangelistic activities. As members, we must constantly pray for her. God works with a prayerful church and He gives authority to her workers. Visitors who hear the word preached with power will be moved to believe.

Casting Out of Unclean Spirits

And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” (Mk 1:26–27)

God has given the church the authority to cast out demons (Mt 10:8; Mk 16:17). In this context, the gospel of the kingdom can be both heard and experienced (Mt 12:28). There are many testimonies in the True Jesus Church about how demons have been cast out by the power of the Holy Spirit. In one church, there was a man who had been attending services and studying the church’s doctrines for a long time. Although he was familiar with the Bible’s teachings, he found it hard to completely believe because he felt he could not yet see God. But on one occasion, he witnessed the church members casting out an unclean spirit; he saw for himself the demeanor of the demon-possessed person and the effects of the members’ fasting

prayers. This left him in no doubt about God’s power and the authority given to the church. He and the one who had been demon-possessed went on to accept water baptism.

Healing of the Sick

So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them. (Mk 1:31)

Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law with a simple touch. This was evidence of God’s empowerment (Acts 10:38):

[...]God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Jesus was from Nazareth, an unremarkable place (Jn 1:46). Yet He was anointed with power to heal the sick and the demon-possessed. Today, His church, with the same lowly status, has likewise been granted power to perform the ministry of healing and to glorify God’s name.

PRAY AND PREACH

Signs and miracles are critical complements to the gospel. Spiritual authority is more than a powerful sermon: if a listener does not experience God, it will still be difficult for him to believe.

Jesus said: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit before they went forth to preach the gospel. They obeyed, staying in Jerusalem until the downpour of the Holy Spirit gave them God’s authority. Subsequently, they went on to fulfil their commission with joy and courage.

Therefore, planning evangelistic work must never be approached in

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). We should not passively wait for people to seek the truth; instead, we must be proactive in bringing people to God’s church, guiding them to learn the truth, and interceding for them. We must feel the same urgent sense of mission that Jesus felt when He preached in all the cities and villages.



What motivates us to preach? Is it external, say, from ministers encouraging us? Or is it from within, stemming from the abidance of God's Spirit, compelling us to share the good news with others?

the same way as secular events. In the latter, we apply our knowledge and past experience, and then hope that things will go smoothly. For evangelistic events, we must first, constantly and earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. We seek to proceed not by our own will but with the power and authority of God. Only with the Lord's abidance can the gospel be preached effectively; only then can the word of God enter and work in the hearts of the listeners.

THE MOTIVATION TO PREACH

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Mt 9:36)

And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. (Mk 6:34)

What motivates us to preach? Is it external, say, from ministers encouraging us? Or is it from within, stemming from the abidance of God's Spirit, compelling us to share the good news with others?

External stimulation may prod us to be involved. But the burning fullness of God's Spirit will drive us to be committed. This is because the Spirit of Jesus enables us to see others in the same way that Jesus did. We shall be acutely conscious that people in the world are weary and scattered like sheep without a shepherd—vulnerable to attack, devoid of care, and lacking in sustenance for their very souls. And, like our Good Shepherd, we will be filled with compassion which, in turn, spurs us to urgently share the Good

News with them. Filled with God's Spirit and love, we will look beyond a person's worldly credentials and circumstances; we will be motivated solely by the love of Christ to see a person's spiritual need.

Once, Jesus and His disciples sailed to a deserted place to rest, after a busy day when they did not even have time to eat. But when the multitudes saw where He was going, they rushed ahead, arriving at the destination before He did. Moved by their actions, Jesus went ashore to continue teaching until late into the evening. Afterwards, He even fed the multitudes with bread before sending them away.

During the course of our lives, there may be times when we feel we have good reasons for not participating in the work of evangelism. Perhaps we have been facing personal issues that demand all our time, energy, and focus. In such situations, we should learn from Jesus and look into the hearts of those who have yet to believe. Seeing how much they need God will rekindle our compassion and stir us to overcome our physical or mental challenges and resume God's work.

THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few." (Mt 9:37)

Evangelism is more than simply bringing people through the doors of the church; we also need to undertake follow-up work. As there is so much to do and limited time to do it, Jesus urges us to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt 9:38). So besides prayer for evangelistic work, we must also incessantly ask God to stir up the hearts of members. When

God moves people to do His work, they will do it willingly and joyfully. More importantly, they themselves will benefit from their commitment to the commission. In the process of saving others, seeing God's love and mercy in action will also build up their own faith along the way.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our Lord Jesus Christ has much to teach us in terms of personal evangelism. We must follow closely in His selfless and untiring footsteps leading forth into the cities and villages. We must pray before and throughout our ministry, asking Him to guide us with His Spirit and enabling us to preach the gospel with authority and power. We must not be hirelings but be motivated by a heart of compassion. Importantly, set aside quiet times to draw close to God on a regular basis so that we can find strength and nurture our determination. By God's grace, the evangelistic work of the church will prosper, and the longer we serve Him, the sweeter He grows. ★



Between Complacency and Pride

Jordan Kwok—Newcastle, U.K.

During a discussion on the topic of faith, one youth posed a question about overcoming complacency and pride in our faith and service to God. As youths who are beginning to have responsibilities in church, we may easily develop a sense of self-confidence and self-entitlement towards our faith. We become comfortable with our spiritual lives because we are always in church—we attend every service and fellowship, and we do many good deeds. Our peaceful lives and our service to God make us feel as though we are right in our faith and better placed than others who don't do as much as we. But if we harbor such complacency, it can result in pride. In order to overcome complacency and pride, we must understand the biblical views and adopt the mind-set of humility.

HOW DOES COMPLACENCY DEVELOP INTO PRIDE?

The Cambridge Dictionary defines "complacency" and "pride" as follows:

Complacency: "a feeling of calm satisfaction with your own abilities or situation that prevents you from

trying harder."¹

Pride: "the feelings of your own self-worth, the belief that you are better or more important than other people."²

Complacency develops when we become satisfied with our spiritual life. We are comfortable with the position we are in—this may include our faith, our relationship with God, our service in church—and we see no need to improve.

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Cor 10:12)

Here, Paul talks about a group of proud people in the church at Corinth who commended themselves by comparing themselves with others. Likewise, when we are complacent, we tend to compare ourselves with others within the community of faith.

¹ <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/complacency>

² <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/pride>

And when we compare, we open a gateway into pride and downfall. We see ourselves as strong, and others, who are not like us, as weak. Paul warns that such comparison is not wise, since the yardstick they used to judge is their own.

Instead, the standard of God should be our yardstick. Jesus tells us that we are known by the fruits we bear: a good tree bears good fruit, a bad tree bears bad fruit (Mt 7:16–20). Bearing good fruit distinguishes us as the disciples of Jesus and brings glory to God (Jn 15:8). The Bible repeatedly emphasizes on spiritual growth and cultivation through bearing fruit. It is our duty as disciples of Jesus to strive for spiritual perfection and to be more like Him.

With this understanding, we can reflect on the question: Does simply attending every church event cause us to bear good fruit and make us better than those who do not attend?

BEARING FRUIT

In order to bear fruit, the Bible tells us that we must walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), be led by the Spirit (Gal 5:18) as well as hear and understand the word (Mt 13:23).

First, we must submit to the Spirit. Submission requires humility to deny ourselves and realize our own weaknesses. During His life on earth, Jesus declared that “the Son can do nothing of Himself” (Jn 5:19) and that it is “the Father who dwells in Me [who] does the works” (Jn 14:10). Similarly, we cannot grow and bear fruit without God, just as a branch cannot bear fruit without the vine (Jn 15:1–8). Without God’s Spirit, we are merely flesh and naturally, can only produce the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19–21), which are contrary to the Spirit.

Recognizing this is the first step towards humility—every fruit we bear is through God and from God. This applies to both our service to God and our faith. Humility also helps us to recognize God’s great love and grace; He provides us with His Spirit to enable us to serve and to grow, although we are sinful beings of the flesh.

Next, to bear fruit, we must subject to and be led by the Spirit. We need to live an active spiritual life, hand in hand with God, allowing the Spirit to guide us in all that we do. God’s Spirit enables us to act according to God’s principles and live a holy life. Through constant prayers, we will be strengthened by God, despite the challenges we may face in our daily lives and in our service to God.

Finally, to bear fruit we must hear and understand God’s word. On top of attending services and diligently studying the Bible, we need to ponder over the Scriptures’ teachings and apply them in our daily lives. By doing so, we will not only have faith but we will also have works. Through humility in spiritual cultivation, God will allow our fruits to grow.

By understanding the standards of God and maintaining a humble mindset, we can quench complacency before it begins and prevent pride from developing in us.

PAUL’S EXAMPLE

In his epistles, Paul shared how he overcame pride from complacency. Paul was a mighty apostle who worked zealously for God. It would have been reasonable for people to look up to him, follow him as a spiritual leader, and praise him for his faith. Such accolades could have easily made Paul proud. But what did he actually think?

For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Cor 15:9–10)

Paul understood that because of his past, he was unworthy to serve God or be called an apostle. He knew that it was only by God’s grace that he became an apostle and could serve the way he did. This self-realization as well as the love and mercy of God motivated him to labor for the Lord’s ministry. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul reiterated that he was the least of all believers, and that it was only through God’s grace that he could preach (Eph 3:8). This was Paul’s humility.

CONCLUSION

Taking every opportunity to attend services and fellowships, and to participate in church work is good and

plays a key role in spiritual cultivation. But if we are not vigilant, we will easily fall into the complacency trap. And when we allow complacency to develop, it will lead to pride.

Conversely, if we understand that God’s standards are far above ours, we will pursue spiritual growth through spiritual cultivation; we will never feel complacent, but will strive to bear fruit for the glory of God. Ultimately, the key to overcoming complacency and pride is humility, acknowledging that everything we do, from serving to bearing fruit, is through the hand of God. Like Jesus and Apostle Paul, with humility, we submit to the Spirit and lead a fruitful life filled with goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph 5:9).

Once we are able to bear fruit, the Lord will delight in us (Ps 147:11; 149:4). May God guide us to examine ourselves (2 Cor 13:5) and to ensure that we don’t compare ourselves with others according to man’s standards; rather, let us grow with humility in the light of His word. ★

If we understand that God’s standards are far above ours, we will pursue spiritual growth through spiritual cultivation; we will never feel complacent, but will strive to bear fruit for the glory of God. Ultimately, the key to overcoming complacency and pride is humility, acknowledging that everything we do, from serving to bearing fruit, is through the hand of God.

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: 2500 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: 2500 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 #77:

Topic: Integrating Faith with Life

Articles due: May 15, 2015

Integrating faith with life requires us to practice our faith in every aspect of our daily life; in the way we think and in the way we conduct ourselves. So what are ways to integrate our faith with our lives?

First, we need to hold a correct set of values, in line with biblical teachings. Do we rest our sights on things on earth or things above? Do we focus on nurturing our faith, and the faith of those around us? What is most important to us?

Next, we integrate our faith with our life of worship. Do we worship God in spirit and in truth, and offer pure and unblemished sacrifices to Him? Is our worship one of substance over form?

Beyond our life of worship, our faith has to integrate with our family life. Do we pray and read the Bible regularly at home? Have we set up our own family altar, where family members gather to worship God? How often do we share our faith experiences with our loved ones?

And finally, we need to integrate our faith with our life in society. Can our friends and neighbors see Jesus in us? Do we share the gospel with them? Do we manifest Christ in the way we live our life?

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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