

MANNA

ISSUE 80
Summer

**When the Heat Comes, We Shall Not Fear •
While the Earth Remains • Rebuild David's Fallen Tabernacle**

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

MANNA
ISSUE 80 Vol 40 No. 2
Publication date: June 2016

Summer

The Times and the Seasons

by Peter Shee

The Bible uses the “the times and the seasons” to refer to God’s intervention in human history and the rolling out of His plan to establish His righteous reign for eternity (Dan 2:21, cf. 44–45, 4:32) through the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:6–7; 1 Thess 5:1–2).

Beginning with this issue, we shall explore the four seasons one after another. Summer is discussed first, in tandem with this time of the year. The hot season has an eschatological ring, since Jesus mentions it as the season that would herald His second coming (Mk 13:28), and when the world heads towards the inevitable, “the elements will melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet 3:10).

Theme article “When the Heat Comes, We Shall Not Fear” reminds us to expect fiery trials with the assurance that despite intensifying heat before the final doom, children of God need not fear because God has prepared for us protection and salvation. A direct eschatological warning in “Prepare, for the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand!” counters the antinomian stance of popular “saved by grace” gospellers, balanced with biblically correct notions of law-keeping. A third theme article “While the Earth Remains” gives an overview of God’s grand plan, viewing it chronologically through the seasons—sowing in autumn, with the early rain peaking in winter and then gradually tailing off, while the patient farmer awaits the ripening of crops and prays that the latter rain be not withheld, underscoring both God’s faithfulness and the necessary obedience of His people.

The Bible study article, “Rebuild David’s Fallen Tabernacle” examines the causes for the destruction of Solomon’s temple and draws teachings from James’ quotation of Amos during the apostolic era—since we are the revived apostolic church, we need to return to the apostolic rebuilding of David’s tabernacle and display the characteristics of a spiritual true church: departure, self-purification, consecration, and the abidance of the Holy Spirit. This study is appropriately placed in the current issue of Manna, as proximity to summer forms the backdrop to Amos’ prophecy (Amos 8:1–2, 9:11–12).

Just as Jesus clarified that His kingdom is not of this world, the other study, “Simon the Zealot,” biblically aligns our passionate loyalties to the concept of God’s kingdom being that which will prevail forever, unlike the Zealot of old who had an “inviolable attachment to liberty” played out in worldly politics. When we shed our secular ideologies, we will be truly liberated to serve God with fellow citizens of His kingdom.

God’s people living in the world are continually exposed to the tension between this age and the age to come, that is, between the secular and the divine. “Against the Tide” exhorts us to bravely resist conforming to the majority. When we truly understand that dark forces control its course, and where the tide of the world leads us, we will want to escape the fires of destruction by fleeing to the LORD, our Refuge (Ps 46).

EDITOR IN CHIEF: Anna Khoo
MANAGING EDITOR: Tzu-Ann Chen
REVIEW BOARD: Andrew Chu (Australia), Timothy Yeung (Canada), Ezra Chong, Joel Chong (Malaysia),
Simon Chin, Eng Guan Tay (Singapore), Michael Chan, T.K. Chin, (UK), Stephen Ku, John Lin, Richard Solgot, W.C. Yeh (US)

Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published quarterly by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
Copyright © 2016 True Jesus Church. All rights reserved.
U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Call for Articles 48
Articles of Faith 49



THEME SECTION

3

While the Earth Remains

God's salvation plan viewed through the four seasons.
by Philip Shee



7

Prepare, for the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand!

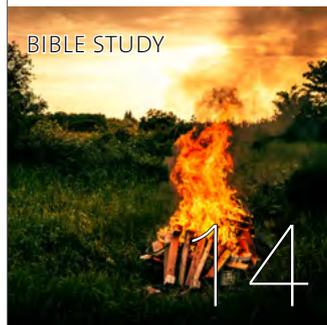
In what aspects should we be prepared?
by Vincent Yeung



11

When the Heat Comes, We Shall Not Fear

God has prepared for us protection and salvation.
by F.F. Chong



BIBLE STUDY

14

Simon the Zealot

What are we zealous for?
by Samuel Kuo



17

Rebuild David's Fallen Tabernacle

God's promise of a renewed spiritual kingdom.
by K.C. Tsai



EXHORTATION

25

No Substitute for Vigilance (I)

How and what do we worship?
by Aun-Quek Chin



29

Against the Tide

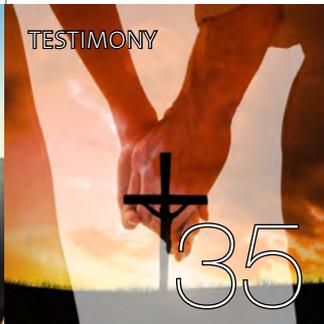
Do not be conformed to this world.
by Peter Shee



32

Living for the Lord: Spiritual Priests (III)

Cultivate ourselves to become holy.
by Simon Chin

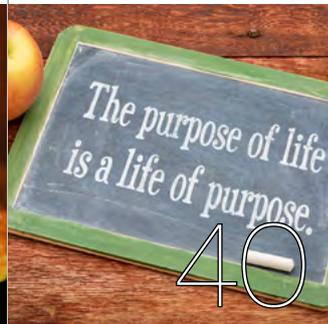


TESTIMONY

35

How I Came to the Lord

Finding true faith and healing.
by Erick Flores



40

We Live to Do Meaningful Things

A sister's journey of faith and service.
by I-Ju Fang



COLUMN SECTION

43

International Assembly

Our Churches in Central and South America

A vast region to conquer.
by Central and South American Coordination Center



46

Evangelism

Breaking Through the Barriers of Preaching the Gospel

Are we barriers or channels?
by Jung-Yu Ho

Summer



While the Earth Remains

Philip Shee—Jakarta, Indonesia

*“While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease.” (Gen 8:22)*

This was part of God’s promise after the flood, when Noah built an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings. Afterwards, God blessed Noah and his sons, and once again gave them this instruction: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1b). With this new blessing, Noah, his family, and all the animals that disembarked from the ark began a new life with the assurance that God would continue His providence and would sustain the earth.

As the Psalmist reflects, “[All creation waits] for You, that You may give them food in due season” (Ps 104:27). This testifies of God’s providence throughout history, how He appoints the seasons at their due time. These seasonal changes are significant as they govern the planting and harvest of crops. But more importantly, as Noah’s household marked the beginning of a new era of life on earth, God’s declaration that the seasons would run their course also carried a spiritual significance. It revealed that, in His time, God would unfold His plan for humankind.

God’s use of the seasons as milestones in His plan is echoed elsewhere in the Bible. As Solomon pondered about life, he wrote: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven” (Eccl 3:1). When the disciples asked

if Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel after His resurrection, He responded, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians concerning the second coming of Christ, he also referred to “the times and seasons” (1 Thess 5:1–2). As we encounter each season unfolding, we will surely benefit if we reflect upon their spiritual significance and respond to the plan of God embedded within.

SUMMER

*Thus the Lord GOD showed me:
Behold, a basket of summer fruit...
Then the LORD said to me:
“The end has come upon My people
Israel.” (Amos 8:1–2a)*

This prophecy of impending judgment was God’s response to the declining faith and conduct of the Israelites. Despite God repeatedly withholding judgment, on account of Amos’ intercession (Amos 7:1–6), the Israelites did not repent. They continued to oppress and to cheat the poor, to worship insincerely, putting their trade before their religious obligations, and to even worship and rely on pagan gods (Amos 8:4–6, 14). God used the vision of a basket of summer fruit to signify that the kingdom would fall imminently, and their sins be judged. The time of grace, when He had overlooked their sins, was over, and He “[would] not pass by them anymore” (Amos 7:8, 8:2). This prophecy, highlighting a period of grace before the swift arrival

of judgment, is in line with Peter's prophecy of the end time:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

(2 Pet 3:9–10)

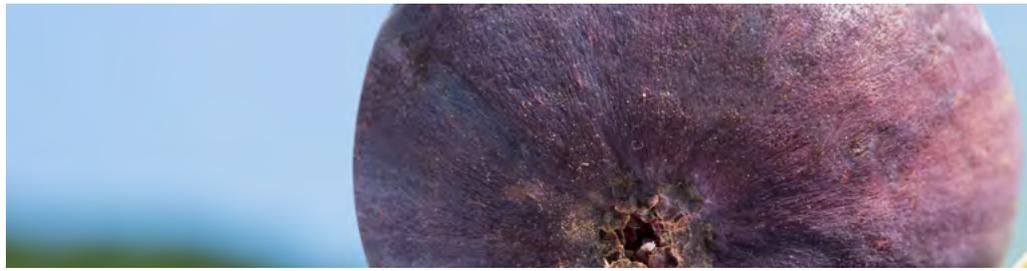
“God’s declaration that the seasons would run their course also carried a spiritual significance. It revealed that, in His time, God would unfold His plan for humankind.”

When telling His disciples about the signs of the end time, the Lord Jesus Himself also used the onset of summer as an analogy to warn us:

“But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand... Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory... Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!”

(Mk 13:23–29)

As summer draws near, with its scorching heat a taste of the tribulation and subsequent judgment that will occur in the end time, it is also a time to reflect on the grace and salvation of God. Such grace was displayed in the pillar of cloud, which shaded the Israelites from the heat of the sun while they journeyed in the wilderness (Num 14:14). Moreover, since we have been forewarned about



the end of time, summer also serves to remind us to “[w]atch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Lk 21:36); to be people of “holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11b–12a). And having triumphed over sin and tribulation in the end time, we “shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike [us], nor any heat” (Rev 7:16).

AUTUMN

*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater. (Isa 55:10)*

Autumn is the beginning of the rainy season in Israel, and is also known as the early or former rain. The early rain softens the parched ground after the dryness of summer. This is the time for sowing, which determines how much food will be produced for the rest of the year. God's wrath is often manifested in the withholding of rain, just as Moses warned the people: “Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce” (Deut 11:16–17a).

Conversely, God's grace is manifested in the giving of rain in due season, which not only allows the crops to grow, but also the growth of

vegetation on which cattle graze. This is as Isaiah proclaimed, “Then He will give the rain for your seed with which you sow the ground, and bread of the increase of the earth; it will be fat and plentiful. In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures” (Isa 30:23).

The spiritual significance of autumn lies in God sowing the seeds of His salvation plan, embedding the plan in His messages, starting in the Old Testament, with prophecies and prefigurations of Christ and the church. This was when God laid the foundations of the faith. These messages were then fulfilled as time unfolded into the era of the New Testament and even into this modern age. Just as prophet Hosea recorded: “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth” (Hos 6:3).

As autumn arrives, let us be reminded of God's plan of salvation, which He conceived before the foundation of the world, and let us seek wisdom from Him to understand it, and have the conviction to embrace it (Eph 1:4–10).

Autumn should also remind us to discover and build our faith on the correct foundation, which is Christ, as He Himself said: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (Jn 5:39). And Paul also wrote to the Corinthians: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).

Faith built on blind zeal and passion, without a fundamental understanding of and alignment with God's established truth, will not lead

SPRING

*Ask the LORD for rain
In the time of the latter rain...
(Zech 10:1)*

As winter transitions into spring in Israel, there are still occasional showers, known as spring or latter rain. This spring rain is critical for lentils and grain to ripen. The arrival of spring also ushers in the harvest of the firstfruits.

The advent of spring points again to the faithfulness of God, as He fulfills the Old Testament messianic prophecies concerning His coming, and His promise to pour His Spirit upon all flesh. The first downpour of the promised Holy Spirit happened during the spring festival of the Pentecost, just as Joel prophesied when he spoke of the last days (Joel 2:23, 28; Acts 2:1–4, 16–18). This, in turn, followed the coming of the Messiah, His death, resurrection, and ascension (Jn 7:37–39, 16:7).

While God was faithful in fulfilling His promise of pouring down the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Zechariah's call for us to ask for the latter rain indicates the possibility that the Holy Spirit could be withheld. This is supported by Jeremiah's response to Israel's unfaithfulness: "Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain" (Jer 3:3). Likewise, when Moses exhorted the Israelites before they entered the promised land, he reminded them of God's warning:

"And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain ... Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain."
(Deut 11:13–17a)

us to salvation. For this reason, Paul made the following prayer for his fellow Israelites:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

(Rom 10:1–4)

as He keeps His promise to "open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season" (Deut 28:12a).

In the spiritual context, while the dry summer represents God's judgment as a consequence of sin, a wet winter, in contrast, represents the faithfulness of God in executing His plan: "In that day [when the Messiah is pierced (Zech 12:10)] a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech 13:1); and "in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem ... in both summer and winter it shall

As summer draws near, with its scorching heat a taste of the tribulation and subsequent judgment that will occur in the end time, it is also a time to reflect on the grace and salvation of God.

WINTER

*You have set all the borders of the earth;
You have made summer and winter.
(Ps 74:17)*

Winter is the period of the heaviest rain in Israel, as described in Ezra, when the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered in the open square of the house of God on the twentieth of the ninth month (Ezra 10:9). Given that this is the wettest time of the year, it is for good reason that Jesus tells us to "pray that your flight may not be in winter" (Mt 24:20). The heavy rain in winter is needed for the crops to grow after the seedtime in autumn. This points to the faithfulness of God,

occur" (Zech 14:8). When the people humble themselves, pray, and turn from their wicked ways, God will hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land (2 Chr 7:14).

With God's faithfulness as a backdrop, winter is also the time of waiting patiently for the final chapter of His plan: for the coming of the Lord, the harvest of the fruits. Just as James exhorted:

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (Jas 5:7–8)

“As the seasons unfold, so does God’s salvation plan. And if we reflect on the spiritual significance of each passing season, we would prepare ourselves for what is to come.

If we keep the above verses in mind as we review church history—with the degeneration of the apostolic church towards the end of the first century (Acts 20:28–30; Rev 2–3) and the subsequent heresies and pagan practices that crept into the church—it should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit would have been withheld until now, the end time, when He returned to restore the church once again.

CONCLUSION

“[B]ut the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.”
(Deut 11:11–12)

This is the faithfulness of God. As He cares for the land and provides rain in due season, from the beginning of the year to the very end, He will also surely fulfill His plan of salvation according to His time. God has sown the seeds of His salvation plan in autumn, and the winter rains have watered them so that they will surely grow to fruition. The spring rain has arrived and the harvest of the firstfruits

is imminent. The arrival of summer ushers in the time of judgment for sin. As the seasons unfold, so does God’s salvation plan. And if we reflect on the spiritual significance of each passing season, we would prepare ourselves for what is to come. ★



Welcome to Manna on the Web

Welcome to Manna on the Web

Manna Magazine Issue 79
by 1MPSP2010@mannamag.com on 4/21/2016 1:02 AM

Religious Education

Table of Contents
M79_final_web.pdf

Scripture reveals to us that at one point in Jewish history God lamented, “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land” (Hos 4:1). He further mourned, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6a). Note that these grievances were not directed at the entire world; they were specific charges against God’s chosen people. God had an expectation of His beloved people, and they did not live up to it. Rather than walking in His ways, they betrayed the true and living God to join themselves to idols, harlotry, and wickedness (Hos 4:2,12). No wonder God’s “heart churns within [Him]” (Hos 11:0).

The apostolic church also stressed the importance of growing in spiritual knowledge. In the middle of a discourse concerning Jesus Christ as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews digresses to reprove the members for their declining faith. The author laments, “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” (Heb 5:12). It is clear the apostles also had expectations of the members. A lengthier time in Christ should naturally beget knowledgeable and mature believers—believers who would be able to instruct others. Instead, the members remained unskilled in the word, unable to discern, and dithered on the elementary principles of Christ (Heb 5:13–14; 6:1). The way the author continues also suggests these believers had regressed to the point of being borderline apostates (cf. Heb 6:4–8).

Explore

MANNA
online

mannamagazine.com

- Download or read the latest issue online
- Browse past issues
- Subscribe print copies
- Sign up for new issue notifications



Prepare, for the Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand!

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK

There is no shortage of warning signs in the Bible. The dramatic pronouncement by Amos—“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel”—reverberated throughout the reign of Jeroboam II and for many generations after (Amos 4:12). The prophet’s visions of a basket of summer fruit (Amos 8:2–4) and two baskets of figs (Jer 24:1–3) signify that the end is coming soon.

In the New Testament, there are also numerous reminders to prepare for the end. Paul exhorted the Romans to wake up from their slumber, saying “the day is at hand” (Rom 13:11–12). He also wrote that believers need to work out their salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). The imagery may appear in different forms, but the message is clear and uncompromising: the end—ἔσχατον, *eschaton*—whether it is personal or universal, is near!

The sense of urgency is pointed, yet subtle, in the Gospel of Matthew—both John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the same message at the beginning of their ministries: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 3:2, 4:17). This theme runs seamlessly through the gospels, through the sayings, parables and discourses of Jesus. It serves to remind the readers to be alert and sober, preparing them to meet the Lord.

WARNING AGAINST COMPLACENCY

John the Baptist warned the Pharisees and Sadducees against complacency when they came to the place he was baptizing. He said, “[D]o not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these

stones” (Mt 3:7–9). Salvation is not based on entitlement, birth right, or membership of an elite organization. Each person has to produce good fruit or else they will be discarded (Mt 3:10).

In the parable of the two sons, the second son said he would go to work in the vineyard, but did not go (Mt 21:30). He epitomized the social elite who refused to believe—they were the bad tenants who beat, killed, and stoned the landowner’s servants and eventually killed the landowner’s son (Mt 21:33–38). Because of their disbelief, the kingdom of God would be given to a nation bearing fruit (Mt 21:43). Indeed, when Jesus praised the centurion’s faith at the beginning of His ministry, it was a portent of the things to come: many will come from afar to take Israel’s place at the feast of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, outside of which there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 8:10–12).

However, Jesus’ followers should not be complacent—their place in the kingdom of God is not assured. The church comprises a mixed bag of believers. Like weeds and wheat sowed in the same field (Mt 13:24–

” *Salvation is not based on entitlement, birth right, or membership of an elite organization. Each person has to produce good fruit or else they will be discarded (Mt 3:10).*

30), the two are inseparable until the harvest (Mt 13:29). The kingdom is also described as a net, catching both good and bad fish: the latter will be thrown into the blazing furnace, where again there will be “wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 13:50). What distinguishes the good from the bad, and the wheat from the weeds?

In the parable of the wedding banquet, the initial cohort of guests refused to attend (Mt 22:5)—these people represented the Pharisees and Sadducees who paid no attention to God’s invitation. Ultimately, the banquet was filled with all kinds of people, good and bad, but the good ones were those who had prepared, arriving in wedding clothes (Mt 22:11). The portion for the bad ones, who had not prepared, was “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 22:13).



make long prayers to show people that we are religious, not because we feel the need for it. We watch over our own behavior only because we want to project an impeccable image. The means have become the end in itself, and such religion is devoid of any spirituality. In fact, good behavior is not even a means to piety. It is the outer expression of our inner being—we do good deeds by nature without thinking too much about it.

in sin that grace may abound?” The answer is overwhelming: “Certainly not!” (Rom 6:1–2). He warned against using “liberty as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal 5:13).

When Matthew collated the sayings of Jesus in his Gospel, he held on to this same message. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it (Mt 5:17–20). The weeds in the kingdom of God are those who practice “lawlessness” (Mt 13:41). The wicked servants who practice lawlessness by eating and drinking with the drunkards are bundled with the hypocrites (Mt 24:50)—they are as bad as the hypocrites. Even those who prophesy, cast out demons, and perform wonders in God’s name, if they “practice lawlessness,” will be rejected (Mt 7:23).

WARNING AGAINST GROWING COLD IN LOVE

In the end time, lawlessness will abound and we will become less empathetic. Therefore, be on your guard as the love of most will grow cold. Only the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Mt 24:12–13). In the Sermon on the Mount, a simple description of doing the will of the Father is to be like Him. “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,” said Jesus—the manifestation of this perfection is love (Mt 5:43–48). Love for your enemies goes beyond the letter of the Law, which is the basis on which Jesus interprets the Law and the Prophets. The fulfillment of the Law, and the will of the Father, a righteousness that the Pharisees could not reach, starts with love and ends with love. As Paul puts it, “[T]he purpose of the commandment is love” (1 Tim 1:5a).

“We need to shake off our complacency, knowing that our faith needs to be translated into action.”

So, in what aspects of our lives should we be prepared?

WARNING AGAINST HYPOCRISY

Jesus did not reject the facets of Jewish piety—prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. These good deeds are not discounted, but they should be performed out of the goodness of one’s heart. They are not to be carried out as a demonstration, a performance, or a form of outward piety, as exhibited by the Pharisees, who were called “hypocrites” by Jesus (Mt 6:2, 5, 16). Therefore, we must beware of subconsciously boasting about how many hours we pray, how much we offer, and how much suffering we endure when we work for the Lord.

The seven woes delivered to the scribes and the Pharisees are accompanied by the sevenfold repetition of the word “hypocrites” (Mt 23:13–30). Despite their outward piety, they fail to exercise good deeds out of a good conscience, purity, and sincerity. We should take note that we do not fall into the same trap. We

WARNING AGAINST LAWLESSNESS

The opposite of formal religiosity is lawlessness and licentiousness. It is human logic to think that if we are justified by faith alone and not by works, then it does not matter what we do because God forgives. In fact, many Christians outside the True Jesus Church believe that one is saved just by confessing that Jesus is Lord. This form of free-for-all belief means that cohabitation, divorce and remarriage, and gay relationships are acceptable in their churches.

The teachings of the apostolic church have been marginalized and supplanted by love and forgiveness. To many Christians, love surpasses even God’s commandments. They use logic to argue: “How could the all-loving God be so cruel as to condemn those who fail to observe every minute detail in the Bible?” The mainstream Christian faith has become more inclusive, tolerant, focusing on the social aspect of human needs. Paul questioned such rationale, asking: “Shall we continue



God is love—there are countless instances of God's mercy and compassion in Matthew. In the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees relating to working on the Sabbath, Jesus added the quotation: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Mt 12:3–8; Mk 2:25–28), which He also quoted in Matthew 9:13. Jesus came for the sick and needy, not for those who believed they were healthy—those who deemed themselves more worthy to be saved. Jesus felt compassion for the crowd (Mt 9:36, 14:14). And in the parable of the unforgiving servant, the master was moved with compassion (Mt 18:27). Before the master exercised his judgment on the unforgiving servant, he asked "Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" (Mt 18:33). We, the recipients of God's grace, should in turn exhibit the same compassion as our Father.

BE PREPARED

The key comparisons between "good" versus "bad," "belief" versus "unbelief," and "prepared" versus "unprepared" appear repeatedly in Jesus' parables and sayings. Underlying these contrasts are two opposing mindsets and two different outcomes when the Lord comes to exercise His judgment. On that day, we will be deemed either good or bad.

The basis of that judgment is determined by whether we believe in Jesus or not. We hear, believe, learn, act, and are transformed—

this is a lifelong exercise that we need to go through. As Paul put it, "...[Y]ou have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth [belief] is in Jesus; that you put off, concerning your former conduct [action]...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God [transformation], in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:21–24). We should become more and more like God through this continuous spiritual cultivation. The transformation takes time, effort, and lots of sacrifice, which Paul describes as "work[ing] out your own salvation" (Phil 2:12).

The idea of preparedness culminates in the parable of the ten virgins. Five wise and five foolish virgins were waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. The former were prepared with extra oil, as the timing of the bridegroom's arrival could not be determined. The unprepared virgins had to go to buy more oil as their lamps were going out. When they returned, the door was closed and they were shut out of the banquet. Their pleas were met with the response: "I do not know you" (Mt 25:12).

In the parable of the talents, the master who went on a journey represents the Lord (Mt 25:14–30). After a long period of time, the master returned to settle accounts with his servants. The unfaithful servant who failed to produce a return was described as "wicked and lazy." He was cast into "the outer darkness,"

where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The moral of these parables is that we should watch (Mt 24:42, 25:13) and be prepared to give our accounts, because we do not know the day or the hour of the Lord's arrival (Mt 24:50). The wise and faithful servants are the ones who keep watch, prepared for the coming of the Master (Mt 24:42). On the other hand, the wicked ones are those who lapse in their responsibilities, and are caught off guard by the sudden return of the Master (Mt 24:48–51). The outcome for the unprepared is the same in each of these parables: "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 24:51).

HOW SHALL WE PREPARE?

First, we need to shake off our complacency, knowing that our faith needs to be translated into action. Disciples are asked to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34). Moreover, Jesus warned that the reward at the final judgment will be given according to what each person has done (Mt 16:27). The difference between good and bad is not simply a matter of whether we are ashamed of Jesus (Mk 8:38); the attitude also needs to be translated into action. We are judged not only by our words and attitude, but also by our works. We should lead a life worthy of our calling, exhibiting the qualities of Christ in our behavior (Eph 4:1–2), and serving God diligently through faith and patience until the end (Heb 6:9–12).

Second, we should not be swayed by the seductive influence of broad societal trends. Society has become more tolerant; everyone is free to do what they think is right. In this way, society has become morally "lawless," and Christians in general are not immune to this influence. As members of the true church, we should lead a life worthy of our calling, upholding the teachings of the Bible, and manifesting the qualities of Jesus in our servitude.

Third, good deeds alone are insufficient; we need to do the will of

☞ *Only good works that arise from within the heart, and are conducted with the right frame of mind, are counted as righteous in God's eyes.*

“We need to prepare—our lamps should be filled with oil, signifying the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We cannot simply generate love from within ourselves, as the outflow of God’s love comes from the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).”

the Father. The Pharisees had much to say about works. Paul once testified that he was “blameless” concerning the righteousness in the Law (Phil 3:6). However, the righteousness subscribed by the Pharisees was not the same as God’s righteousness; in fact, they had not submitted to the latter (Rom 10:3). Therefore, simply working for work’s sake is not sufficient to fulfill God’s righteousness.

The same principle applies to Christians—simply performing work outwardly does not guarantee salvation. Those who claim that they prophesied, cast out demons, and performed wonders in Jesus’ name will be rejected if they have failed to do the will of God (Mt 7:21–23). Matthew clearly spells out that we need to do better than the Pharisees: “[U]nless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20). Jesus came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17).

To achieve this, we need to be transformed from within, as only good works that arise from within the heart, and are conducted with the right frame of mind, are counted as righteous in God’s eyes. Therefore, we need to prepare—our lamps should be filled with oil, signifying the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We cannot simply generate love from within ourselves, as the outflow of God’s love comes from the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

We should prepare ourselves to give our account at all times, as we do not know when our end will come. We also need to show love to the little ones, those who are most in need in the community of faith. We should not despise them (Mt 18:10), be unmerciful towards them (Mt 10:42)

or cause them to stumble (Mt 18:6). The final scene in the parable of the sheep and goats tells us that we will be judged according to what we did to the least of our brother and sister—the degree to which we exercised God’s love (Mt 25:40).

CONCLUSION

In God’s kingdom, many are called but few are chosen (Mt 20:16; 22:14). Over the ages, humankind was trapped by the triad of hypocrisy, lawlessness, and the lack of love. As members of the true church, we need to break out of this mode of living and learn to be as perfect as the Father. We are saved by grace, but we still need to do good works and follow the commandments. As Jesus put it, “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” should be done without leaving the lesser things undone (Mt 23:23). We cannot just sit back and expect salvation to come automatically. Instead, we should do good deeds and exercise mercy, as the Father is full of mercy.

Let us revisit the cherished verse: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt 6:33a). It is not simply a choice between money and God, it is also a choice between human-defined righteousness and God’s righteousness. The true and false disciples in Matthew 7:21–23 should no longer be seen to represent those within church and those without; it also depicts the good and bad believers within the kingdom of God (see also Matthew 13).

The new interpretation of Old Testament commandments that Jesus put forth in the Sermon on the Mount—signposted by the repeated phrase: “But I say to you” (Mt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)—revealed how God’s righteousness should be

exercised. Sin is not simply an outward action (Mt 5:27). Righteousness is not simply fulfilling the letter of the Law (Mt 5:24, 31). Not only do we need to perform good deeds and guard our outward behavior, we also need to be transformed, to forgive, and to love from within. The Sermon on the Mount culminates with the golden rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 7:12). Love fulfills the Law and the Prophets; it is the basis of God’s righteousness and God’s will. Jesus then concludes with three antitheses: the narrow and the wide gate; true and false prophets; and the wise and the foolish builders (Mt 7:13–27). Each has two opposing paths—the choice is ours to make. Either we are good or bad, prepared or unprepared. Let us make the wise choice and be prepared! ★



When the Heat Comes, We Shall Not Fear

F.F. Chong—London, UK

Lengthy exposure to the sun causes heatstroke and sunburn. Worse, it damages the skin and may even lead to skin cancer. Yet many still choose to suffer the intense heat of the sun. Some do it out of vanity, e.g., regular tanning to look good, while others do it for survival, toiling laboriously under the sun to eke out a meager existence.

In the natural world, the heat during a drought is particularly destructive. Every green plant withers without water (cf. Gen 41:6, 23). Every life form is at the mercy of the scourging sun. Little can survive Nature's fiery ordeal.

Today, the prevalence of famines due to prolonged summers and unpredictable heat waves in many parts of the world fulfills Jesus' prophecy of the time of troubles ahead of His Second Advent (Mt 24:7; Mk 13:8; Lk 21:11). Apart from physical phenomena, these woes can also refer to problems within the community of God. The intensity of the problems will increase as the church becomes more susceptible to the powerful perversity and secularity of the world.

Nevertheless, the prophets of the Old Testament consistently reassure

“Heat figuratively means trials, tests and temptation. As long as they remain under His protective wing, God's elect will always be sheltered from the "heat" of every difficult circumstance.

the children of God. We need not fear the coming heat because our God will provide the requisite shelter. The God whom we worship is the Lord of Life; and so He has the power to lead us through the most difficult patches in life, and the unpredictability of the ever-changing world. However, there are conditions we must fulfill in order to receive and remain in this blessed position. Fulfilling the conditions not only preserves our relationship with God, but more importantly, strengthens it.

REMAIN IN GOD'S SALVATION

There are many prophecies concerning God's salvation for His chosen people. One of these is the acceptable time (Isa 49:8). Spiritually speaking, when this time comes, people who believe in God are set free from every chain. They will be given food wherever they are; even on desolate heights (Isa 49:9), i.e., places where nothing could ever grow. At these heights,

they are completely exposed to the heat of the sun. But by God's grace, the heat does not pose the slightest threat to them (Isa 49:10b). They enjoy the same protection as that provided by the pillar of cloud to the Exodus Generation (Ex 13:22).

Heat figuratively means trials, tests and temptation. As long as they remain under His protective wing, God's elect will always be sheltered from the "heat" of every difficult circumstance. What Isaiah says is even more astounding: neither heat nor the sun shall strike them (Isa 49:10b). God will lead them by the springs of water (Isa 49:10c). When the elect function fully under the guardianship of the Lord, the abundant grace of God is sufficient for them to deal with any situation in life, be it in peace or adversity.

This prophecy was fulfilled when God established His church at the downpour of the Spirit. God's grace was spread far and wide in the early

church. Although Satan hotly pursued the church and tried to destroy her through the fiery opposition from the ruling authorities, the work of saving was not stifled. The Lord protected the church in the midst of fiery trials. Thus, in that time of persecution, Peter urged the church to focus on the salvation that would come (cf. 1 Pet 1:5–8). The grace of God would continue to abound in the church.

However, the frequency of trials will increase, particularly before the second coming of Christ (cf. 2 Tim 3:1). Not only will the church experience what the apostolic church went through, she will face even greater challenges. To find cover from the intense heat of trials, believers have to remain in the church of God. The prophet Joel warned of the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord (Joel 2:31), testifying to the reality of the coming perils. But in Zion (the church) there shall be deliverance, i.e., salvation for the elect (Joel 2:32b; Isa 46:13).

WASH OUR ROBES WHITE

The greatest peril that the church and her believers would encounter is the great tribulation (Rev 7:14). After the opening of the sixth seal, the four angels standing by the four corners of the world are temporarily prevented from harming the earth, the sea and the trees (Rev 7:1–3). Their work of destruction is put on hold to make way for the work of sealing for God's servants. The seal enables the latter to be victorious, and these elect then gather to acknowledge the salvation work of God (Rev 7:9–10). They are arrayed in white robes before the throne. The robe represents characters and behavior. They have washed their robes. This indicates that they have sanctified themselves by the washing of the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:13–14; 12:11a). With their nature refined, they are able to gain access to the Lord. They serve the Lord day and night in His temple (Rev 7:15). Their entire existence revolves around God and their work for Him. In return, they experience the total presence of God in their midst. God consciously chooses to abide with them.



God accepts and honors us when we attain the required standard of cleanness and godliness. We would no longer again experience spiritual hunger and thirst (Rev 7:16a). In God's presence, our soul is ever-satisfied and we will never have a sense of emptiness within us. Although there will be times when things are unbearable and daunting, God will always be there to quench our thirst by the power of the Spirit.

The absence of God from a person's life is a huge and chronic problem. Although the person may try to repress it, the sense of dissatisfaction arising from alienation from God lingers. The difficulties in his or her life exacerbate this dissatisfaction. And when God's protection is absent, a person is always exposed to the full and almost unbearable heat of a trial.

Trials and tribulations are inevitable. In fact, this is the way for us to gain entry into the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Unlike non-believers, we have God. If we allow God to shepherd us, the outcome will be amazing – He will lead us to Himself, the living fountains of waters (Rev 7:17). God's leadership reflects not only His presence but also the intimate relationship we have with Him. In this relationship, there are no more tears. Sin results in death, but in our sin-free relationship, there is no more death. We enjoy life eternal (Isa 25:8).

TRUST IN HIM

For God to lead us requires us to trust in Him. What does trusting God actually entail? Demonstration of this trust goes beyond our daily practice of reading the Bible and praying to God. In the time of Isaiah, there were some whose prayers and sacrifices were completely rejected

by God (Isa 1:12–15). In fact, their offerings and religious practices were an abomination in God's eyes. The more they performed these rituals the angrier God became towards them.

The prophet Jeremiah once said that the man who trusts in the Lord shall be blessed ... And he will not fear when the heat comes (Jer 17:7–8). A person is like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river. This is the life of a person who trusts in God—he stands strong in the scourging heat.

How can a person avoid being adversely affected by fiery trials and persecutions? The Psalmist (Ps 1) provides the steps to take to attain to the level of spirituality required to withstand the full force of any test that comes our way.

First, there must be a desire to separate ourselves from the wicked. God's children must never share in wickedness, sin and scornfulness (Ps 1:1). This is to ensure we remain untainted by corruption. We cannot call Christ the Lord while in assembly with other children of God and, after the assembly has been dismissed, we behave no differently from those who do not know God. This is unacceptable. A life of double standards will surely incur the wrath of God; we cannot possibly then expect the Lord's help in time of need.

Second, we are working towards being with God when we begin to develop a love for God's word (Ps 1:2). We can attain such a love if we are determined to change ourselves from bad to good, allowing the Spirit to work on our sinful nature and corrupt character. This purging process is essential. Once it is accomplished, nothing will hinder us from drawing closer to God. When the old nature



has been put to death, God abides with us always, and our love for God's word grows stronger correspondingly.

Constant meditation on His word will help us further develop our love for His word. Once we taste the goodness of the word, we would want more. But this willingness does not come by easily. The psalmist wrote that he, "meditates the word day and night" (Ps 1:2b). The word 'meditate' means speaking to oneself the word of God. There is always a need for us to speak to ourselves the word of

(Ps 1:3); we will be able to extend God's grace to others even when we ourselves are still facing trials and tribulations. One notable example is Paul's imprisonment. His incarceration turned out for the furtherance of the gospel—he preached the gospel to the palace guards. God's power overflowed from Paul and became a force of motivation to the brethren in Philippi. The whole church was strengthened in faith and their zeal remained undiminished (Phil 1:13–14).

We must examine our hidden character. We must shine the light of God on the deepest and darkest recesses of our hearts, and honestly consider our manner of life.

God. This is both a conscious choice and a way of teaching ourselves. At whatever level of spirituality we may be, it is absolutely essential for us to self-teach the word in this manner, aside from the teachings we learn from others and the church. Self-teaching is to be done with a sense of reminding ourselves to keep the word.

Such a procedure of self-teaching is a good practice. If we maintain noble hearts before God, the word will work within us (cf. Lk 8:15). When we are able to touch God in life, like the roots of a tree reaching out to the waters, the scorching heat in the summer will not harm us. God will be there to nourish and quench our thirst. There is a clear channel for us to continually draw on this divine resource to keep our spiritual lives healthy. Our hearts are miraculously kept in the peace of God (cf. Phil. 4:6–7). The power of God will rest upon us.

We will never be short of fruits

IN PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

When trusting God is founded on the premise of pursuing godliness, the Spirit will empower the inner man with the inclination to do what is right. Such a person becomes very sensitive to sin, draws ever closer to God and is fully molded by God's word. His life will not regress to the perversion of the world. The world may become more corrupt than ever before but his life is one that is increasingly filled with the righteousness of God. His life is a stark contrast to the secular around him.

Such a life should be every true believer's pursuit before the Second Advent of Christ. Peter stressed the importance of having the correct attitude towards the impending melting away of the universe in intense heat. We must examine our hidden character. We must shine the light of God on the deepest and darkest recesses of our hearts, and

honestly consider our manner of life (2 Pet 3:11). Doing this will help us keep the righteousness of God as our main focus in everything we do.

Such individual preparation will naturally turn into collective preparation for Christ's coming once there is awareness and regular concerted prayer becomes the congregational norm. In this way, the apostolic church example will be realized in our churches instead of remaining a far-fetched theological ideal consigned to the pages of the Bible. The God-desired faith and love of the early church shall be found in us, the end-time true church—the perfect church of God where righteousness dwells (cf. 2 Pet 3:13).

CONCLUSION

Encountering the heat of the day is inevitable in this life. Peter tells us that it is no strange thing for a believer to meet with fiery trials (1 Pet 4:12). The Bible provides a way to survive it. First we must remain in God's salvation at all costs. This implies that we must keep ourselves in the church of God since the church is where salvation is placed (Isa 46:13). Second, we are to wash our robes white, to put ourselves in a position for God to abide with us. This washing provides us with the capacity to keep God's commandments.

Apart from personal diligence, trusting in God is foundational to helping us withstand the heat of life's calamities. Trusting entails being freed from all unrighteousness. The power of God to draw us closer to Him when we frequently reflect on His word provides a pathway for us to reach God. With His power, nothing can stop us from walking righteously and uprightly regardless of situation. We will then be able to attain to righteousness, the ultimate goal. Life, its temporal pleasures or inevitable adversity, will not derail us from our walk toward our heavenly home. From individual to congregation, we are prepared for the second coming of Christ. ★



Simon the Zealot

Samuel Kuo—Flushing, NY, USA

At the time of writing, citizens of the United States are progressing through another presidential election cycle. It has been virtually impossible not to know, since daily headlines and nightly news programs have often consisted of the latest campaign bulletins. Not only is there plenty of coverage in the traditional media sources, many people's social networking newsfeeds are blanketed with political opinions, links, and videos related to this year's batch of candidates as well. Often, many of these posts are full of emotion, anger, and vitriol especially concerning their political opposition. People can be quite passionate when it comes to their politics, no matter the country.

If our assumptions prove correct, one of the Lord Jesus' hand-selected disciples was also very politically involved. In fact, whenever his name appears in the Bible, his political affiliation is always attached: "Simon the Zealot."

HIS NAME

The New Testament lists Jesus Christ's twelve apostles in four separate passages. In both Luke 6:12 and Acts 1:13, we see Simon's name written

as "Simon the Zealot." Interestingly, Matthew 10:4 and Mk 3:18 render his name as "Simon the Cananite" (NKJV) or "Simon the Cananaean" (RSV); however, this is not to be mistaken with the geographical locations of Cana or Canaan. "Cananite" from the Greek, *Καναναῖος* (*kananaios*) originates from the Aramaic *ܩܢܢܝ* (*can'an*) meaning *zealot*, *enthusiast*¹. In fact, all four lists of the disciples essentially render his name the same way.

The fact that "Zealot" was always biblically attached to Simon's name most likely indicates that he belonged to the eponymous Jewish sect and political faction of the time.

THE ZEALOTS

Typically, Christians are familiar with two Jewish sects during the time of Christ: the Pharisees and Sadducees. These groups are often mentioned in the gospels, and their beliefs are somewhat elaborated upon (cf. Acts 23:6–8). However, based on the writings of the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, there were two additional Jewish sects (or what he calls "philosophies") at the time of Jesus: the Essenes

and the Zealots². According to Josephus, the Zealot movement was founded by Judas the Galilean³, who attempted a revolt against the Roman government around AD 6 because of a tax-related decree to conduct a census. (Interestingly, this Judas is also mentioned by Gamaliel in Acts 5:37.)

Religiously, the Zealots were very similar to the Pharisees⁴. This meant that they believed in the immortality of the soul, in a final judgment after death, and in a physical resurrection. The Pharisees were very virtuous, obtaining a good reputation among the people, and therefore able to be very persuasive in their doctrines concerning worship. They practiced modesty, despising delicacies in their diet.⁵ The Pharisees tended to be apolitical. The Zealots weren't.

Politically, the Zealots are described to have had an "inviolable attachment to liberty."⁶ They believed that only God had the right to rule over the Jewish nation—that Jews "were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans, and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their lords."⁷ Therefore, they believed that they were doing God's work by rebelling against Roman soldiers and

leaders, even killing some of them. They were political extremists. A related sub-group, called the Sicarii, or *assassins*, who wore concealed daggers were even more extreme, carrying out planned assassination attempts.⁸ Of note is the mentioning of this group in Acts 21:38.

It is often said that Barabbas, the prisoner released on Passover instead of Jesus Christ, would probably also have been a member of the Zealots, or at least similar politically, since he is described as a “rebel” (NKJV) or “insurrectionist” (NIV, Mk 15:7).

BE HARMONIOUS WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

If indeed the apostle Simon used to belong to the aforementioned sect, there are many lessons that we can learn and apply to our Christian walk. The first is that we should learn to dwell in harmony with our Christian brothers and sisters.

One of the other disciples whom Jesus Christ hand-selected was Matthew (Mt 9:9; Lk 6:15). Remember that Matthew was a tax-collector before he left everything to follow Jesus (Lk 5:27). As a former tax-collector, his actions would have been consistent with a political posture opposite of Simon's, since the taxes that he collected would eventually end up in the hands of the Romans, and the Zealots were staunchly anti-Rome. Sometimes, people of opposing political stances cannot even be in the same room together. Yet here we see that Simon had to learn to, at the very least, tolerate Matthew and his past in order to be disciples of Jesus Christ. “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

Eventually all twelve disciples were sent to preach the kingdom of heaven (Mt 10:5–7). They lived together (Acts 1:13). They prayed together (Acts 1:13–14). They preached together (Acts 4:33). They were imprisoned together (Acts 5:18). They suffered persecution together (Acts 5:40–41). The Bible only uses the collective term, “the disciples,” but Matthew and Simon would obviously be included. To think despite their

ideological differences, they could work so cohesively together for the kingdom of God.

Every area of church ministry requires the cooperation of many individual members. But the church can be so diverse—not only in ethnicity and language, but in many ideologies and preferences as well. Democrat or Republican? Communist China or Democratic Taiwan/Hong Kong? Capitalist America or Socialist Europe? Arsenal or Chelsea? Yankees or Mets? Coke or Pepsi?

How can the church work together? How can the holy work progress? In matters of the truth of salvation, obviously no compromise is permitted (Gal 1:6–9; 2 Jn 9–11). But in all other matters, including our politics, we need to lay aside our differences and dwell in harmony with our brothers and sisters. I like to think that Simon and Matthew put into practice what the Lord Jesus Christ taught His followers: “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for [them]” (Mt 5:44).

GIVE UP OUR PASSIONS AND IDEOLOGIES

Simon the Zealot also teaches us that after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we should eventually give up our passions and ideologies that we may have adopted over time, especially when they are in conflict with the Lord Jesus' teachings.

Presumably, Simon was extremely zealous for his nation Israel—a very

pro-independence outlook. Perhaps what first attracted Simon to Jesus Christ was that he thought Jesus was the Messiah who would overthrow the Roman government and restore the kingdom of Israel. In fact, it seemed that Simon wouldn't have been the only disciple with such expectation, since even during the ascension of Jesus Christ, the disciples thought He was establishing a physical kingdom: “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)

However, soon after receiving the promised Holy Spirit, Simon's zeal for Israel eventually transformed into a zeal for Jesus Christ. He realized Jesus did not come to establish a physical kingdom, but one that transcended the world (cf. Jn 18:36). Instead of living for his passions and ideologies, he labored for Jesus Christ instead.

One teaching that would have especially challenged Simon was Jesus' teaching on paying taxes. Jesus had once famously said, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Mt 22:21). This was a direct challenge to the politics to which he followed. How could he go against the principles that he was so passionate for? How could he let go of his anti-Roman ideology? The key would have been transformation through the promised Holy Spirit. When one walks in the Spirit, he follows the will of the Spirit, rather than his own passions (Rom 8:1–8).

Since we are in Christ Jesus, we must also tear down our worldly

” *Every area of church ministry requires the cooperation of many individual members. But the church can be so diverse—not only in ethnicity and language, but in many ideologies and preferences as well. Democrat or Republican? Communist China or Democratic Taiwan/Hong Kong? Capitalist America or Socialist Europe? Arsenal or Chelsea? Yankees or Mets? Coke or Pepsi? How can the church work together? How can the holy work progress?*

zeal. Collectively, we often struggle with all sorts of worldly zeal. A zeal for video games. A zeal for make-up and fashion. A zeal for higher education and status. A zeal for the newest gadgets and technology. A zeal for travel and pleasure. A zeal for sin. It is generally easy to tell not only by the amount of time we spend on these things, but also on how we sacrifice other priorities to obtain them—especially when matters concerning the kingdom of God are laid at the altar. Many times our zeal for these worldly things are thus borderline idolatrous. Those passions and philosophies may have enslaved our hearts and cheated us with empty deceit (Col 2:8). But we must learn to give them up like Simon did.

had been witnesses of its absolute truth. Because God's love and Lord Jesus' sacrifice had transformed them. Because the down-pouring of the promised Holy Spirit had completely changed their values and passions, empowering them to live accordingly. Seldom would someone die for another person. Even rarer is a person who would die for a cause they did not believe in. But that's exactly what most of the Twelve did.

Are we convicted by the gospel truth? Has God's grace and love transformed us? How has the Holy Spirit changed and empowered us? These are all questions worthy of our contemplation. May we also follow in the footsteps of the apostles to live for the sake of Christ.

they are of no help (Ps 146:3, 118:9). But if we are zealous for Jesus Christ we stand on a kingdom that will prevail forever. ★

Many times our zeal for these worldly things are thus borderline idolatrous. Those passions and philosophies may have enslaved our hearts and cheated us with empty deceit (Col 2:8). But we must learn to give them up like Simon did

BE ZEALOUS FOR JESUS CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL

We may think that such excitements are the answers to a happy and meaningful life; however, we may entirely neglect to cultivate a zeal to follow Jesus Christ wholeheartedly. Where is our zeal to live, and even die, for the One who died for us? (2 Cor 5:14–15). This is one of the biggest lessons we learn from Simon the Zealot.

Though the Bible is silent on what eventually happened to most of the twelve apostles, many extra-biblical accounts indicate that they likely died as martyrs for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Simon the Zealot would have been no exception. There are many conflicting accounts, but perhaps the strongest tradition suggests that he was ultimately sawn in half for being a Christian. Hence, many western works of art classically depict Simon the Zealot with a saw⁹.

Why would the apostles give up their lives for the gospel? Because they

CONCLUSION

The Zealot movement eventually died out in a most tragic way. They were very active throughout the war of AD 66–70 against the Romans, which led to the fall of Jerusalem by future Emperor Titus. Josephus describes how they made a final stand against the Romans in a fortress called Masada in AD 73. The ensuing Roman siege was lengthy and demoralizing. On the night before walls were breached, seeing that there was no escape, rather than surrendering to their enemies, they chose ten of their own to kill the rest of the fortress inhabitants, including the women and children. Then lots were drawn among the ten for one to kill the other nine. And finally, the last survivor was to kill himself.¹⁰ The political movement amounted to nothing. Israel still remained under Roman control.

Zeal for various worldly passions and ideologies, politics or otherwise, will pass away with the flow of time, just like the Zealots did. Scripture tells us not to put our trust in princes for

1 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2 Josephus, F. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.11–26 (18 ch.1 4–6)

3 Josephus, F. *Wars of the Jews*, 2.118 (2 ch.8.1)

4 Metzger, B. (2003). *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, and Content* (3rd ed.). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

5 Josephus, F. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.12–15 (18 ch.1.3)

6 Ibid, 18.23–25 (18 ch.1.6)

7 Josephus, F. *Wars of the Jews*, 2.118 (2 ch.8.1)

8 Josephus, F. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.185–187 (20 ch.8.10)

9 Guiley, R. (2001). *The Encyclopedia of Saints*. New York: Checkmark Books

10 Josephus, F. *Wars of the Jews*, 7.252–406 (7 ch.8.1–9.2)



Rebuild David's Fallen Tabernacle

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

THE FALLEN TABERNACLE

"And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'
"Known to God from eternity are all His works."

(Acts 15:16–18)

This passage comprises the words of Elder James at the Council of Jerusalem. The latter established an important milestone in the history of

salvation with its decision not to bind Gentile (i.e., non-Jewish) believers with the statutes and judgments of the Mosaic Law. James, quoting Prophet Amos, understood that God's desire to rebuild David's fallen tabernacle did not refer to the rebuilding of the physical holy temple in Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Rather, it referred to the spiritual kingdom that would be established after the ascension of Jesus, the church that would be established at the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit.

Source of the Fall

The Gospel of John records Jesus' words: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). The author specifically notes that the temple Jesus was referring to was His own body (Jn 2:21). In other words, Jesus foretold His death

and resurrection, as well as the rebuilt temple, the church (Eph 1:23).

The Jews, especially their religious leaders, had permitted the secularization of the physical temple. Instead of being a house of prayer, the temple had turned into a marketplace for moneychangers, as well as cattle and sheep traders. Such activities were initially started for the convenience of those who had come from afar to worship in the temple, but soon became a means of profiting from godliness. To Jesus, the temple was little better than a den of thieves (Mt 21:13). Worse, it was a place where God no longer wished to dwell. To Jesus, the Jews had destroyed the temple.

A NEW SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

The destroyed temple which Jesus was going to rebuild in three days would be a spiritual kingdom. This is the "forever" kingdom that was promised to David when he determined in his heart to build a temple for God. God had then told him: "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:16). David's fallen tabernacle

"God's desire to rebuild David's fallen tabernacle did not refer to the rebuilding of the physical holy temple in Judah Rather, it referred to the spiritual kingdom ..., the church that would be established at the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit.

(or tent) would be rebuilt so that Gentiles who are called by the Lord's name could enter to seek the Lord (Acts 15:17).

David's Empire

David's empire, stretching from the River Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, up to the border of Egypt (1 Kgs 4:21), fulfilled the promise of God to Abraham. God had established a covenant with Abraham, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates ..." (Gen 15:19–21). Later, when the Israelites left Egypt and entered the Wilderness of Sinai, God reiterated this promise to Moses:

"And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River...."
(Ex 23:31–33)

"The period leading up to the establishment of the church, when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, is like the period before Sarah was promised a son. She was a barren woman. But through the promise of God she gave birth to Isaac, the only son of Abraham.

And again, before the Israelites crossed River Jordan, God proclaimed to Joshua, "From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory" (Josh 1:4).

"[This] shall be your territory" was an Old Testamental promise of a specific land area defined by boundaries. It was thus difficult for Abraham's physical descendants who inherited this promise to mentally break through these boundaries. For example, some Pharisees who believed in Jesus had argued that the gentile believers must be circumcised and abide by Mosaic Law (Acts 15:5). However, their insistence was overridden by testimonies of Barnabas and Paul's evangelism amongst the Gentiles, and by the

wonderful works of the Holy Spirit as witnessed by Peter in the house of Cornelius.

Supported by such empirical evidence, James recalled Amos' prophecy and realized that the fallen tabernacle of David had already been rebuilt. And that is the true church. The physical city of Jerusalem, which was the center of worship and offering during the Old Testamental period, was no longer the chosen place of God's dwelling (Jn 4:21).

The Rebuilt Temple

With His blood, Jesus established a new covenant. By His blood, Jesus rebuilt the spiritual temple, the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22). Those who believe in Him need no longer make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for worship; instead they are to worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:21–24). The earlier covenant has now been superseded: "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb 8:13).

Jesus rebuilt the ruins of David's tabernacle, and set up the spiritual temple so that all mankind may seek the Lord. The rebuilt tabernacle is no longer restricted by the old boundaries. There is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. In fact, anyone who is willing will be ushered

into the salvation grace of the Lord (Gal 3:26–29).

ENLARGE THE PLACE OF YOUR TENT

*"Sing, O barren,
You who have not borne!
Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,
You who have not labored with child!
For more are the children of the desolate
Than the children of the married woman," says the Lord.
"Enlarge the place of your tent,
And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings;
Do not spare;
Lengthen your cords,
And strengthen your stakes.
For you shall expand to the right and to the left,
And your descendants will inherit the nations,
And make the desolate cities inhabited."*

(Isa 54:1–3)

The LORD urged the barren one to enlarge the place of her tent. Her descendants stand to inherit the nations. What did the Prophet Isaiah mean by this prophecy? How is this related to David's fallen tabernacle?

The Earthly Jerusalem Will Be Desolate

David erected the tabernacle in Jerusalem to house the ark of God (2 Chr 1:4). The tabernacle was located within Zion¹—the city of David—within the walls of Jerusalem. After

¹ Zion was originally an ancient Jebusite fortress in the city of Jerusalem. It is described in the Bible both as the city of David (cf. 2 Sam 5:7,9) as well as the city of God (cf. Ps 87:2–3).



Solomon had built the temple, the ark was brought into the temple (2 Chr 5:7–14). God chose Jerusalem to be the dwelling place of His name because of David (2 Chr 6:6). This city would be the place of worship and offering for His people (Deut 12:13–14)—the center of their faith.

However, it was also in Jerusalem that subsequent kings led the people to worship idols, playing the harlot and defying God. In order to redirect the faith of His people, God sent His servants, time and again, to lead them back to Him. However, these servants were killed by the people, who were unwilling to listen.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus once lamented over Jerusalem. Speaking as the Father in heaven, He said: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not

heed God’s message, He wanted to depart from her.

The physical Jerusalem (cf. Gal 4:23–25) corresponds to Hagar and those born to her; the latter refers to the physical descendants of Abraham. Born under the old covenant, they were kept under the guardianship of the Law, in bondage to the beggarly elements, the handwriting of ordinances (Gal 3:23, 4:1-3,9; Col 2:14), i.e., their misplaced trust in physical rituals. Such were in the same barren state that Sarah was before she received the promise. These Israelites were unable to see the love of God through His commandments, statutes and judgments. Nor did they find the life that He wished to bestow through the commandment (Rom 7:10). In particular, when they were taken captive by other nations, their path to worship at the temple in Jerusalem was cut off, making them even more like a barren woman without hope.

The words of the Lord are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). Since He declared that

“The genuine descendants of Abraham—those who would inherit the covenant and thereby receive eternal life—are the children of promise (Gal 4:28). They are those who have entered the true church. They ... must be born by the promise of God to Abraham (Gal 4:29). The Jerusalem above is the spiritual true church, which is the mother of them all (Gal 4:26).

willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Lk 13:34–35). Since the Jerusalem of the old covenant was unwilling to

He would abandon Jerusalem and leave her uninhabited, it would surely come to pass. But although earthly Jerusalem is abandoned, the Lord had prepared greater and more abundant grace.

The Heavenly Jerusalem Will Be Mother of All

[B]ut the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written:

*“Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband.”*

(Gal 4:26–27)

The salvation grace that God wants to bestow on all humankind was a mystery, “which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:9). Through the Holy Spirit, this mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. The mystery was that gentile and Jewish believers would come together to receive the grace of salvation through Christ. And the “Jerusalem above ... which is the mother of us all,” which corresponds to Sarah (Gal 4:26), is the true church comprising gentile and Jewish believers.

The period leading up to the establishment of the church, when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, is like the period before Sarah was promised a son. She was a barren woman. But through the promise of God she gave birth to Isaac, the only son of Abraham. And God said, only those born of Isaac shall be called the descendants of Abraham (Gen 21:12).

The other sons of Abraham did not inherit the covenant God established with Abraham. Only Isaac, the son of promise, inherited this covenant. Therefore, the genuine descendants of Abraham—those who would inherit the covenant and thereby receive eternal life—are the children of promise (Gal 4:28). They are those who have entered the true church. They do not need to be physical descendants of Abraham, but must be born by the promise of God to Abraham (Gal 4:29). The Jerusalem above is the spiritual true church, which is the mother of them all (Gal 4:26).

BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

"[Y]ou shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' " (Mt 23:39b).

Jesus spoke these words after His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey and after the cleansing of the temple. However, as Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the multitudes had shouted: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" (Mt 21:9b). Why, then, did Jesus say that they will not see Him until they have uttered that phrase?

What Jesus wanted to highlight was that even though the multitude had welcomed Him with great rejoicing, they were in actual fact hoping for Him—the Son of David—to deliver them from Roman rule and establish an earthly Davidic kingdom. They were not praising Jesus because they truly knew Him and the kingdom He was to establish. At that point in time, it never crossed their minds that the Messiah (the Anointed One) they had been waiting for would eventually be treated as a sinner, and be crucified in place of a notorious criminal such as Barabbas. They never expected the Messiah to be crucified in atonement for their sins, to bleed, and then to resurrect. Nor did they know that the kingdom the Messiah was going to establish would not be of the world (Jn 18:36–37). And even more so, they did not expect Him to establish His church that would lead men into His kingdom.

Therefore, when Jesus said, "You shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,' " He meant that they had not yet seen Him because they did not truly know who He was, and they did not realize that He would bear their grief and sorrows. But one day, the Jews would acknowledge that Jesus, whom they had nailed on the cross, is the One who has come in the name of the Lord; they would then believe in Him and praise Him.

Until then, they had not yet seen this Messiah who was once on earth. Jesus continues to wait for them (cf. Rom 11:1–27).

MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN THE CHILDREN OF THE MARRIED

"Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman." (Isa 54:1)

In Galatians 4:21–31, Paul gives a detailed exposition of Isaiah's prophecy. After the earthly Jerusalem's destruction, and when the fullness of time has come, the Lord shall return to rebuild the ruins of the fallen

today, the Jerusalem above (the spiritual true church) has been revealed through the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit. The true church shall enlarge the place of her tent and stretch out the curtain of her dwellings to welcome children of the Lord from amongst the Gentiles. She fulfills the prophecy that the woman who was without husband will have many children (Gal 4:27).

The spiritual true church comprises many in the Old and New Testament—ancient saints like Abraham², Isaac and Jacob (Lk 20:37–38), the apostles, those who held fast to the faith, and us today. All these had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, but were born into the world according to their time to glorify God. The ancient saints had passed away and were received into the spiritual

“The true church shall enlarge the place of her tent and stretch out the curtain of her dwellings to welcome children of the Lord from amongst the Gentiles. She fulfills the prophecy that the woman who was without husband will have many children (Gal 4:27).”

tabernacle of David. According to the understanding of James, the apostles and the elders (Acts 15:13–18), this rebuilt tabernacle would indeed be the house of prayer for “all nations” (Isa 56:7)—the spiritual true church.

The Spiritual True Church

God established several covenants with the Old Testament Israelites, and was a husband to them (Jer 31:32). At that time, the Gentiles who were outside the covenant were like a woman without a husband and without God (Eph 2:12). However,

true church. This spiritual true church is the holy city Jerusalem which will come down out of heaven (emerge from the spirit) from God (Rev 21:2).

Preaching the Word, Rooting in the Word

“Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall

² Jesus said that God refers to Himself as the “God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Since God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mt 22:31–32), these ancient saints are still living men in the sight of God although their physical bodies had long perished. They make up the spiritual true church.



*I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
So that the rest of mankind may seek
the Lord,
Even all the Gentiles who are called
by My name,
Says the Lord who does all these
things." (Amos 9:11–12)*

*expand to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will inherit the
nations, and make the desolate cities
inhabited." (Isa 54:2b–3)*

God was commanding an expansion without limits! To the apostles who saw Jesus ascend to heaven on Mount Olive, the prophet's words would have been vague and inconceivable. To these Galileans, Jesus' instruction to go and make disciples of "all nations" would have boggled their minds (Acts 10:28–29). Their lives were hemmed in by geographical boundaries, numerous covenants, Jewish traditions, and the Mosaic Law. Had it not been for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they would never have ventured beyond the closed-up Jewish community and enter the world of the Gentiles (Acts 10:28). How far could they lengthen their cords? How could they have reached out to all the nations?

However, nobody and nothing can stand in the way of the Holy Spirit's intent! He wants the true church to evangelize globally, taking the gospel to literally every corner of the world. At the same time, the church is to strengthen her stakes, to lay a deep foundation wherever she reaches. Then the complete salvation gospel can be deeply rooted in all who have the heart to seek the Lord, and they can remain steadfast when the rain descends, when the water floods and the wind blows (Mt 7:24–27).

GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY THE NAME OF THE LORD

When they were in Antioch, Syria, Paul and Barnabas were sent by the Holy Spirit to a new land to proclaim the gospel of the Lord (Acts 13:2). They passed through the island of

Cyprus and entered a few towns and villages in the province of Galatia. They bore testimony of the Lord wherever they went and established a few churches. There were Jews as well as Gentiles who came to believe in the Lord and were baptized into the faith.

Not long after this missionary trip, some believers came down from Judea and taught the necessity of circumcision for salvation (Acts 15:1). This claim was hotly disputed by Paul and Barnabas. Eventually, the issue of whether gentile converts had to undergo circumcision was brought before a council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Quadrilateral

After much debate, Peter stood up to bear testimony of how he was sent by the Holy Spirit to the home of an Italian centurion, Cornelius, to preach God's salvation grace to them. He described how he personally witnessed the Holy Spirit being poured down on the Gentiles during his preaching, which proved that it was God's will for them to be baptized into the Lord. Following this, Paul and Barnabas also recounted how God worked through them to perform miracles amongst the Gentiles. Finally, James concluded the debate by citing the prophecy of Amos:

*"After this I will return
And will rebuild the tabernacle of
David, which has fallen down;*

On hearing James' judgment on the matter, the council came to a consensus and consequently wrote to inform the Gentiles that they need not undergo circumcision when they come to believe in the Lord (Acts 15:10); it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to the church that the gentile converts would be subject to no greater burden than abstaining from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality (Acts 15:28–29).

Importantly, in this meeting, the Holy Spirit Himself bore testimony and provided guidance because everyone had been united in following His leadership. The will of God was clear. He had walked ahead of them, leading them down a path which no one had walked before (Josh 3:3–4).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPIRITUAL TRUE CHURCH

The church had affirmed that it was necessary for a believer to abstain from "things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality" (the Jerusalem Quadrilateral). However, is such abstinence sufficient to ensure that the believer walks smoothly unto eternal life?

On closer examination, there was a preceding context to James' conclusion. He had said, "For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read

“The Bible reveals that the true church will keep the Sabbath. This was the case for the apostolic church, and it will be the same for the church revived by the latter rain of the Holy Spirit.

in the synagogues on every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). In those times, the Gentiles who believed in the Lord were able to attend Sabbath worship in the Jewish synagogues, to listen to the reading of the Pentateuch of Moses. If they wished to obey the commands of God and uphold His teachings, it would be insufficient just to abstain from the Jerusalem Quadrilateral. They would still need to understand the spirit of the Law of Moses.

Under the new covenant that Jesus had established through His blood, He puts His laws into men's hearts and writes them on their minds (Heb 10:16). Although the Gentiles did not need to undergo physical circumcision, they needed to be continually renewed through the Spirit, to become a new man, to abide by the word of God, and to be circumcised in their hearts (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 3:3–6; Rom 2:26). All these can only be achieved through knowledge of the Old Testament laws and the prophetic books. Through daily spiritual nurture, the believer

”*To depart, or be separated, from the world does not mean becoming a hermit*

can gradually transform himself and regain the image of God, possessing true holiness and righteousness.

The Perpetual Covenant of the Sabbath between God and His People As the Mosaic Law was read in every synagogue in every city, the apostles and elders would not need to repeatedly admonish or remind the gentile believers of the righteous requirement of the Law (Rom 8:4) in their letters to the gentile churches. The gentile believers in apostolic times attended Sabbath services every week and so had every opportunity to learn and understand the will of God.

“Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall

surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

(Ex 31:15–17)

Keeping the Sabbath is a “perpetual covenant” between God and His people, an everlasting sign (Ex 31:12–17). This means it will never change, regardless of the appearance of the new covenant. In addition, it is an Old Testament prophecy that the gentile believers shall keep the Sabbath:

Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants— Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant— Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer.” (Isa 56:6–7a)

This is the basis for discerning the true church today. The non-Jewish members of the true church will also observe the covenant of God by keeping the Sabbath. This is consistent with God's will. God shall lead them to the holy mountain—He shall take

them to higher ground where they can draw nearer to Him and be high above the worldly wind and waves. As they have deep spiritual communion with God through the Holy Spirit in the spiritual true church, they will be truly joyful in the house of prayer. It goes without saying that Jewish believers must continue to keep the Sabbath.

When the Lord Jesus was preaching on earth, it was His custom to go into the synagogue on the Sabbath to read and teach the people from the Scriptures (Lk 4:16). Paul did the same thing (Acts 17:2). The Bible reveals that the true church will keep the Sabbath. This was the case for the apostolic church, and it will be the same for the church revived by the latter rain of the Holy Spirit.

REPAIR THE DAMAGE

“On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old.” (Amos 9:11)

When James quoted this passage, he said, “After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up” (Acts 15:16). The tabernacle of David was damaged so God would return to rebuild it.

Source of Damage

The temple of Solomon was built in BC 957. After 371 years, in BC 586, it was burned down and the walls of the city destroyed when the great army of Babylon attacked Jerusalem (2 Chr 36:19). Although this was when



the temple was physically destroyed, God's presence had long departed from it. Under the leadership of their kings, the Jewish people had started to burn incense to Baal, walking after other gods even as they continued to call upon God's name in His holy temple (Jer 7:8–11). Hence God departed from the temple, the place where He had chosen to establish His name. The faith of the people had become corrupt, which in turn defiled the holy city. Without the presence of God, the city became desolate.

In BC 538, God moved the Persian king Cyrus to allow the Jewish people's return to Jerusalem to restore the temple of God (Mal 1:1–4). Zerubbabel led a group of exiled Jews back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple upon the original foundations. The temple was completed and dedicated in BC 515. Soon after, however, the people's faith deteriorated. As Nehemiah and Malachi noted, the Israelites did not abide by the teachings of God in terms of Sabbath-keeping and the spirit of offering; they did not pursue godliness; they took the marriage covenant lightly and neglected social justice (Mal 2:9, 3:5).

All these were breaches in the tabernacle of David. The crux of such damage was their inability to wholeheartedly serve the one true God. Although the people came to worship in the temple, they had idols and immoral thoughts in their hearts. They did not persevere in following God's words, corrupting their worship with secular practices.

Come Out of the World

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."
(2 Cor 6:16–18)*

Workers of God must assiduously work to heal the breaches in the church such as disunity amongst brethren or in doctrine, heresy, bad behavior, secularism etc.

Departing from one's present situation in the world is an important theme of salvation grace. God's first utterance to Abraham began with: "Get out of ..." (Gen 12:1). Leaving his father's country was a prerequisite for receiving the blessings of God. Similarly, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He told him to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt (Ex 3:10, 29:46). If they did not depart from Egypt, then God would not dwell among them.

*Depart! Depart! Go out from there,
Touch no unclean thing;
Go out from the midst of her,
Be clean,
You who bear the vessels of the Lord.
For you shall not go out with haste,
Nor go by flight;*

*For the Lord will go before you,
And the God of Israel will be your rear guard. (Isa 52:11–12)*

To depart, or be separated, from the world does not mean becoming a hermit (1 Cor 5:9–10). Rather, it means that we do not adopt the values of the world which are not in accordance with biblical teachings, and uphold the moral standard of the Bible whilst resisting compromise with secularism. The true church is the Lord's sheepfold which He shepherds with His words. There is no need for the church to rely solely on the administrative practices of the world to govern the church (cf. 1 Sam 8:4–7).

The most important task of God's servant is to work with God to mend the breach of faith in the church. This means humbly submitting to the revelation and guidance of the Holy Spirit to wholeheartedly uphold the common faith of the true church (Tit 1:1–4);

to hold fast the pattern of sound words from the Bible, through faith and love in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:13–14); and to uphold the mystery of the faith (1 Tim 3:9).

CONCLUSION

When the apostles gathered at Jerusalem to debate the necessity of circumcision for gentile converts, they affirmed a key insight in the history of faith. The prophecy of the rebuilding of David's fallen tabernacle did not refer to a physical reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem; instead it was about the establishment of a spiritual kingdom which Gentiles who are called by the Lord's name could enter to seek the Lord (Acts 15:17). It is the will of God that both Jews and Gentiles can come together in the true church to receive the grace of salvation through Jesus Christ. The

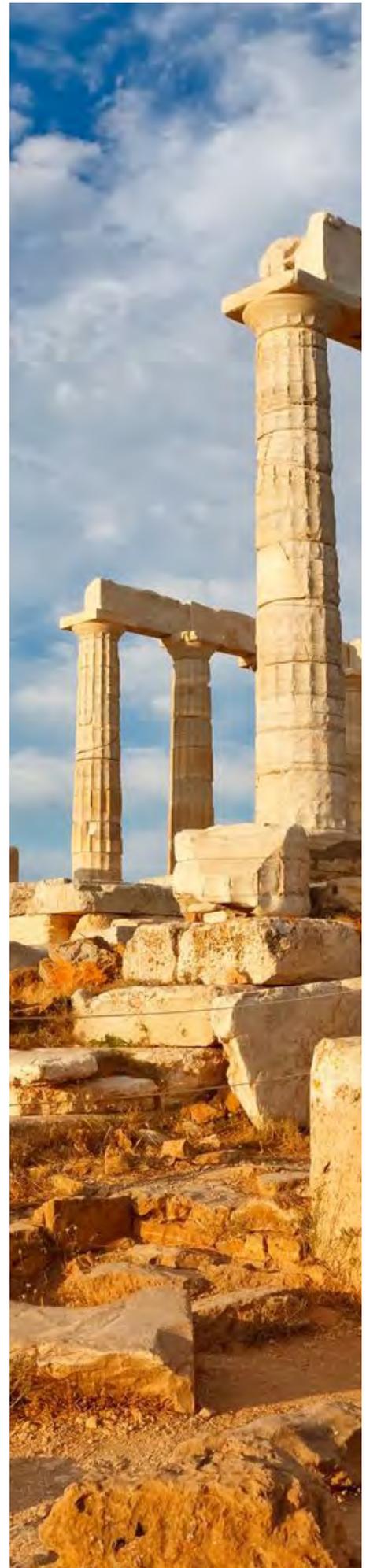
Patriarchs of the faith such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10). God prepared this city for them (Heb 11:16) just as He prepares it for us.

spiritual true church consists of the ancient saints, the believers of the church in the apostolic time as well as believers today.

The believers of yore faithfully served the true God when they were on earth and followed His command wherever they were. This is a constant reminder that the true church holds fast God's perpetual covenant (Ex 31:16). She worships the God Whom Abraham worshipped, the only true God—Abraham did not worship a god in three distinct persons, the Trinity³. Specifically, she must keep herself from defiling the Sabbath (Isa 56:6). In addition, the true church has a firm belief in the Bible and does not conform to worldly trends and values. The true church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit who guides and directs the church (Eph 2:22). Individually, the body of every member of the true church is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in him or her to provide counsel and comfort (1 Cor 6:19).

Throughout the history of man, God has continually selected and sent out His servants to minister to His true church. Workers of God must assiduously work to heal the breaches in the church such as disunity amongst brethren or in doctrine, heresy, bad behavior, secularism etc. There is no servant who can complete the entire course of the salvation plan alone; instead, each servant must work to the utmost of his ability during the limited time span in which he has been commissioned. And the examples of Moses and Paul remind us that no matter how gifted an individual worker is, he must always work humbly alongside co-workers.

Patriarchs of the faith such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10). God prepared this city for them (Heb 11:16) just as He prepares it for us. May we all look forward to abiding with our Lord in this holy city, New Jerusalem, the everlasting dwelling place of all those whose names are written in the Book of Life (Rev 21:27, 22:5). ★



3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>



No Substitute for Vigilance (I)

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

Priest or prophet, king or commoner—regardless of station or position, all men struggle with sin since time began. While we are on this earth, there is simply no immunity from the lures of sin and we simply cannot ignore it. We can only acknowledge it, confront it, struggle with it, and finally either yield to it or overcome it. Yet more often than we should, we find ourselves yielding to sin. In this article, we will study one of the main causes for sin in our lives: a lack of vigilance in our faith.

Today, elders, deacons, preachers, and believers of the True Jesus Church (TJC) must all battle complacency in faith. Alas, as we have seen, one too many formerly pious and fervent servants of God have succumbed to the lures of sin and in the process wrecked their own faith and worse still, the faith of others as well. Ironically, many a time, it is the faithful church-going group of Christians who are most vulnerable to sinful temptations.

Many pious Christians believe themselves to be impervious to sin and temptation by virtue of their many years of service and ministry in church. While regular service and attendance in church does indeed

“After we have believed in God for some time, we might begin to indulge ourselves in the mercies of God and believe that God would accept changes to the ways we worship, changes that are made to suit our lifestyles and tastes.

make one's faith more formidable, the sense of spiritual immunity it unwittingly fosters has led many to let their guard down and slacken as they mature in their faith. The growing lack of vigilance is, as we shall see, a grave weakness that the devil exploits to destroy God's best workers.

There are two consequences of this weakness. Firstly, we reduce God's majesty by worshipping Him in our own way. Secondly, we allow our lusts and desires to displace God as the object of our worship, ultimately prostrating ourselves before artificial idols—glory and money—while mindlessly chanting the same old “Lord, Lord.”

In other words, a non-vigilant or careless faith will lead us to distort *how* and *what* we worship, all the while we deceive ourselves as being faithful Christians.

THE WAY I WANT IT

Firstly, a negligent faith in God deforms our mode of service to God, causing us to worship God in any way we wish instead of the ways He has instructed us. Christians often do this because they believe they can get the best of both worlds by accommodating their desires with their worship of God. Though by doing so, they invariably prioritize the gratification of the flesh above their adherence to God's word.

The episode in Exodus 32 involving Aaron and the golden calf is a clear example of how such a tragedy can unfold. Aaron's introduction into the biblical narrative sees him starting out as a “minor character.” He was to be merely the mouthpiece of Moses, after Moses had told God that he is “slow of speech and of tongue.” However, God subsequently chose Aaron to occupy the highly significant sacred office as His very first High Priest.

As High Priest, Aaron was the most eminent religious authority among the Israelites, second only to Moses, and the Bible even records of God speaking to Aaron directly just as He did with Moses. Thus it would seem reasonable to suggest that Aaron should have been intimately familiar with God. Moreover, Aaron had also witnessed firsthand the powers of God in Egypt; he knew of God's strictness regarding absolute faithfulness and obedience to Him throughout their journey in the wilderness. The chosen people of God thus had good reason to look up to Aaron as a role model.

So how was it that Aaron could have led his people to commit such grave sin as idolatry, one of the most egregious and talked-about sins in the Bible? Why did three thousand men of Israel have to die at the hands of their brothers on that fateful day (v28)? One of the most fundamental reasons is that Aaron and the Israelites were not vigilant. While they waited for Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, they allowed impatience and uncertainty to cloud the clarity of their faith—the same faith that trusted in the strength of God's hands to pull the Red Sea apart. Consequently, they took it upon themselves to worship God in the manner they pleased.

There are two reasons to explain why believers would alter God's direct instructions regarding how we ought to worship Him. The first reason is most evident in the case of the Israelites: we choose to worship God in the ways that gratify our immediate lusts and vices. In Exodus 32:6, Moses records that the "people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." Apostle Paul goes on to elaborate that these Israelites were taking part in idolatrous acts that incorporated pagan elements into the Israelites' once-sacred mode of worship (1 Cor 10:7). To the Israelites, the invention of such a practice was ingenious: not only could they fulfill their obligations to God by supposedly worshipping Him as the golden calf, they could satiate their base instincts of sensuality and revelry in the process.

While it may be difficult for us to imagine incorporating religious



practices of other faiths into our worship, the danger persists, perhaps even more insidiously, in the form of secularization today. For instance, the types of music that we choose to praise God with is one of the many areas of our own worship that is susceptible to distortion by secular influences. The infiltration of such secular practices into modern Christianity is often gradual and done in the innocent name of evangelism. For example, many churches have justified the inclusion of incredibly sensuous and worldly activities in their worship by claiming that this is the best way to reach out to the world. Upon seeing the thousands that flock to such services, people are compelled to agree. However, this is misguided and as the true church of God, we should

Even while we strive to lead exemplary lives to show the world the powerful integrity and character of a true Christian, we should do so for the ultimate ends of bringing glory to God, not ourselves.

not be concerned with marketing our gospel or packaging it attractively so as to garner mass appeal. The fundamental spirit of our worship and our service is our trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, believing that it is indeed only God who gives the growth. In today's highly progressive socio-political age, the ability of secular influences to contaminate the purity and reverence of our worship

has never been greater. Hence, we must remember to be vigilant in how we choose to conduct our worship.

The second reason we alter the way we worship is to satisfy our own preferences and for our convenience. After we have believed in God for some time, we might begin to indulge ourselves in the mercies of God and believe that God would accept changes to the ways we worship, changes that are made to suit our lifestyles and tastes. The Israelites certainly thought so when they chose to build a golden idol, created with their own jewelry and possessions, thinking that this somehow endowed them with authority over the true God. God's seeming aloofness, Moses's delay, uncertainty over the future—these were inconveniences faced by the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai that prompted them to take matters into their own hands.

If we consider this in today's terms, we can think of it as Sabbath services clashing with our treasured, once-in-a-lifetime appointments. Or, perhaps our preference for certain speakers over others and how we choose to be absent for sermons given by those we dislike or find less interesting.

Reading of how Saul's premature offering to God cost him a critical war and his favor with God, we learn that it is always God who makes the call. And because we trust in Him to do the best for us, we follow in faith. We must put God's instructions and requirements above our own comforts and preferences, for this is part of what it means to take up one's cross and to trust and follow Christ.

FALSE IDOLS

When our faith grows inattentive, not only does the way we worship change



for the worse, the *object* of our worship changes as well. Gradually, false idols begin to displace God in our hearts and minds.

False Idols: Self-Glorification

The world presents us with innumerable idols to emulate and worship. Some secular role models are indeed worthy of emulation and praise for their heroism or the ingenuity of their contributions to humanity. However, no one, no matter how impressive, deserves to be worshipped with the same amount of dedication and fervor with which we worship Jesus.

While the temptation to worship others is great, especially when we aspire to be in the positions of our idols someday, greater still is the temptation to seek for, and bask in, the adulation others give us. It is hard not to like being worshipped and praised, but Paul, a man most worthy of admiration by worldly standards, shows us how we should act when we are placed in such situations. As recorded by Luke in Acts 14, Apostle Paul, accompanied by his co-worker Barnabas, had recently healed a born-cripple in Lystra. The miracle drove the Lycaonians into a religious frenzy, prompting loud cries of veneration and declarations throughout the city, such as, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" A priest of Zeus even brought sacrifices to offer before Paul and Barnabas, believing them to be both Hermes and Zeus incarnate respectively.

However, to everyone's surprise, the two miracle-workers of Christ did not take this well. Tearing their clothes, they ran into the crowds, trying to shout over the din of misdirected praise and worship:

"We are also men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God..."

Why did Paul and Barnabas reject the Lycaonians' praise and worship? To any bystander, it would have been well earned. However, Paul knew that even at his best, he was only a vessel, a messenger, a servant bearing good news. Paul knew that his hands healed no one unless they were holding on to God at the same time; his tongue spoke nothing, unless the words were the Living Word; his feet could bring him nowhere, unless the Holy Spirit guided them. In essence, Paul knew

"We wish to have both a meaningful spiritual life filled with good deeds and ministry, and yet also a life with more money and luxuries. For Jesus to say that such a situation is impossible is indeed deeply distressing for many. When we choose our gods or God, it was, and still is, all or nothing."

that all glory and all strength were God's, and God's alone.

What about receiving praise for our secular achievements, those we believe come from our effort and smarts? What does Jesus have to say?

"I do not receive honor from men... How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" (Jn 5: 41, 44)

Very simply, we reject the honor from men because we know that reserved in Heaven is an even greater honor given by God. Indeed, there is nothing to stop us from becoming

gods on earth to our fellow mortals but to do that is to forsake an even greater seat of esteem—one next to our Father, the Creator. Even while we strive to lead exemplary lives to show the world the powerful integrity and character of a true Christian, we should do so for the ultimate ends of bringing glory to God, not ourselves.

False Idols: Money

Interestingly, this formidable competitor against God for residence in our hearts is inanimate. That one of our greatest idols is not even a living being is symptomatic of the age-old disease of materialism: powerful enough to reduce thinking, feeling, spiritual, and faithful Christians to lifeless money-chasing machines who willingly sacrifice faith, family, and freedom in Christ for something that can be literally blown away by the wind. Just as this idol—money—is dead, so are its most ardent disciples.

For Christians, becoming a disciple of money is not an option. Jesus clearly warns in Matthew 6:24:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

This warning makes the choice simple, yet exceedingly frustrating, for the Christian. On a fundamental level, we know how a life spent chasing after a larger bank account is meaningless and is at odds with the meaningful life Christ has given us through His death. Yet, by putting matters in such an uncompromising binary, Jesus prevents us from doing what we truly

“*Having a sober faith that is always aware of God’s bigger picture and that always remembers God’s word, even in the most dire of situations, is the only way we can finish this marathon—where our enemies are not just distance and fatigue, but distractions and evil line the paths on either side of us, calling out for us to yield to the demands of our flesh.*”

want: to find a “compromise” to gain the best of both worlds. We wish to have both a meaningful spiritual life filled with good deeds and ministry, and yet also a life with more money and luxuries. For Jesus to say that such a situation is impossible is indeed deeply distressing for many. When we choose our gods or God, it was, and still is, all or nothing. This is the same dilemma the Israelites faced.

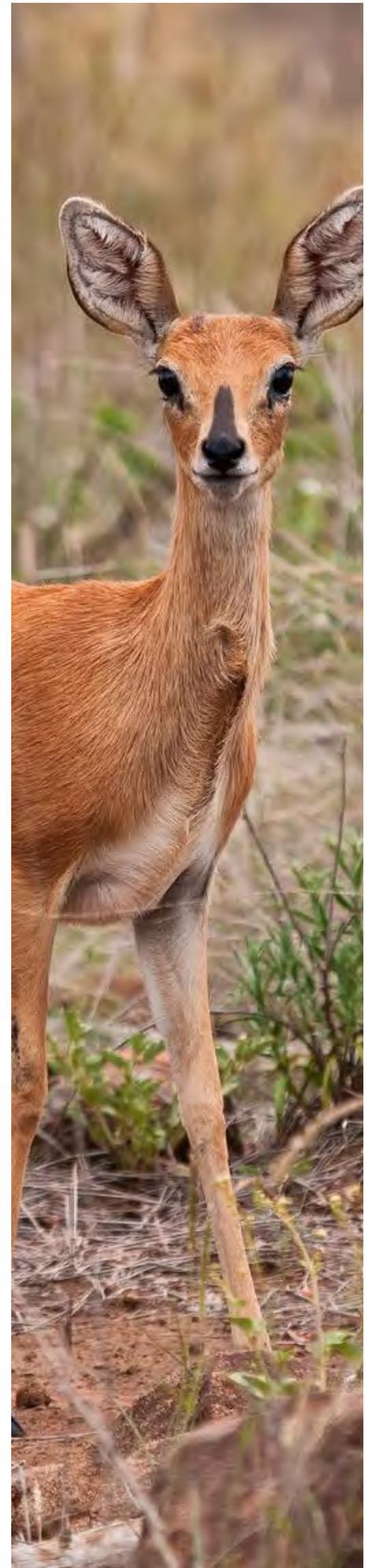
Today, when we read of the many follies and failures of the Israelites, we might be inclined to think of them as an extremely fickle, feckless, and confused group of people, who were constantly sabotaging their chances of prosperity and bliss. While that may be true, we should not think ourselves as being any better. The modern Christian faces perhaps even more trials than they did, and in the age we live in today, our idol of materialism is an even greater delusion. The economic system of Western capitalism has brought with it an accompanying culture of materialism that has found its way into Christianity, where it has subtly displaced God as the object of worship while retaining all the trappings of Christianity like prayers and hymn-singing. Thus, what we see in many churches today are people using “Lord, Lord” as a stand-in for their true cry for money and prosperity. As TJC believers, we should be vigilant and examine whom we are truly worshipping in our hearts.

FINISH THE RACE

The Christian journey is a marathon, not a sprint. At certain points in our lives, we experience short bursts

of spiritual energy, invigorated by a sudden display of God’s grace and mercy or by deeply spiritual experiences such as visions. However, these rarely sustain us for a prolonged period of time. Sooner or later, we settle back into our routine of an unreflective pursuit of power, status, and fortune. Therefore, vigilance is key. Having a sober faith that is always aware of God’s bigger picture and that always remembers God’s word, even in the most dire of situations, is the only way we can finish this marathon—where our enemies are not just distance and fatigue, but distractions and evil line the paths on either side of us, calling out for us to yield to the demands of our flesh.

To summarize, to be vigilant is to remember to be faithful to God alone and to the clear ways He has told us to worship Him. Just like the Israelites, we, as the chosen TJC, are now at the foot of Mount Sinai. Just like Moses, Jesus is descending soon. Will we survive the wait? ★





Against the Tide ~ Do Not Be Conformed to This World

Based on a sermon series on "Overcoming Secularity" by Peter Shee—Singapore

DEFINING SECULARITY—A TALE OF TWO AGES

The word "secular" comes from the Latin *saecularis*, relating to an age or period, which is in turn derived from *saeculum* which means "generation." The Bible mentions two ages – "this age" (cf. Heb 2:2) and the "next age" or the "age to come" (Heb 2:5). The former refers to our lives on this earth, and the latter, to the future world where we will spend eternity with God in bliss.

The author of Hebrews urges us to anchor ourselves to the things we have heard lest we drift away (Heb 2:1–2). Such a warning hints at the characteristic of "this age"—there are whelming tides that may sweep the unwary away and prevent his or her entry into the "next age." We must always examine our mindsets and check our behavior against the things we have heard. We must clearly discern: which age do we seek to align ourselves to?

DETERMINING OUR STATUS—A PEOPLE OF THE NEW AGE

God has not put the world¹ to come in subjection to angels (Heb 2:5–6). Citing the Psalms (cf. Ps 8:4–6), the

author of Hebrews informs us that Jesus Christ will rule the world to come. And this world ruled by Christ has already begun; the kingdom of God has been inaugurated on earth as His church and those who have been baptized into the church of Christ are His subjects. This is why Jesus tells us not say the kingdom of God is here or there, "[f]or indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21).

Jesus died for our sins and His blood redeemed us from this age. His resurrection marked the inauguration of His messianic kingdom (Acts 13:33; cf. Ps 2:6–7; Heb 2:5–8). Through baptism, we identify with His death and resurrection, escape from the corruption of this age and enter into His kingdom. As subjects of God's kingdom, we must first seek God, His kingdom, and His righteousness instead of the things of this age. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is now given to us to empower

us to obey God and walk according to His righteousness (Rom 8:11–13). If we persevere, resisting conformity to this age, we show ourselves to be true citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

DISCERNING OUR DESTINY—FUTURE GLORY IN THE NEW AGE

Jesus is the captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10). He shall bring us, together with other children of God, into glory in the world to come. However, this demands that we submit to Jesus as captain and accept His absolute rule in our lives; this requires us to reject any affiliation to this present world.

God has deemed us worthy to be called His people. However, we must constantly remember that this world is not worthy of God's people (Heb 11:38). Hebrews 11 is a list of victors who had overcome the fiercest battles in their lives. Despite intense persecution—some were even sawn into two—they maintained their faith

”Our lusts draw us towards the current of the world. Through our lusts, the devil controls us. If we can control or even eliminate our desires, the devil will no longer be able to sway us to walk according to the course of the world.

to the very end. These people of faith could persevere because they stayed away from a world that was not worthy of them. They wandered in mountains, deserts, dens, caves and so on in order to avoid the corruption of the world, and remained holy.

Today, we may not be physically removed from society. However, we need to be spiritually separated from this world and her values (2 Cor 6:17). We must resist drifting along with the tide of the world. In 17:14–17 provides many teachings on how to be spiritually removed from this age—we must not be influenced by the world to sin together with them (v14) and we must lead a holy life (v17).

BECOMING A LIVING SACRIFICE

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom 12:1–2)

Although we are still living in the world, we must present our bodies



that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The following focuses on the first step.

NOT CONFORMING TO THIS AGE

The Course of the World

The world that we live in is in rebellion against God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly warns that His people will always be at loggerheads with the people of this world (Jn 14:14,16). Being of God and being of the world are two mutually exclusive categories; we can only be of one or the other. If we choose the former, then we must be ready to stand against the world and against the tide of secularity.

The tides of this world are no gentle ripples which lap and eddy around us as we stand. Instead, the tides of secularity are often huge waves that rush in to sweep us out into the ocean.

Before we came to know the Lord Jesus Christ, we were part of the world, conformists to this age. Paul warns us that there are three things that threaten us and our salvation—the devil (the prince of the power of the air), the course of the world, and our fleshly lusts. Our lusts draw us towards the current of the world. Through our lusts, the devil controls us. If we can control or even eliminate our desires, the devil will no longer be able to sway us to walk according to the course of the world. However, if we are still conforming to the world and walking according to our lusts, it means that we are under the control of the evil one to disobey God.

Some argue that the world is beautiful and ask what is wrong with enjoying the world. It is true that God created a good and beautiful world (cf. Gen 1:3–25). However, when the Bible says not to conform to this world, the Bible is not referring to the physical earth, but the ways of the world or the course of the world. Not conforming to this age means not conforming to the world's values, mindsets, and ways of doing things. Galatians 1:4 provides us with the correct translation—"this (present evil) age" as opposed to "this world," thus clarifying the distinction between the physical creation and the ways of the world. God created a wonderful world to be inhabited by His children. Tragically, since the fall of Man, "this age" now occupies God's world and we have become corrupted. However, the apostle Paul reminds us that Christ has saved us from the corruption of this age (Gal 1:4).

Jesus Christ sacrificed His life on the cross to deliver us from the corruption in this age. We must respond to this freely-given grace by no longer conforming to the world

This age that we live in is spiritually Sodom because it is filled with debauchery and immorality. This world is spiritually Egypt because it oppresses Christians and enslaves people to sin. Do we still find the world attractive? Do we still want to conform to its ways?

as a living sacrifice, i.e., we should conduct our lives in a worthy manner, holy and acceptable to God. Such a sacrifice of our bodies "is our reasonable service." It is a conscious act on our part to offer our entire life as a continual worship of God. Only by sustaining communion with God can we remain secure and not drift away with the tides of this age.

There are three steps to presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. First, do not be conformed to this world². Second, we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Third, we must prove what is

Even as we strive to align ourselves to God, the world strives—insidiously, incessantly and relentlessly—to make us conform to it.

[I]n which you once walked according to the course³ of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Eph 2:2–3)



but conforming to the will of God, our Father. This means being wise and making prudent choices regarding the things that affect our lives—our friends, studies, career, and where we live. Beware of making Lot's choice.

Not of This World

And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. (Rev 11:8)

This age that we live in is spiritually Sodom because it is filled with debauchery and immorality. This world is spiritually Egypt because it oppresses Christians and enslaves people to sin. Do we still find the world attractive? Do we still want to conform to its ways?

We do not belong to this world and that is why the world will hate us (Jn 15:19). Moreover, our real opponents are not human; our real enemy is the spirit of the air. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood but dark forces (Eph 6:12). The prince of darkness seeks to entice us over to his side by appealing to our lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life. However, we must not compromise. In fact, Philippians 2 tells us to make our stand clear. We have to shine as lights in the world and show ourselves to be different from this age. The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth but He will abide with us forever (Jn 14:16–18). Hence we do not seek acceptance by the world; we have overcome the world and those who are of God hears us (1 Jn 4:5–6).

As Lot found out too late, this age (or this world) may not gently invite us to imbibe its values. At times, it threatens and forces us to conform. And often times, we—like Lot—have

long been corrupted by the views and values of the society we live in. The only solution according to the word of God is to crucify (Gal 6:14). No matter what threats we face, we have to crucify the world. If the world does not take “NO” for an answer, then we have to crucify ourselves. In other words, let us happily die in defiance of the world and obedience to God, rather than live in sinful conformity.

CONCLUSION—THIS WORLD WILL BE JUDGED

This world will eventually be judged when Jesus comes again, signifying the end of this age. John 16 tells us that when Jesus comes again, He will convict the world of sin and righteousness, and the prince of this age will be judged.

Paul also tells us that we—the saints—will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2). If we are going to be judges of the world, how can we defile ourselves by

conforming to this world's values? We must thus carefully examine ourselves and repent from inappropriate behavior so that we will be worthy judges and not end up being judged with the world. James tells us that friendship with the world is enmity with God; it is spiritual adultery (Jas 4:4).

Demas was a good co-worker with Paul (Col 4:14; Phm 1:24) but left his ministry because he loved this present world (2 Tim 4:1). We were entangled with the world before but now that we have been saved, we have escaped the corruption of this age. Let us be wary lest we entangle ourselves again with the pollution of this age and our latter end will be worse than the beginning (2 Pet 2:20).

Let us strive to be among the victors of Hebrews 11. We are people who have faith, who truly believe that God exists and seek God (Heb 11:3). Most importantly, as one of those in Hebrews 11, we must remember that the world is not worthy of us. Never drift along with this world. Stand against the tide! ★

1 Greek: οἰκουμένη from which “ecumenical” is derived rather than αἰών or κόσμος; the emphasis is thus on a new world order.

2 & 3 Greek: αἰών meaning “age.”

Lot: A Family Tragedy

Lot chose to live in Sodom because it was a thriving city (cf. Gen 13:10–12). But Sodom was also a place full of evil (cf. Gen 18:20–33) and full of the thinking of this age. By choosing this depraved society to live in and bring up his family, Lot subjected himself to unnecessary and continual bombardment of evil. The community he lived with was evil and Lot was tormented daily because his soul was righteous (2 Pet 2:8).

Despite Lot's righteousness, he and his household suffered a tragic end. When two angels visited Lot to save him and his family, all the men of Sodom wanted to have sex with these two beautiful angels. The whole city came and knocked on Lot's door. Under intense stress and in his desire to save the angels, Lot offered his virgin daughters to the men of the city in “exchange” (Gen 19:6–8)! Later, Lot's wife could not detach herself from the attractions of this age and was turned into a pillar of salt. Besides losing his wife, Lot also lost his two daughters to immorality. His two daughters made Lot drunk and committed incest with him.

This tragic account should make us reflect on the choices we make. Like Lot and his daughters, have our choices corrupted our moral values? Like Lot's wife, do we have such great attachments to this age that these will cost us our life one day?

Living for the Lord (III): Spiritual Priests

Based on sermon series by Simon Chin—Singapore



After establishing the need for us to live for Christ in part one of this series, part two provided useful tips on how to live for the Lord at home. In part three, we will study how personal spiritual cultivation enables us to live for Christ.

After experiencing God's gracious calling, Paul dedicated his life to Him. He served as an apostle, propagating the gospel until his martyrdom. Before his death, he wrote to his co-worker, Timothy, saying: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:7–8). God's grace, coupled with Paul's faith, meant that Paul could live for Christ and die for Christ.

Today, we know that we have received the Lord's grace because He has called us to salvation. We have come to know Jesus through hearing the truth, believing in Him, and having been redeemed by His blood, and we now belong to Him. Through His love, He has made us into a kingdom of God's people, a nation of kings and priests.

[A]nd from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own

blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5–6)

Therefore, Paul exhorts us to live for the Lord: "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:7–8).

THE PRIESTS—A SPECIAL PEOPLE

During the time of the Exodus, God chose the sons of Aaron among the Israelites to serve as priests. God instructed Moses to consecrate them

for duty: to cleanse them, clothe them with holy garments, and to anoint them with oil. Only then could they enter the Holy Place to burn incense, light the lamps, change the showbread, and offer burnt offerings on the bronze altar. No other Israelites were allowed to perform these sacred duties.

Each year, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the people. Taking the blood of bulls and rams into the Most Holy Place, he would sprinkle it on the veil and pour it onto the mercy seat. Only God could determine who could undertake this role.

Despite God's clear instructions about the priesthood, presumptuous

Just as a son talks to his father, so we should converse regularly with our Father in heaven—not just when we have need of something. The more we communicate, the more we will experience His love and care.

acts were carried out. Even Uzziah, considered as one of the good kings of Judah, transgressed by entering the temple to burn incense. As a result, he was struck with leprosy, a condition which stayed with him until the day he died.

OFFER UP PRAYERS

By God's grace that comes through the blood of Christ, we have become spiritual priests. Although we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices, we should render spiritual sacrifices, which are our prayers.

*Let my prayer be set before
You as incense,
The lifting up of my hands as the
evening sacrifice. (Ps 141:2)*

This psalm of David reflects his longing for the Tabernacle and his desire for his worship to be acceptable to God. He speaks of prayers ascending as incense to heaven and the lifting of his hands as the evening sacrifice.

Prayer is the duty of every believer: if we do not pray, how can we claim to be a Christian? There may be times when we feel that there is nothing to pray for because everything seems to be fine in our lives; but we forget that prayer is communication with God. Just as a son talks to his father, so we should converse regularly with our Father in heaven—not just when we have need of something. The more we communicate, the more we will experience His love and care.

Our relationship with God is established through deep prayers. While it is undoubtedly important to read the Bible and attend church services, we also need to pray. Without prayer, our relationship with God will be superficial, as we will find it hard to feel God's presence and love. It is with good reason that prayer has been likened to breathing; it is essential. If we lead a prayerful life, the Holy Spirit will work mightily in us, edifying us and strengthening us spiritually.

Intercessory prayer is also important, because within the community of faith, we need to ask God to look after the members. We should pray

for one another: our children, the sick, the poor, those who are going through trials, and those who are in danger of falling into sin. If we truly live for Christ, then we should make intercession an integral part of our daily routine.

*Therefore I exhort first of all that
supplications, prayers, intercessions,
and giving of thanks be made for all
men, for kings and all who are in
authority, that we may lead a quiet
and peaceable life in all godliness
and reverence. For this is good and
acceptable in the sight of God our
Savior, who desires all men to be*

As spiritual priests, we need the word of God to guide us to live according to His will. If we allow our spiritual cultivation to lapse, such that we no longer read the Bible, we may not even notice if we stray from God. At that point, our actions will be displeasing to Him, and our sacrifices will be blemished.

*saved and to come to the knowledge
of the truth. For there is one God
and one Mediator between God and
men, the Man Christ Jesus.*

(1 Tim 2:1–5)

Here, Paul exhorts Timothy to pray for everyone, especially those in positions of authority. Being under Roman rule, this advice was particularly pertinent: if an emperor ruled with consideration of his subjects, the Christians among them would be able to live peacefully and practice their faith without oppression.

Today, most of us are blessed with freedom of worship. But in some countries, Christians are still being persecuted, and cannot assemble to worship or to evangelize. Therefore, we need to pray for them. Moreover, we should ask God to enable more people to receive the gospel so that they can come to know Jesus Christ, the Savior of humankind, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.

Prayers can work wonders. We often hear testimonies of brethren who have prayed for unbelieving family

members who eventually accepted Christ. Prayer is about asking God to work, opening up hardened hearts.

BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

In order to serve God as spiritual priests, we must be built into a spiritual house.

*[Y]ou also, as living stones, are
being built up a spiritual house, a
holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual
sacrifices acceptable to God through
Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:5)*

Believers are like living stones because the life of Christ is in us.

Together, we form a spiritual house, which is the church. Having the status of priests, we must be holy and consecrated to God. We ought to put away secularity and put on holiness and righteousness through spiritual cultivation. Only then can our worship be acceptable to God.

Spiritual cultivation means nurturing an image that reflects the righteousness of God. It comes from daily prayer and reading of the Bible. God's word acts like a mirror, showing us our blemishes so that we can remove them. A priest of God should not lead a double life, attending church on the one hand, and immersing himself in unspiritual pursuits on the other. God looks at our hearts: we must cultivate ourselves to become holy so that we can serve God.

OFFER GODLY SACRIFICES

Serving God means offering godly sacrifices. If we give to God according to our whim, or we offer up worthless things, we dishonor Him.

Although Saul was a faithful king at the start, he transgressed against

” God looks at our hearts. What condition is it in?

God later in his life. On one occasion, when surrounded by enemy forces, he took it upon himself to offer a burnt sacrifice to God, instead of waiting for Prophet Samuel. On another occasion, Saul disobeyed God, sparing the life of King Agag and allowing the Israelites to take the spoils of war, which included the best of the sheep and oxen. He justified his actions to Samuel, saying that the livestock would be offered to the Lord. But Samuel rebuked him, saying, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Sam 15:22). Saul’s sacrifices were ungodly because he disobeyed God’s command. As it transpired, the Lord rejected Saul from being king.

As spiritual priests, we need the word of God to guide us to live according to His will. If we allow our spiritual cultivation to lapse, such that we no longer read the Bible, we may not even notice if we stray from God. At that point, our actions will be displeasing to Him, and our sacrifices will be blemished.

The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, “Read this, please.” And he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, “Read this, please.” And he says, “I am not literate.” Therefore the Lord said: “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,”

(Isa 29:11–13)

Isaiah pointed out that the Israelites who came to worship before God

merely paid lipservice, as their hearts were far from Him. Today, the same situation could befall us: we may worship God, but we may neither understand His word nor feel His love, and may even doubt His word.

God looks at our hearts. What condition is it in? If our heart is intent on searching, God will open it to understand the Bible. God’s word will become to us as sweet as honey, inspiring us to fear Him and to stand before Him in awe. Consequently, our worship will become increasingly spiritual, and we can be holy and royal priests, knowing God, worshipping Him in spirit and in truth, and serving Him willingly and joyfully.

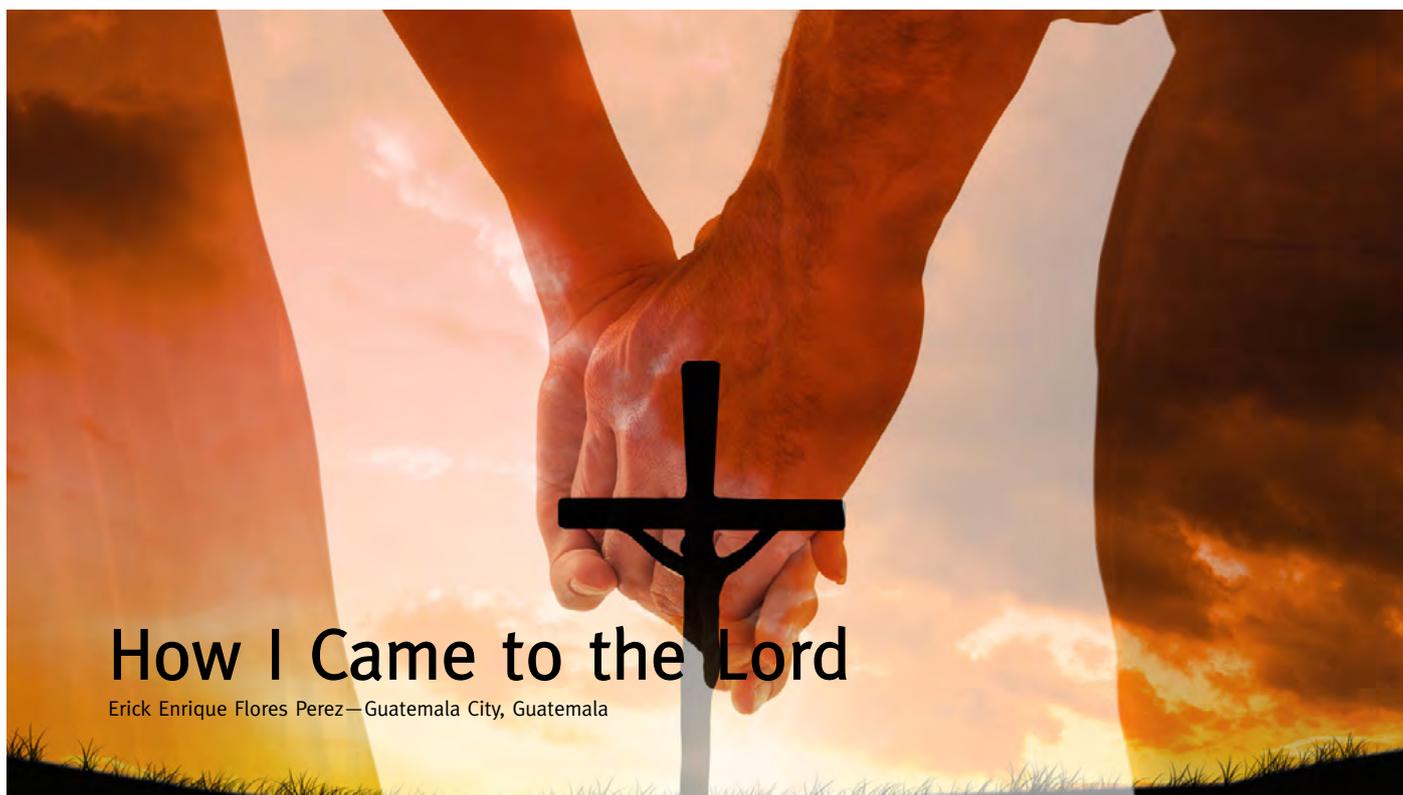
CONCLUSION

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. (Hos 4:6)

Throughout history, the Israelites often turned to idolatry because of a lack of knowledge. Having forgotten the law of God, they carried out deeds that were displeasing to Him. Even the sacrifices they offered to God were blemished. For this reason, God punished them until they repented. We should take heed from history.

Through the grace and mercy of God, we have come to know the truth, and God has poured out His Holy Spirit upon us. We should therefore offer up daily prayers, build up the church, and live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. Then we will receive God’s blessings and peace; and He will abide with us and grant us the promise of eternal life. ★





How I Came to the Lord

Erick Enrique Flores Perez—Guatemala City, Guatemala

GROWING UP IN GUATEMALA

From Catholicism to Protestantism

Protestant Christianity arrived in Guatemala at the end of the 1970s. It was a breath of fresh air after many years of government restrictions and alliance to the Roman Catholic Church. By the 1980s, the Pentecostal movement had experienced a massive boom in the number of its churches and members. These churches' teachings were mainly influenced by their US counterparts. Most of us were fed the prosperity gospel—the doctrine which asserts that God will bless us with health, wealth, and success, if we proclaim our faith in Him—something that appeared to be the right weapon to help Guatemalans battle extreme poverty.

In 1990, when I was eighteen, I converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. Eight years after my conversion, I thought I knew everything there was to know about God, Christianity, and the church. It also seemed that God loved me so much He was willing to satisfy any desire of mine.

At that time, I remember feeling very annoyed by the social divides

“I was also struggling with sin. I battled an inclination towards pornography, suicidal thoughts, deep depression, and hate.”

I observed, and the church's corresponding helplessness or inaction. I felt that there was a distinct dichotomy between what was taught in church and what was applied to help society. For example, the inside of the church was always beautiful, nice, and clean. But once we stepped outside the church, into the neighborhood or surrounding areas, there was a plethora of social and spiritual problems—drugs, street kids, pornography, sexual abuse, and violence against women.

Struggling With Sin, Learning to Serve

Personally, I was also struggling with sin. I battled an inclination towards pornography, suicidal thoughts, deep depression, and hate. I often wondered whether I would ever be good enough to be accepted by the Lord. Could I really free my life from sin? The Catholics of my childhood and the Pentecostal Christians both told me the same two principles:

first, faith is not about thinking, but only believing what the priest/pastor says; and second, “We the Catholic/Pentecostal Church is the only true church, and there is no other way to reach heaven except through our institution.”

In the latter part of 1998, I stumbled across the Guatemala City garbage dump. I was horrified to discover that many families lived there amidst the rubbish: young children, elders, single mothers, all rummaging through the rubbish for scraps of food, for survival. I never imagined humans could live like that; I had grown up in poverty but never to the extreme I saw that day.

On the same day, I met some Christians working with the garbage dump community. As they needed more volunteers, I joined them. For the next five years, I volunteered on weekends. After that, I worked for an additional year as a paid full-time staff at the NGO running the project.

Our work was focused on children

and teenagers. But these were no ordinary teens. Most of them had undergone all the traumas that a hostile environment could hurl at them: violence, sexual abuse, lack of a father, addiction to substances, etc. Working with these youths was a formidable challenge. It was then I realized that perhaps God had allowed me to experience the same issues while growing up as a way to prepare my heart to understand and have compassion towards others.

Later, I joined forces with a friend to open a shelter for a group of twenty-five children who used to gather near the garbage dump and were addicted to glue sniffing. This house operated for just six months. It was not as easy as we thought it would be to change someone else's life by getting him or her to read the Bible, sing hymns, and pray. We needed more help and training. There were spiritual forces at work, and things beyond our understanding. The children had to undergo detoxification processes, but we lacked the know-how. This was when I was first learning how to serve others.

I too wanted to have a share in such blessings of material wealth. However, I could not help feeling that the fundamental basis of the prosperity gospel did not match with the experiences of those found in the Bible.

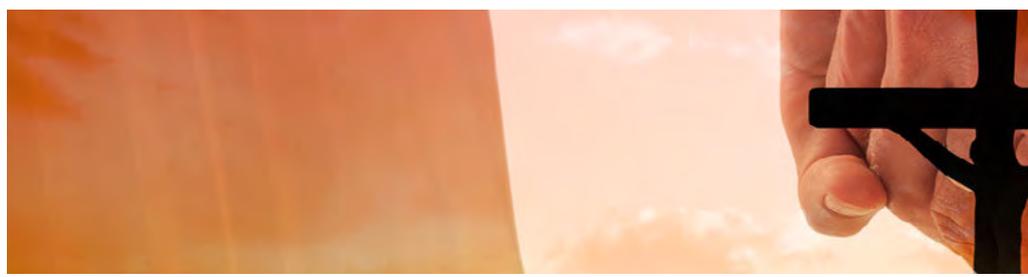
FROM GUATEMALA TO TAIWAN

New Life, New Challenges

In 2004, a friend of mine, an ex-volunteer in the garbage dump program, recommended me as a candidate for the Taiwanese Foreign Affairs Scholarship Program. I did not expect to be selected, but God had a different plan and He worked through my friend's influence with the Taiwanese diplomatic bodies and government. I was granted that scholarship. We ran the shelter right up to two days before my departure.

Taipei

I did not have an exact image of what to expect when I got to Taiwan. But



nothing would have prepared me for that modern and rich metropolis. I had to attend language school to get my Mandarin up to speed. I really felt out of place because my classmates were the children of high-level Taiwanese diplomats and government officials, but I tried to just get on with my Mandarin lessons.

I attended a church in Taipei, the Ling Liang (Bread of Life) Church, which had a very large congregation. The worship atmosphere was very similar to churches in Guatemala—throbbing music, flashing lights, shouting, dancing, and exciting messages about how to become wealthy, prosperous, and successful in life.

My time in Taipei caused a crisis of faith for me. In Taipei Ling Liang Church, I felt that my value as an

individual was related to my economic status. Overwhelmed by life in Taipei, I moved to the countryside as an attempt to cope with life. I enrolled in Chung Cheng University, at the College of Social Sciences in the Political Science Department in Minghsiung, Chiayi, Taiwan.

Minghsiung

I started attending Sunday services at the Minghsiung branch of Ling Liang (Bread of Life) Church. Before long, I started feeling uncomfortable about some of the church's teachings and practices. First, the church leaders ate dishes prepared with blood (e.g., *xie gao*—glutinous rice and pigs' blood). Second, some members (as well

as some of the leaders) continued to worship idols in the temple and participated in ancestor worship rites at the request of their non-Christian parents. When I questioned them, they would give me the stock answer: "All these non-Christian practices are acceptable since we are now under grace and not the Old Testament Law."

This left me quite puzzled. These Christians and Christian leaders had been richly blessed economically. According to the prosperity gospel, this proved that God is abiding with them. But their practices went against His teachings. Why would God bless us if we do the things that He has forbidden? Specifically, if we can eat blood "under grace," would we then need to keep the other commandments Jesus gave?

To be honest, I too wanted to have a share in such blessings of material wealth. However, I could not help feeling that the fundamental basis of the prosperity gospel did not match with the experiences of those found in the Bible. For example, the apostles all led simple lives; they were not focused on realizing their dreams or getting rich. Hence, all this time, I kept feeling that there was something wrong with me and my faith. It seemed that I had never been able to please God.

It was a tough time. I was very lonely. I prayed and asked Jesus to give me a wife, but I did not set any conditions for my ideal woman. I told the Lord I would yield to His will.

About two months later, I met the girl who would become my wife, Lee Pei Pei. She was a twenty-four-year-old Chinese Malaysian, and a first-year student at the Political Science department where I was finishing my third year. It was love at first



sight for me. Her cheerful, down-to-earth and happy outlook on life brought me great joy. I knew she was the one I would marry. We started living together, with the intention of marriage. But before we could get our marriage registered, she got pregnant. We were terrified, so we decided to have an abortion. I never thought I would be able to take such a step. I knew this was the consequence of doing things our own way instead of God's way. Six months after we first met, on May 29, 2010, we registered our marriage in Taiwan and had our wedding ceremony in the Ling Liang Church in Minghsung, Chiayi.

Encountering the True Jesus Church

Getting married did not cleanse us from our sin of fornication. Nor was it a panacea for all our past issues concerning our differences in faith, culture, language, and values. On the very night of our wedding, as past offences emerged, we fought, yelled and even talked about divorce! The following days brought no resolution. As days went by, things became even more aggressive and violent. I started slamming doors and hitting walls; she was leaving home for hours without telling anybody her whereabouts.

We knew from the start that we needed urgent help to repair the sinking boat of our marriage. Our church leaders could not offer this because they too had marriage problems. We started to look for other churches that could give us some spiritual support, and point the way towards healing and restoration. We spent almost three months searching. We attended service after service, but found no peace. I told my wife we might even have to leave Taiwan in order to find a church where we could

find real peace.

Then one morning, I recalled that during my first year in Chung Cheng University, when I was not able to understand any Mandarin or local Taiwanese, I had attended a Sabbath service at the True Jesus Church (TJC) in Minghsung. This first visit to the TJC had come about because of the perseverance of a servant of the Lord.

This particular member of the TJC collected used cans to recycle for a living. We met each other every morning—I would be jogging and he would be pushing his old bicycle on his collection rounds. He would call out the same thing to me in Taiwanese every morning. Since I did not understand, I did not respond to him until, one day, a Taiwanese friend interpreted his morning greeting for me. My can-collecting friend had been telling me, “You have to go to church. You ought to go to church.” He was not going to give up inviting me to his church, so I finally agreed to go. Because no English was spoken during the service, I understood almost nothing and thus decided not to return. I then completely forgot the whole incident.

Revisiting the True Jesus Church

Four years later, and desperate to find a church that could be a source of



Bro. Erick and Sis. Pei Pei during their wedding.

healing for my marriage, that first visit to the TJC suddenly came to mind. My wife agreed to attend the Sabbath service at the TJC. By this time I was able to understand Mandarin and some Taiwanese. On that visit, I felt as if I had come home. I just loved it. I felt peace and knew that God would take care of everything.

Within six months of attending services, my wife received the precious Holy Spirit. Both of us received water baptism on May 1, 2011. After I was baptized in the name of Jesus, in living water, I felt different. Words cannot adequately describe it, but I somehow felt imbued with power to overcome sin in my life. A long and secret addiction to pornography, and the shame it produced, came to an end. I knew, too, that God forgave me for the abortion, even though the healing of our marriage still had some way to go. I started praying earnestly to receive the Holy Spirit.

Previously, when Pei Pei first attended Ling Liang Church and noticed the lack of good role models, she wondered why I insisted she convert to Christianity. What is the difference between being Buddhist and Christian? Why be a Christian if our behavior is no different from non-Christians? After we came to the TJC we learned that if our faith is based on people, we may fall away one day. We had to turn our eyes away from man and towards God.

More importantly, our search led us to God's truth. Isaiah 58:13–14 teaches that the church of God ought to keep the Sabbath. I also knew that in the Acts of the Apostles, the believers kept the Sabbath on Saturday, not on Sunday, which is the Catholic Church's holy day based on their teaching of the Lord's Day. Even before coming to the TJC, we had decided, as a couple, to keep the Sabbath day. In the TJC, a church that observes the Holy Sabbath, we found a confirmation of our beliefs.

When we started attending Sabbath services in the TJC, we thought we knew all about God and salvation. However, teachings from our previous church that we thought were from God turned out to be non-

biblical. For example, it is wrong to think (and teach) that believers can influence God's hand through their actions. Famous pastors from mega churches teach that giving money to the church is like planting the seed for God to give us returns and blessings. These pastors say that by giving, we are producing and creating faith, and God will then move for us. Thank God for leading us to the truth.

FROM MINGHSIUNG TO TAIPEI

Life as a TJC believer

After graduating from university, I found a job at Taiwan International Radio, so we moved to Taipei. After I started working, I hardly had any free time. I really enjoyed my job, so I would work from early in the morning to late at night. Because of this, I read the Bible less and prayed less. My conversations with my wife were reduced to wishing her goodnight.

My church life suffered too. I would attend Sabbath services, but my intention was to rest and catch up on my sleep! I slept through the sermon and prayers, only to wake up when I heard the phrase, "This concludes our service today." I was physically exhausted and my relationship with my wife was also showing clear signs of fatigue.

Desperate to find a church that could be a source of healing for my marriage, that first visit to the TJC suddenly came to mind.

Things came to a head during a spiritual convocation in Muzha, Taipei. A Holy Communion service had been scheduled, so members were encouraged to prepare their hearts before attending. But I did not fully appreciate the deep significance of the sacrament and so I did not treat it as important. Besides that, I had become complacent about my spiritual cultivation and pursuing God's love and will. On the morning of the Holy Communion service, I told my wife to leave first, promising to follow twenty minutes later. An hour and a half later, my wife called and



woke me up. "Didn't you say you were coming to church? Why aren't you here?" We started to argue and I finally retorted, "Why don't you go by yourself?" I bluntly told her I would not attend service unless I had a proper rest.

On that very day, my wife took her passport and some of her things, and left home without saying a word. Later, she rang me from the airport, saying that she was going home to stay with her mother in Malaysia. I was very angry, and told her, "Fine, if you want to leave, don't ever come back." I thought my threat would make her change her mind and stay, but instead, she hung up on me.

That night, the realization that my wife was really gone hit me. I also realized that I had a lot of physical complaints because I was overworked. Worst of all, I realized that I had drawn so far away from God, from my Father in heaven, that I could not

bring myself to pray to Him.

Several nights later, in my stubbornness, I thought: *Look at me. My body is ill; I have ulcers and intestinal bleeding. It's all my wife's fault. Maybe I should just divorce her and find somebody else to marry—I'll be much happier.* I was trying to comfort myself. Indeed, I started to cheer up because I thought a fresh new start was exactly what I needed.

Happily, I returned to my room and I slept very well. But at 3 a.m., I heard a stern voice say, "Erick, Erick." I immediately recognized the voice of the Lord Jesus. No one had to tell me

who it was because the voice carried so much power and authority. It was neither a dream nor a vision; the voice sounded as if it had been amplified by a huge speaker in my room.

As soon as I heard that voice, I replied, "Lord Jesus, You know how much I love you." But He cut me off and said, "Why have you drawn farther and farther away from Me?" He called me again, "Erick." I wanted to say again, "Lord, You know I love you." But He just kept asking me, "Why did you leave me?"

He did not say anything else, but I understood. There are no excuses in front of the Lord. I had no evidence to show I really loved Him. If I could not love my wife whom I could touch and see, how could I love the invisible God whom I could neither touch nor see?

When this realization hit me, my body started to shiver uncontrollably. I wept and wept. I then knelt down to repent and confess my sins before the Lord, and ask Him to forgive my sins. After the prayer, I contacted my wife, and told her how sorry I was. I asked her to forgive me and come home. All these things happened at the end of 2011.

After Pei Pei's return, a preacher came on a pastoral visit to our home. We shared our problems with him. The preacher then asked me, "Would you like to place all your questions and burdens into the hands of the Lord? If you are willing to trust Him, Erick, you have to prepare your heart, because you're asking the Lord to come into your life to fix things." I told the preacher I was willing, so we all knelt down together to pray.

The preacher visited on a Sunday afternoon. On Monday morning, when I went to work, my boss called me into his office and fired



me. While I could see the hand of God in this, I did think that He had been quite harsh to take away a job I enjoyed. Nevertheless, it meant that I had more time to read the Bible and attend church services. Importantly, I no longer fell asleep at church.

“As soon as I heard that voice, I replied, “Lord Jesus, You know how much I love you.” But He cut me off and said, “Why have you drawn farther and farther away from Me?” ... If I could not love my wife whom I could touch and see, how could I love the invisible God whom I could neither touch nor see?”

In retrospect, I recognize God's wonderful grace and will towards my family. I started to draw nearer to God through reading the Bible, praying, and attending church services. Praying with my wife also brought us closer again. From that time onward, I never slammed the door or punched the wall again. While I still occasionally lose my temper, I quickly apologize to my wife because I always remember the voice that spoke to me. The voice had been so powerful, and so angry, that I did not ever want to hear it again. However, since I have the tendency to immerse myself in my work, Pei Pei insisted that we leave Taipei for a change of environment.

We left Taipei at the beginning of November 2011, returned to Guatemala, and stayed with my mother for a while. About a year later, we travelled to the US and attended church in Irvine. Our baby girl came to this world and our lives were blessed with her shining joy. We travelled to many other places, and spent a significant amount of time at my mother-in-law's home in Kuching, Sarawak, in East Malaysia. God blessed us with our baby boy in

January 2015.

Currently, we are still praying about our future, asking God to help us find a place to establish ourselves. We also pray that He continues to guide us through the process

Lessons in Marriage

Looking back, it is clear that the Lord had a plan for us: the start of our marriage was the start of our journey of faith.

Even after we were baptized into the TJC, our marriage problems were not solved immediately. We still had conflicts, but we learned to read the Bible for ourselves and to turn to it to tackle our problems. We also learned to talk and communicate a lot more to avoid misunderstanding each other, since that is how a lot of our arguments came about.

In the past we would look for man to help us. But we have since learned to seek God instead. This was why we needed, and continue to need, a church where God abides. In the process of learning to rely on God, the Holy Spirit really gives us strength.

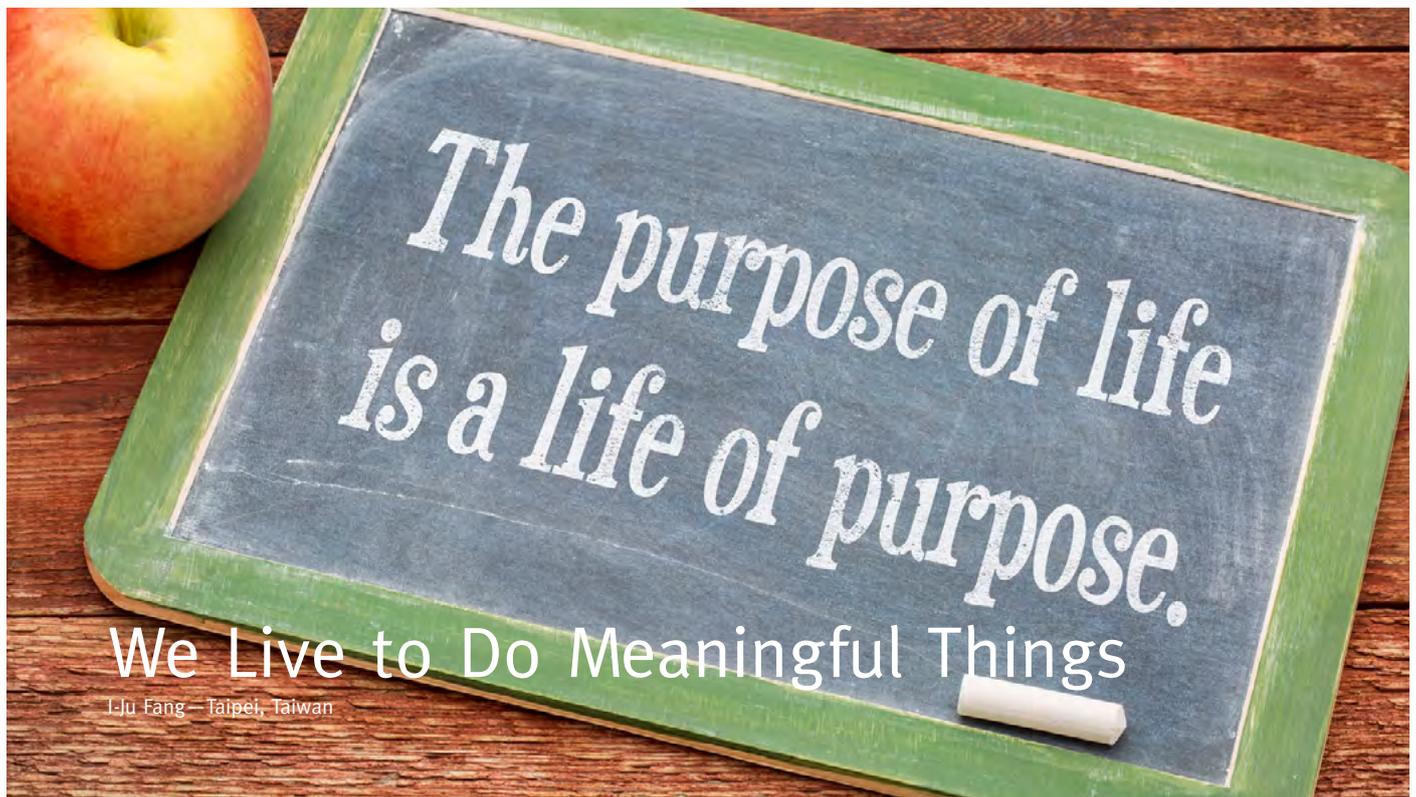
As humans, Pei Pei and I still fight. But these quarrels are nothing compared to our previous arguments. Now, we always manage to find a solution. We may get angry for a few minutes, but we quickly reconcile. Even if we do not want to make up, we know we have to, otherwise we would be playing into Satan's hand.

Satan tries to sow seeds of discontent in every family and every relationship, especially those of God's children. He tries to breed disappointment, jealousy, and mistrust in us. We cannot give him a place to work in our hearts. In a married life based on biblical truth, we must learn to sacrifice and be humble.

Most importantly, we thank God that we have learned to rely on God in our marriage. We are always reminded of this:

“But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

(Mk 10:6–8) ★



We Live to Do Meaningful Things

I-Ju Fang — Taipei, Taiwan

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..."
(Jn 15:16)

Every believer in the true church has been chosen by God, and His will for us is to manifest His image and bear fruit for His glory. I would like to share with you my journey of faith, and how I came to have a deeper understanding of God through my experiences in life and my service to Him.

EARLY YEARS IN TAIWAN

I was baptized into the True Jesus Church together with my mother when I was young. I grew up in the church, attending Religious Education (RE) classes and enjoying church life. However, my father was not a believer and would sometimes object to our participation in church activities. I always wished that he would accept Christ, but he stubbornly refused even to set foot in church.

The years passed, and I graduated from a local university and started my career as a full-time junior high school teacher, teaching music. As music was not generally considered to be a

core subject, my students usually did not pay attention in class. I would sometimes think: *Do I have to teach like this for the next twenty-five years?* I began contemplating going overseas to further my education. However, I was worried about my proficiency in English and whether I would be accepted by any university.

When I shared my aspiration with a church sister, she encouraged me to fast and pray. I decided to take her advice. Despite initial apprehension that fasting would impact on my ability to teach, I found that it did not. In fact, fasting prayer proved to be very effective.

STUDIES IN THE US

By God's grace, my application to the American University in Washington DC was accepted. With this, the next stage of my life began. But the

timing was not ideal. Asia was facing a financial crisis, and my tuition fees increased by thirty per cent in a matter of months. Adjusting to a new life in the US, while shouldering the financial burden, became disheartening. One day, while travelling to attend church services in Philadelphia, a three-hour bus ride away, I thought to myself: *Didn't I fast and pray? Why am I facing so many obstacles? What does God want me to do?*

That Sabbath service revived my faith. But on the journey home, it dawned on me that I would still have to confront the obstacles. I thought of how I had always lived at home with my family in Taiwan; this was the first time I was living away from home. As I was thinking of this, some birds flying onto a tree caught my eyes, and Matthew 6, where Jesus tells us not to worry, came to mind.

"Adjusting to a new life in the US, while shouldering the financial burden, became disheartening. ... I thought to myself: Didn't I fast and pray? Why am I facing so many obstacles? What does God want me to do?"

I thought, if God could prepare food for the birds, would He not care for His most precious creation—man?

I was reminded that we need to seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, and He will take care of our needs in life. God opened my heart to understand that there was a reason for me to study abroad, and that I might be able to do something for Him. In the midst of difficulties, God gave me the strength and motivation to study. Indeed, two years later, I completed my tertiary education abroad and returned to Taiwan.

WORKING IN TAIWAN

In Taiwan, I became involved in a number of church duties: I served in the RE and music departments, was involved in college fellowship evangelism, and assisted in the church website, as part of literary ministry. However, I still asked myself: *What can I do for God?* At this time, I was looking for a job, and my criteria was that I must be able to keep the Sabbath and continue my church work. With this in mind, I prayed to God for guidance.

I found my first job as an administrator in a music graduate school. Two years later, in 2003, with God's help, I was appointed as a professor. That same year, I also served as a counselor and a hymnal leader in a college students' spiritual convocation for the first time. During the convocation, I prayed that God would add to my faith and my strength so that I could balance my work and church duties. On the last day, during the prayer following Holy Communion, I heard a voice saying, "No matter what happens, it is from God. He will guide you."

MY FATHER'S LONG JOURNEY

On my way home that day, I received a call: my parents had been involved in an accident. Shocked by the news, I prayed all the way home. As I was praying, the earlier prayer came to mind: *All of this is from God.* I was comforted.

When I reached the hospital, I discovered that my father had

sustained serious injuries to his right leg after his motorbike was hit by a car. The doctor suggested an amputation, but my father refused. My mother's injuries were not as serious.

As part of his recovery journey, my father was treated at six different hospitals. He needed skin and tissue grafts, and his leg bone was severely fractured. Sometimes the grafts failed, and the doctors had to repeat the procedures. For two years, the hospital became our second home. Nevertheless, God granted us peace throughout this period.

Many brothers and sisters in Christ prayed for us, and often they would ask if they could visit us in the hospital. However, my father would decline. But still, God continued to guide us. During one occasion, when we were praying quietly for my father, he suddenly opened his eyes and said, "Thank you for praying for me."

One morning in 2008 ... my father suddenly asked me, "What do you do in church?" I did not know how to answer him at first. Then I explained that we go to church to observe the Sabbath and to listen to sermons. He said, "I want to go with you."

I took the opportunity to ask him whether he would pray with us. He agreed, although I felt that he was doing so just to please us. He could not accept praying in tongues as he was convinced it was contrived. For this reason, we would pray with him each day in words.

During this time, as I read the Bible daily, I would think how best to pray with my father. I thought of the message in the book of James, that we may have many plans but we do not know what will happen tomorrow. It made me appreciate that if God wills, we can do this or that, but if He does not will, we plan in vain (Jas 4:13–14).

Over time, my concern was not so much over my father's physical recovery, but rather that he should come to believe in Jesus Christ.

By God's grace, two years after the accident, my father's condition

improved sufficiently for him to be discharged from hospital.

One morning in 2008, five years after the accident, my father suddenly asked me, "What do you do in church?" I did not know how to answer him at first. Then I explained that we go to church to observe the Sabbath and to listen to sermons. He said, "I want to go with you." When I heard this, I did not know what to say as it came as a complete surprise. All I could do was to go into a room to offer a prayer of thanksgiving.

From that week, my father started attending Sabbath services. At first, he refused to listen to testimonies or to pray. After listening to sermons, he would sometimes criticize the speakers. On my part, I would turn to the Bible to try to find answers to his questions.

God is wonderful, and the way He calls everyone is different. Although

my father objected to certain aspects of the church services, he liked to read the Bible. I gave him a Bible when he was hospitalized, and he finished reading it within two months. When I took a look inside, I could see he had underlined many parts. Amazingly, God enabled him to remember the things he read.

"WE LIVE TO DO MEANINGFUL THINGS"

In the summer of 2009, the International Assembly was recruiting students for the full-time Theological Training Program (TTP). It coincided with a time in my life when I was asking myself: *What is the meaning of life?*

The TTP was open to both brothers and sisters. On my part, I would need parental consent in order to apply. My mum told me that she had no opinion

“The TTP was open to both brothers and sisters. On my part, I would need parental consent in order to apply. My mum told me that she had no opinion about the matter, and so I asked my father. After hearing my request, he simply replied: “We live to do meaningful things.””

about the matter, and so I asked my father. After hearing my request, he simply replied: “We live to do meaningful things.”

In September 2009, my father registered for baptism. One church board member approached my mother and me excitedly, saying, “You have prayed so hard for your father and have been encouraging him, and now he’s applied to be baptized!” My mum and I looked at each other. Neither of us had even dared to raise the issue; it was God who had inspired my father.

Two weeks before his baptism, my father received the Holy Spirit. I was thankful to God for this, as my father’s leg injury meant that he could not kneel down to pray. After my father’s baptism, I felt as if my burdens had been lifted. After twenty-five years, it had finally happened! I always thought it would happen eventually—but maybe at the end of his life. God gave us this gift much sooner.

In March 2012, after some administrative issues had been settled, I took the TTP test and passed. After joining the program in the fall of that year, I was able to spend time in prayer, emptying myself and removing the sense of achievement that came from past service to God. It was also during this time that I encountered many trials. However, it was on account of these storms of life that God taught me to rely on Him. Each time I encountered a difficulty, God would reassure me that His grace was sufficient, and that there were brethren praying for me. I would learn something new each day.

Since we belong to God, we need to serve God and put Him first. Although everyone serves in different ways, be it full-time or part-time, the

main thing is that we must endure to the end. We should believe that God will provide for our daily needs, and that He cares for us and listens to our prayers. Regardless of what we may encounter, we can be like Paul who was able to rejoice greatly. Although we may face difficulties, we know that God will open a way for us. We can rely on the strength that He gives us.

When I first started my TTP training, many brethren would ask me, “What will you do after you graduate? Are you going to be a preacher? What are your plans for marriage? What about your career?”

Their questions made me reflect on the reasons for joining the TTP. A sister asked me whether God’s calling was clear. In truth, I did not hear a voice telling me what to do. I only know that, with all the mercies that God has bestowed on me, it would certainly be wrong not to repay Him. We must grasp every opportunity to do something that is meaningful in life. ★





Our Churches in Central and South America

Central and South American Coordination Center

INTRODUCTION

Central and South America is a vast region that comprises thirty-two different countries and many small offshore islands.

The main languages in this region include Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, Dutch and the American Indian languages. Spanish is widely spoken amongst most of these nations, except for Brazil where Portuguese is spoken, French Guiana where French is spoken, Suriname where Dutch is spoken, and Belize and the Caribbean where English is spoken. In addition, the American Indians speak their own dialects. There are over 1700 dialects, with Nahuatl, Mayan, Quechua, Guarani and Aymara being the most dominant.

THE EARLY YEARS

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, True Jesus Church (TJC) members, primarily from Taiwan, emigrated to Central and South America. To preserve their faith, these brethren held family services. Gradually, under the guidance of the International Assembly (IA), the Taiwan General Assembly and U.S. General Assembly (USGA) the gospel seed began to



germinate and to grow in more places in this vast region.

On May 9, 1992, the Central and South American Coordination Center (CSACC) was established, with the objectives of enhancing pastoral care in the region and strengthening communication among the various places of worship.



The Lord continues to work, and from a humble beginning of gathering for family services, our brethren now have their own church buildings which can be used for evangelism, pastoral work, and training.

Pastoral and evangelistic work in this region is primarily supported by the USGA. The IA also supports the work by regularly sending preachers to pastor the flock in this region.

A SUMMARY

The situation of the churches in Central and South America as of December 31, 2015:

Country (City)	No. of churches	No. of prayer houses	Points of worship	No. of believers	No. of preachers	No. of ministers	No. of RE teachers	No. of RE students
Dominican Republic		1		21				
Guatemala				4				
Ecuador				26				
Bolivia			1	9				
Brazil (São Paulo)		1		32			5	7
Brazil (Foz do Iguaçu)		1		18				
Chile		1		31	1			
Argentina	1			550		3	16	40
Total	1	4	1	691	1	3	21	47

Source: CSACC, 2015

CARRIBEAN

Dominican Republic

The first seed of the True Jesus Church in the Dominican Republic was a Taiwanese family who emigrated there in 1984 to start a business. They did not forget their commission and they started proactively preaching the gospel. Initially, the service was held in an office of their factory. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers gradually increased. In 1997, USGA officially took over the pastoral work in Dominican Republic. In 2002, a wooden house was purchased to be a place of worship in San Petro. In 2014, the USGA decided to dismantle the wooden building and reconstructed a cement building, thus providing better facilities for holding services, promoting the holy work and training. The new church building was completed in September 2015 and will be dedicated on July 16, 2016. It is a two storey building, with a chapel, a kitchen, and two offices on the first level and a preacher room and RE classrooms on the second level. Currently, there are twenty-one believers, mostly local Dominicans.

SOUTH AMERICA

Brazil

In 1982, the seed of the gospel reached Brazil. By God's grace, the first prayer house (located in São Paulo) was officially established on February 6, 1993.



The new church building in San Petro.



Children at the San Petro church.



CHALLENGES

The region of Central and South America stretches over a vast area and is home to a multitude of cultures and languages. At present, there are still many parts of this region where the gospel has yet to reach, and the diversity of languages is a major challenge to the evangelistic efforts in this region. In these end days, we pray that our Father in heaven will continue to bestow His grace, to preserve and guide us, so that we can establish His name in this vast continent of ours. May all glory and praises be unto the name of the Lord forever! ★

São Paulo Prayer House

Our believers at the São Paulo prayer house are mostly local Brazilians. In the early days when workers were lacking, one could clearly witness how our Father in heaven guided and preserved these believers' faith. At present, the IA sends workers to carry out visiting and pastoral work four times a year.



Members at São Paulo Prayer House.

Foz do Iguaçu Point of Worship

The Foz do Iguaçu point of worship, attended mostly by believers of Chinese descent, is located at the intersecting border of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.



Foz do Iguaçu Point of Worship.

Argentina

Under the guidance of God, the Argentina church, located in the capital city of Buenos Aires, has come a long way: from the early days in the early 1980s when a few believing families gathered for home service once a month, to the present congregation of over five hundred, with weekly Sabbath worship, and well-structured RE system, conducted in a grand and majestic church building.

Over the past thirty years, one can truly witness the gracious Lord's support for the church in Buenos Aires.



Argentina Church

Chile

There is at present a full-time preacher stationed in the Chile prayer house. He also takes care of pastoral work in neighboring Ecuador and Bolivia.



Members at Chile Prayer House.

Ecuador

Our brethren in Ecuador reside in the four cities of Quito, Santo Domingo, Trucan and Guayagui. The members are cared for by the IA workers who visit four times a year.

Bolivia

There is a service meeting point in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and to pastor these handful of believers who are mostly immigrants from Taiwan, the IA sends workers to carry out pastoral work four times annually.



Breaking Through the Barriers of Preaching the Gospel

Based on a sermon by Jung-Yu Ho—Chang Xing, Taiwan

In one of his final epistles, Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to preach in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2). Our Lord Jesus also encourages us with His actions during His ministry. Whether through a simple breaking of bread or to stop in the middle of a crowd to ask, "who touched me," He consistently taught and preached to His audience, thus leaving behind an important legacy: to be always ready to preach at any time and in any place.

Mark 2 records one such healing and teaching event. A crowd had gathered in a particular house to hear Jesus. The place was so packed that no one could enter, let alone a paralytic lying on a bed. Nevertheless, his four friends took it upon themselves to help this man reach Jesus. They carried him, on his bed, to the roof of the house and lowered him to Jesus.

If we associate this incident with evangelism, we can say that the paralytic had to overcome a number of obstacles before he could reach Jesus. These obstacles, or barriers, come in various forms, from physical obstruction like the crowd or the roof that hindered his passage to Christ, to verbal criticisms of Jesus by the scribes

who could hinder the faith of those listening to Him.

In their own ways, the different characters from this story, from the owner of the house to the scribes seated before Jesus, can represent examples in preaching, from the negatives—the obstacles or barriers to evangelism—to the positives—breaking through barriers.

BARRIERS

First, let us look at barriers that were created: the crowd, the scribes, and possibly, even the paralytic himself.

The Crowd

The crowd had gathered, as a natural response to what they might have heard regarding the miracles performed by Jesus. At a time before any live media coverage, anyone who wanted to see Jesus had to approach Him in person. While it might seem good that many had come to see Jesus, Mark 2:4 records that these people had become a hindrance because the paralytic and the four men carrying him "could not come near [Jesus] because of the crowd." This suggests that this crowd stopped short of coming to seek Jesus as the paralytic

had. Although it is commendable that they wanted to see Jesus, their action was not what Jesus wanted; they were just curious and wanted to witness a sensational event; they did not have any intention of believing in Him. This does not align with what the Lord wants from those who seek Him: to believe in Him and acknowledge their need for Him.

Moreover, the crowd was in the same house as Jesus, and in a way, we could associate the house and the crowd, metaphorically, to the church. Such a reading brings two things to mind. If a church congregation is not united in its efforts to seek Jesus and worse, fail to allow others to seek Him, the church will tragically become a barrier to those who need Jesus. The crowd, too, can also be likened to a church congregation with members who do not exhibit exemplary behaviors and do not lead Christ-like lives; instead of shining for Christ in the way they live their lives, their conduct becomes a barrier to evangelism, putting off those who may wish to reach out to Jesus.

The Scribes

This is the second group that hinders



the preaching efforts: the scribes who were seated before Jesus in the house. Despite being placed in the best seat to listen to the words of Jesus, these scribes challenged the message: “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Lk 5:21) They failed to make good use of their prime position to maximize their learning; instead, they remained ignorant and did not believe.

The group of scribes can be likened to some “long-timers” in church who have listened to many sermons but are concerned only with the sermon speakers’ presentation style and with the quality of sermons. Worse, they focus their attention on finding faults with what they hear. They do not allow the word of God to reach their hearts and transform their way of life.

The Paralytic Man

The third character who is a barrier to preaching, some might say rather controversially, is the paralytic himself. In this reading, let us step away from taking the man as someone in need of Jesus and instead, take him as someone who is already a member of the church. In the house of God, being a paralytic would mean that we are not only unable to help others or bring others to church, we need others to help us.

The paralytic needed four men to bring him to Jesus. This translates into effort and manpower resources. In church, if members are weak and need others’ support, then the church resources will be spent taking care of them.

If the paralytic could get up, walk, and work, then the efforts of his four friends could be utilized elsewhere. From the perspective of the church, if every member is healthy and fit, church resources can be channeled to outreach work: preaching the gospel and saving souls.

Hence as members of the church of God, we have to ask ourselves: are we like a paralytic who requires constant care and attention from others? Or are we like the four men who were able to work together to serve God and bring others to His house?

“Are we like a paralytic who requires constant care and attention from others? Or are we like the four men who were able to work together to serve God and bring others to His house?”

CHANNELS

Characters who overcome barriers to achieve their goals are the owner of the house and the four men.

The Owner

The owner gives us a positive example of breaking through barriers to provide a channel to the preaching work. This unnamed owner of the house supported the work of evangelism by offering his house to Jesus, thus providing a venue for others to gather and for Jesus to preach to them. The owner demonstrated his love when he allowed the four men to tamper with the roof of his house in order to lower the paralytic before Jesus. This house owner therefore presents to us a good example of someone who is willing to make sacrifices in his service for Jesus.

The Bible records many similar examples of such self-sacrifice for us to emulate. One such case is the couple Aquila and Priscilla, who similarly offered their house as a venue for the church to gather.

Even though the owner did not personally carry the paralytic to Jesus, he still offered a precious service by opening his home to others to come to know Jesus. His gesture illustrates the many ways available to us to serve God in the work of preaching.

The Four Men

Finally, the four men who carried the paralytic before Jesus can epitomize the ultimate spirit of breaking through the barriers of preaching, by bringing others to Jesus. These four men had to devise a way to get through the barriers—the crowd and the roof—in order to bring the paralytic before the Lord. Yet, despite these challenges, they did not give up. Instead, they persevered and demonstrated their

love for the paralytic. By going the extra mile to help the paralytic, they manifested their faith in Jesus and His power to heal the paralytic.

As God’s workers, we too must have such faith. It is not only those who seek after God who need faith, the workers who help to bring them to church also need faith.

CONCLUSION

From the examples of the characters recorded in the healing of the paralytic, we learn how we might unwittingly become barriers to the preaching work, and how we can break through these barriers and guide those seeking the true path towards Jesus. In short, we should shun the former and emulate the latter—to be faithful workers of Jesus. ★

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: 2500-3000 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: 2500-3000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.
Article length: 2000-2500 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.
Article length: 1500-2000 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 #82:

Topic: Winter

Articles due: October 1, 2016

"You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made summer and winter." (Ps 74:17)

Winter is the period of heaviest rain; hence the rain associated with winter (Ezra 10:9) is known as "geshem", a word referring to violent downpour. The autumn showers that softened the parched ground for sowing now increases into heavy rainfall to allow the crops to grow.

The withholding of rain according to the prophecy of Elijah caused the mountain streams to dry up (1 Kings 17:1- "matar" - generic term for rain, 7 - "geshem"), but God promises that after Messiah is pierced, a steady stream of living water throughout the earth will continue in summer and winter (Zech 14:8).

Winter, therefore, points to God's faithfulness. Just as He continuously provides rain for the crops to grow, God also keeps showering His grace upon us and continuously nourishes us. How have you been nourished by God? How do you see God's faithfulness in your life?

Winter is also a time of waiting. Just as the farmer has to wait for the crops to grow, we need to patiently wait for Jesus' second coming. Sometimes, waiting may seem tedious; at times we may feel that we lack strength to continue our journey of faith. How can we persevere?

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.

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!

True Jesus Church
21217 Bloomfield Ave.
Lakewood, CA 90715 USA

Phone: +1-714-533-8889

Fax: +1-562-402-3190

info@tjc.org

<http://www.tjc.org>

