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Library

ARE
YOU
THIRSTY ?

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EDITORIAL

IN THIS ISSUE we touch on a variety of subjects, one of which is LITERATURE EVANGELISM. It tells us of the value and scope of literature evangelism and how we can contribute to it. Though the world is very much advanced in science and technology – with a touch of a button one can view or listen to telecasts from almost every part of the world – one can still find publications on all subjects and frequencies such as the daily news, weekly or monthly magazines to keep the people informed of what is going on around them. It is through these media that people know more about the world in which they live in.

Literature evangelism in our Church is not new. After it was established in 1917 a magazine was published to urge christians who had deviated from the Truth to return to the Bible. Many who heeded to the message returned to the fold of the Lord.

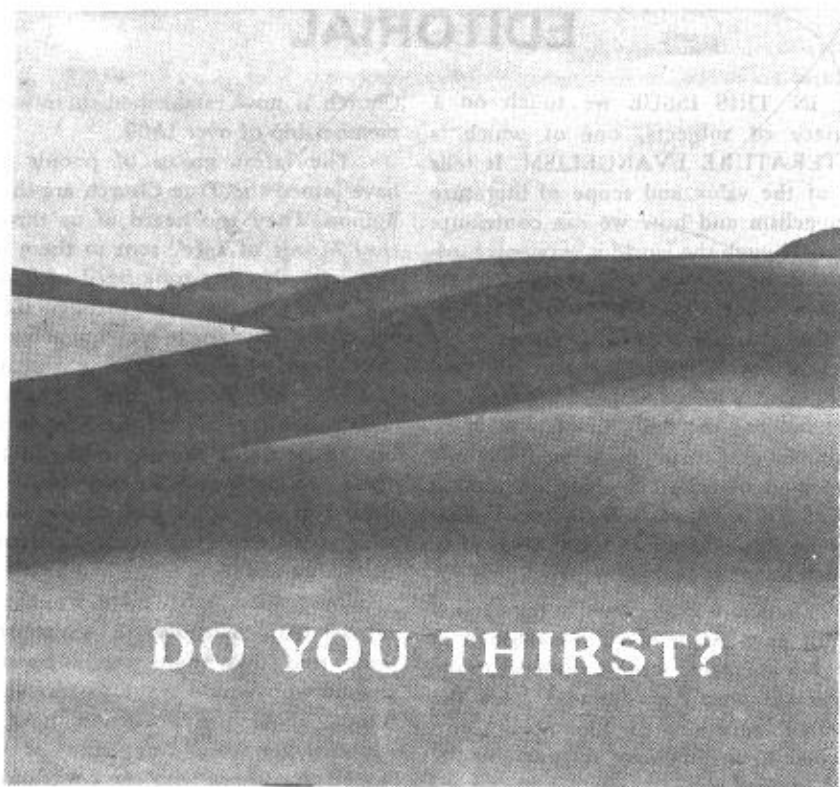
Sabah received the Truth through the "Holy Spirit Times" which was sent by John Voon to his friend there 57 years ago. In the early 1960s the General Assembly in Taiwan attempted to translate booklets introducing our doctrines and basic beliefs into English for distribution to the English speaking members in Southeast Asia, England and North America. The progress of our church in Korea was partly attributed to the support of literature evangelism. Some people in Nigeria also knew about our church through a publication from the General Assembly in Taiwan. The True

Church is now established there with a membership of over 1500.

The latest group of people who have joined the True Church are the Filipinos. They too heard of us through the "Words of Life" sent to them four years ago. No one took heed of it until one young pastor read through it. His thirst for the Truth was quenched by the "Words of Life". Like the woman of Samaria, he brought the "Words of Life" to his relatives and friends who also thirsted for the Truth. So in June 1983, 26 persons who had longed for the Truth that would quench their thirst were satisfied. They were baptised in the name of Jesus.

Evangelists sent there by the International Assembly to assist them were told that there would be more people who would want to receive the Truth. From this we know how important literature evangelism is. It is hoped that those who can contribute in one way or other will come forward and join us to keep this ministry going and the Word flowing to the unreached parts of the world.





To be thirsty is a terrible thing. But the 'thirst' Jesus referred to is not a physical one. On the day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a major religious festival of the Jews, Jesus Christ declared, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."

But why go to Jesus? What is this extraordinary 'thirst' that He alone can quench? It is the 'thirst' within one's heart, a longing in the innermost being. But man himself does not know what he *really* needs.

There is no doubt a pervading sense of dissatisfaction in this generation, despite the luxuries modern living offers. The anti-establishments and the hippies of the 60's, the phenomenal

popularity of Transcendental Meditation and Eastern Occultism in the West, the upsurge of uncontrolled violence, sexual permissiveness, drug addiction and other menaces of society associated with today form but the tip of the iceberg, as it were.

What you see are merely the EFFECTS. The root CAUSE of the PROBLEM is MAN. Man tries to solve the PROBLEM by eliminating the EFFECTS. They fail to see what the PROBLEM is; what man really needs. Throughout history is the woeful tale of man's search for what makes him more than a beast.

Is fame or recognition the answer? Fame cannot satisfy. Solomon, the wisest and most renowned of all kings, considered everything he had, including fame as vanity. Have you ever heard of a man who is contented to live on his fame?

There are those who think that money and material can fully satisfy. But man can never be satisfied with money, no matter how much. The Bible says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance (wealth) with its income," and "the sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much. But the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep" (Eccl 5:10, 12). You may argue that it is what money can get that brings satisfaction, but King Solomon, the wealthiest man in the world confessed:

"Anything I wanted, I took, and did not restrain myself from any joy But as I looked at everything I had tried, it was all so useless, a chasing of the wind, and there was nothing worthwhile anywhere" (Eccl 2:10, 11).

Those who have material abundance realise it is not what they really wanted in life. No wonder Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk 12:15).

To identify this 'thirst', we must go back to the time when it did not exist. We have to pinpoint a particular stage in history when man was completely at ease with nature, totally satisfied with life, and free from anxieties and wants. The Bible tells of this one brief, lovely moment at the dawn of man's history. Animals roamed free across the face of the earth and man was unafraid; the air was fresh and the world was not torn apart by war. There was only love between the man and the woman, and the earth was one big

garden ... They led a healthy and vigorous life. There was no need to fight for a living. Man could talk face to face with his Creator.

Unfortunately, the period of Edenic innocency did not last long. The Creator gave them only one law, but they broke it. From that time on, man had *knowledge*. He wanted to decide for himself what was *good* and what was *evil*. He began to make his own laws, organise his own system of government, and plan his own life apart from God.

God's Law, His way of life, was transgressed and then rejected. The Bible defines 'sin' as the 'transgression of the Law' (I Jn 3:4). And sin is passed on to all men, and has become the root CAUSE of the world's ills. It is not so much what he does as what he is. He is a sinner. And because of that, all the laws he makes restrain his actions but not his nature. One government after another has tried and failed and still no perfect form of government is known. The world leaders today are trying to solve the EFFECTS. They talk about limiting arms but not about eliminating the brutish desire to fight. They can never change man's nature. They are only humans themselves.

Now, the 'thirst' becomes clear. Man was formerly made to enjoy the world. He could choose to obey his Creator or to reject Him. God does not wish to compel obedience. He delights in voluntary submission. His laws were not meant to make our life miserable, but to offer the blueprints of an ideal and happy life in the world.

Unfortunately, the laws of God were rejected and sin rests in all. It seems that man is hopeless, but the Bible says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8), and the redemptive blood of the Lord Jesus has brought us to God (Rom 5:10). Christ sacrificed Himself and bore our sins so that we could be reconciled to God.

You are solving the CAUSE of all human predicaments if you depend on the Lord Jesus who can remove your sin. You must be willing to forsake sin and adopt His way of life. Therefore, acknowledge your sins before God. Rely on Him and believe that by His death on the cross, your sins will be remitted in water baptism. Not until you have put on Christ (Gal 3:27) and received the life of God in you, will your 'thirst' be finally quenched (Jn 7:38, 39).

WHEN ONE SUFFERS...

"Memory is a golden thing that binds us till we meet again. Those that loved him lost so much at his parting but gained so much from his living."

These are the words from a tomb – sincere and meaningful words. At the time when he loved God most, death took him away from us. His wife and his four children have lost his love and care. Everyone seemed to need him a little longer, but why did the Lord call him back?

There was a sister who worked hard for the Lord. She worked alone and silently for the Lord without any complaint or boasting, and her actions often touched me. One day, to our shock and horror, we learned that she had cancer. We could almost feel the pain just by watching her suffer. As time went on, her condition worsened and eventually she passed away. Watching her, many of us began to ask, "Why did she have to die such a painful death?" She had always been faithful to the Lord, and never uttered a complaint against God for bringing her the pain

and sickness. Why did this happen?

The above two instances lead to a common question: "Why did God allow such things to happen?" To answer this question, one must first take into consideration that the cost of being a Christian is to bear the cross of Jesus. Meanwhile, it is important to understand the reasons for sufferings. By explaining why suffering is necessary, this article hopes to help all of us stand firm in the faith, even in the midst of affliction.

God wants to try our hearts

Has there been a time in your life when things went so badly that you wished to leave the world? Why do such things happen?

"I, the Lord, search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of

his doings," answers the Lord.

(Jer. 17:10)

But wouldn't God know the results of our trials ahead of time? The Lord does know how we would do, but He tries our hearts for several reasons:

- 1) God wants to test our hearts and let us know how much we can withstand before we fail. It is only through trials that one may fully understand the extent of his own faith and trust in God.
- 2) He wants to show us the extent of our obedience to Him. Many Christians with apparently strong faith fall when afflictions come. When problems arise, doubt also comes, and the true nature of faith is manifested.
- 3) Afflictions and trials are opportunities for us to prove ourselves to Him. God is just. He rewards only those who have proved themselves worthy of such blessings, and punishes those who deserve it.

It is therefore a privilege to be tried. Regardless of whether we meet with trials or joys, we should remember that these events are ultimately for our own good.

Sufferings prepare us for the better things to come

God is merciful and loving, and does not enjoy seeing His children suffer. However, He wants to make use of these sufferings to prepare us for the blessings which He has promised us.

- 1) Sufferings can be said to be a form of spiritual training which helps to build up faith until we are fully equipped to complete the commission God has set for us.

When we are faced with a series of problems that seem endless, we should remember the encouragement of apostle Paul: "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it" (I Cor 10:13).

- 2) As the Lord is a just God who rewards those who are worthy, sufferings can be one of the means of ensuring that we receive His blessings. If we succeed in the test God has assigned, then we are worthy to receive blessings.

The scriptures have promised that "provided we suffer with Him... we may also be glorified with Him" (Rom 8:17), and "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (II Tim 2:12). Moreover Jesus Himself has said that "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5:10).

- 3) God has continued to shower us with grace and love. Perhaps this is now taken for granted, and we may even think it is God's duty to do so. Through sufferings, we learn to appreciate the goodness of the Lord.

Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Throughout the tribulation, he did not complain to God. On the contrary, he feared Him all the more. As a reward for such endurance and obedience, Joseph became a prime minister of Egypt and later saved Israel from a terrible famine. Through suffering, God had made Joseph fit for his post and worthy to receive greater blessings.

Sufferings bring a strayed believer back to God

Sin has a deadly effect on a believer. Everytime he sins, the voice of God becomes more dull. The longer he continues in this path, the fainter the voice of God will become until he no longer knows that he has sinned. The time will come when he can not hear it anymore. Once this happens, he will have lost his guide to heaven.

God loves us and wants all to complete the journey to heaven. Through His chastisement, He would bring his stray child back "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb 12:6).

By putting us through "fire," we would be refined just as gold is. Malachi 3:3 tells us that God "will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till

they present right offerings to the Lord." Through our sufferings, God notes our progress. From time to time, He would help. When, in the midst of suffering we show the image of God, our test is complete.

The fiery trial of the children of God

Daniel chapter three records an incident concerning Daniel's three friends - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They were Israelites who were taken as captives to Babylon. The story tells of King Nebuchadnezzar, who made a huge image for the nation to worship. The three young men disobeyed the king by refusing to carry out his wishes. As a result, they were thrown into a furnace of fire. To the king's surprise, they were unharmed by the fire. They were loosed from the ropes that bound them; moreover, there was a fourth person in the fire who resembled the Son of God (Dan 3:2). God's protection on those who continue to remain faithful to Him until the end is clearly demonstrated here.

There are three lessons we can learn from this story:

- 1) Just as the three friends of Daniel were unharmed in the furnace, God will not let us be harmed in our fiery trials. We must remember that Jesus puts us through these trials and hardships to build us up so that we can be

ready for great missions, to prepare us for greater blessing, and to bring us back to Him. The apostle Paul reminded us in II Cor 4:8,9 that as Christians, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed." In all matters, we should continue to praise Him.

2) The Israelites were loosed of the cords that bound them. We may still be bound by our sins, shortcomings and weaknesses. Through the painful process of

trials and afflictions, we will be renewed and freed from the chains of sin.

3) The Son of God was in the midst of the fire with the Israelites. Likewise, God will be with us in all our trials: to protect us so that we may not be harmed; to comfort us so that we may not be frightened. When met with failure remember that the Lord is always there to comfort us. He will surely bring new hope.

May God be with you and guide you through troubled waters.



"This would be my consolation;

I would even exult in pain unsparing;
for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

What is my strength, that I should wait?

And what is my end, that I should be patient?

Is my strength the strength of stones,
or is my flesh bronze?

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee,
therefore I despise my life,
and repent in dust and ashes."

(Job 6: 10-12, 42: 5-6)

Some Advice From The Elder James Regarding

"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me..." Jesus prayed with deep conviction and confidence (Jn 11:41). Immediately after this simple prayer, Jesus performed one of his most astonishing miracles by making Lazarus, a man dead for four days, walk out of a tomb alive.

In history, great men of God have been prayerful and great signs have followed them. Moses prayed and the waters of the Red Sea rolled back for the Israelites to pass through, and when Elijah prayed, fire shot down from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

Today, it is imperative for us to examine ourselves to see whether we have the same confidence to associate ourselves with Jesus and say, "Father, I knew that you always hear me..." Ineffective prayer in a Christian life generally stems from a misunderstanding of prayer or a wrong approach to it. The following is an advice from James, Jesus Christ's brother, which he offers in his letter:

I believe and ask according to His will

"But when you pray, you must believe and not doubt at all" (James 1:5). James here is merely stating what Jesus Himself promised during his ministry on earth: "And all things you ask in prayer, believing,

EFFECTIVE PRAYERS.



you shall receive" (Mt21:22). This is no empty promise, for it has been demonstrated time and again in His own ministry. The results, far from being illusory, are positive, tangible and sometimes immediate.

Two blind men followed Jesus, crying out, and saying, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" And Jesus replied, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him,

"Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes saying, "Be it done to you according to your faith." Their eyes were opened.

The kind of faith that pleases Him most is a steady faith. It does not swing from firm belief at one moment to cynical disbelief at the next, for God often has His own time in answering your prayers. Your will cannot be forced upon God and demand that you get immediate results.

The best time for God to answer your prayer may be days, months, or even years later. This is graphically illustrated in the story of Abraham as told by Paul in Romans 4:18-21:

"In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, 'so shall your descendants be.' And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet with respect to the promise of God, *he did not waver in unbelief*, but grew strong in faith giving glory to God, and being *fully assured that what He has promised, He was able to perform.*"

Twenty five years elapsed from the time God promised Abraham that he would be a father of many nations to the time Isaac was actually born (Gen

12:4; 21:5). He waited many years before he could see actual proof that the promise was to be fulfilled in Isaac. And all this while, Paul wrote, "He did not waver in unbelief." Hence he is aptly called the **FATHER OF FAITH**.

If you think that you've waited far too long, just think of how long Jesus has waited for YOU to commit your life FULLY to Him and He may, at this very moment, be still waiting. The Jews waited centuries for the Messiah. The faithful early Christians waited, in prisons and filthy dungeons, until they died, for the return of Jesus Christ. But God has His time for everything.

II. *Pray with fervency*

"Elijah was man of like nature with ourselves and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth". (Jas 5:17, 18 RSV)

"Fervent" is derived from the Latin word "fervere" meaning "to glow or to boil." It means showing great warmth of feeling. Other versions (the New American Standard Bible, Today's English Version, New English Bible) use the word "earnest," denoting seriousness, intensity or determination.

An effective prayer is one which is fervent and earnest. Jesus, in the days of His earthly life offered up prayers with loud cries and tears. He was earnest and absolutely serious about

His prayers. Put your everything into your prayer; not just your mind and your lips, but your heart and your soul; your entire being and your emotions.

Every single word counts. Mean what you say. Solomon warns against flippant words uttered in prayers:

"Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth, therefore let your words be few." (Ecc 5:2)

It is all too easy to lose concentration while praying. If one dares not be frivolous before a human king, what more before the Sovereign of the Universe?!

The parable of the midnight visitor is intended for our asking for gifts from God. A man has a friend and he goes to him at midnight and says to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him." From inside, he shall answer and say, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." "I tell you," Jesus explains, "even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

Here is a living example of an effective prayer offered by a believer. Fred has been a Christian

for quite some time. For many years he has been attending one Spiritual Convocation after another but has not received the Holy Spirit. He knows the importance of having the Holy Spirit, but as his life is little troubled by unfortunate encounters, the urgency is not there. It strikes him one day how powerless he is in the face of adversity. That sets him to think of the urgency of having the Holy Spirit.

Coming to the following Spiritual Convocation, his mind is set on praying for the Holy Spirit. This time it is different. There is the added element of DETERMINATION. He has decided to persist until he receive the Holy Spirit. For three days, he prays and prays. With that DETERMINATION, he comes to the turning point of his life. On the last day, the Holy Spirit pours down on him.

When Peter was kept in prison to be tried before Herod, the Bible records that "the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (Acts 12:5-10). The effectiveness of earnest prayers is powerfully demonstrated here, and as a result, Peter was delivered that night.

III. *Be in a clear conscience*

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

James admonishes us to confess our sins to each other, be reconciled, and then pray for each other. Jesus also said the same thing in Matthew 5:23, 24.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

In a church of a large membership conflicts are inevitable. But it is possible to resolve them with humility, forgiveness, understanding and brotherly affection. Therefore, confess your sins, be reconciled, and pray for each other. Your prayers will be heard.

James also speaks about the "righteous man." What is a righteous man? John answers, "He who does what is right is righteous" (1 Jn 3:7). He is one who strives to live in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Bible. He has no desire to sin and violate the law of God. Peter confirms that, "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer" (1 Pet 3:12). It is the prayers of those who consciously work towards holiness that are effective and powerful.

IV. Ask with the right motives

"When you ask, you do not

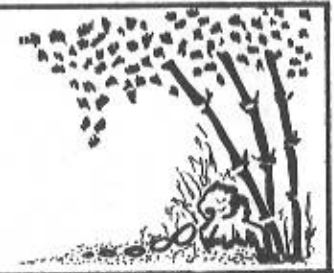
receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (James 4:3)

Students may wish to pray for a successful examination, and businessmen, for prosperity, because, as they think, Jesus once promised, "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it." To be sure, Christ will grant you anything that is beneficial to you:

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (Lk 2:9-12).

This scripture is mainly concerned with praying for the Holy Spirit and spiritual blessing. In our daily life we must remember that the kingdom and the righteousness of God is the primary object in our prayer and supplication (Mt 6:33). Along with the request for achievements in our profession and schooling, we have to do our best and be thankful at all times. Even when we do not receive what we asked for, realize that the Lord sees our motives. Any prayer which does not glorify God or is harmful to one's spiritual well-being is subject to divine disapproval.

Preach The Word



Paul wrote to Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word" (II Tim 4:1-2). The charge of Paul to Timothy to preach the word was motivated by three important aspects of Christian reality: the final judgment, the Second Coming of Christ, and the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God.

As the final judgment is imminent, we must spread the Gospel quickly to all the people, so that they may turn away from their wicked deeds and believe in the Lord. Only in Christ can everyone escape the terrible judgment. The Lord has entrusted not only the church, but also every individual to preach the word. Believers in the True Church must be

ready to strive for the Gospel (Phil 1:27). We must gather our resources together to this end.

The prophet Isaiah said, "Enlarge the place of your tent and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left" (Is 54:2). "Curtains" here refer to the body of Christ (Heb 10:20). "Stretched out" refers to the preaching of the Gospel to all parts of the world. "Lengthen the cord" refers to the gathering of strength together. We can preach the Gospel to all parts of the world provided we can work together. If the church cannot work together in one accord, the believers will be scattered (Mt 12:30).



COURAGE TO BE DIFFERENT

"Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures...." (Acts 18:24)

Although mentioned only a few times in the Bible, Apollos was an important figure in the Early Church. He was noted for his eloquence and fine pastoral work.

What set him apart from others, however, was his meekness and willingness to learn:

"He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately." (Acts 18:25, 26).

Apollos did not scorn Priscilla and Aquila, who others might see as lowly tentmakers (Acts 18:2,3). What a person teaches should not be rejected because he does not have a high education, but weighed with sound judgment, the Word of God, or the special revelation of the Holy Spirit.

What really prevents a 'learned' man from accepting the truth is most often, his *pride*. That is why he cannot accept contrary ideas from one he regards as an intellectual inferior. Apollos did not allow his pride to hinder his acceptance of the Truth. The great value of acquiring knowledge of the Bible and the Truth is not being undermined here. What is being warned against is accepting what someone teaches solely on the basis of his personality or qualifications.

However, this should never be

taken to mean that every intellectual or trained theologian is to be treated with suspicion and doubt. Those that do, hide their own ignorance by misquoting the verse: "but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise ..." (1 Cor 1:27)

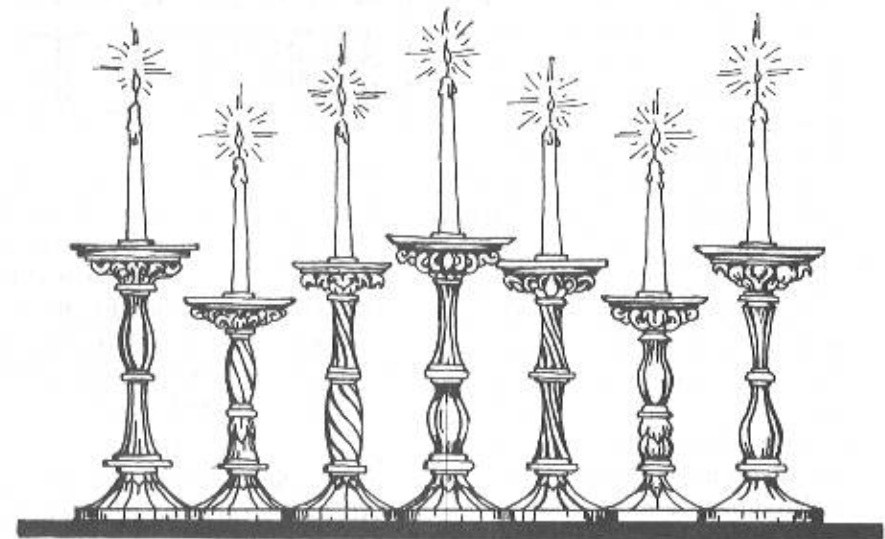
"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3:6). In his epistles, Paul spoke of Apollos as a fellow-worker (cf. 1 Cor 16:12; Tit 3:13). He not only taught, but he also

labored much for the Lord.

Every member of the body of Christ should also combine words and deeds, as John wrote, "Little children, let us not live in word or speech, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18).

The Church needs leaders like Apollos: meek, willing to accept correction, and diligent.

Apollos is an excellent model for all workers of God.



I

The return of the Prodigal Son is a story well-known to Christians and non-Christians alike. It opens with a young man's insistence that his rich father give him his share of the estate before the proper time. He wastes no time and goes to a far-off place where he squanders the money in search of pleasure. However, famine strikes the place where he lives, he is hard pressed to sustain himself, and has no choice but to take on a job feeding pigs.

This downtrodden lad soon realises that this cannot continue. The owner does not even give him enough food. At this crucial moment, he has a shock of recognition, packs up, and heads for home, thinking wishfully, "My father may at least take me in as one of the hired hands." And from there, the story comes to a climax at the dramatic show of forgiveness and love by the father, and the moving scene where father and son are clasped in a warm embrace. The son was dead but now is alive, was lost, but now he is found. This story illustrates the poignant adventure of a sinner: We were still living in sin, but Jesus Christ received us with open arms when we repented and returned to him.

For most of us, the Parable of the Prodigal Son would end happily with a feast and grand reunion, but the elder brother is another important character needed for the parable of

Jesus to reach greater theological dimensions. The elder son is not a lazy man, idly enjoying his father's wealth. Instead, he dutifully works for his father. When the younger brother is honoured, he is angry. He appears to be a nice person, but when he faces this situation his real nature is manifested. The provocation does not at that moment make him evil. The provocation merely brings to the surface what is inside him all the time.

God allows such unpleasant

FATHER, AM I NOT BETTER THAN HE?

occasions to come upon our lives so that we are made to see the corruption of our nature. It is easy for us to consider ourselves spiritual when circumstances are favourable, but when we face problems, perhaps harsh criticism or any adverse situation it is easy to see the ugly 'ego'.

II

The elder son's reaction is: "Look! All these years I've been labouring for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with

prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" (Lk 15:29, 30). In another word, he was grumbling, "Am I not better than he?" He is full of self importance and self righteousness.

Even though his father comes out and entreats him, he feels that he knows everything and has worked hard. He is too proud to accept correction. A mixture of jealousy and anger rules over him.

Our spirituality is perhaps never so tested as when we are opposed and contradicted. When we are

criticised, the only thing that should concern us is whether the criticism is true or false; not whether our critic is a friend or an enemy. Truths might be enunciated from the lips of our opponents.

An unyielding, headstrong disposition is a sure mark of egoism. A rigid self-defensive attitude towards our fellowmen may be reflected in our attitude towards God. If we are unwilling to be taught and corrected by our brethren, it only shows how self-centred we are in spite of all our spiritual experiences and biblical knowledge.

An egoist loves to have the

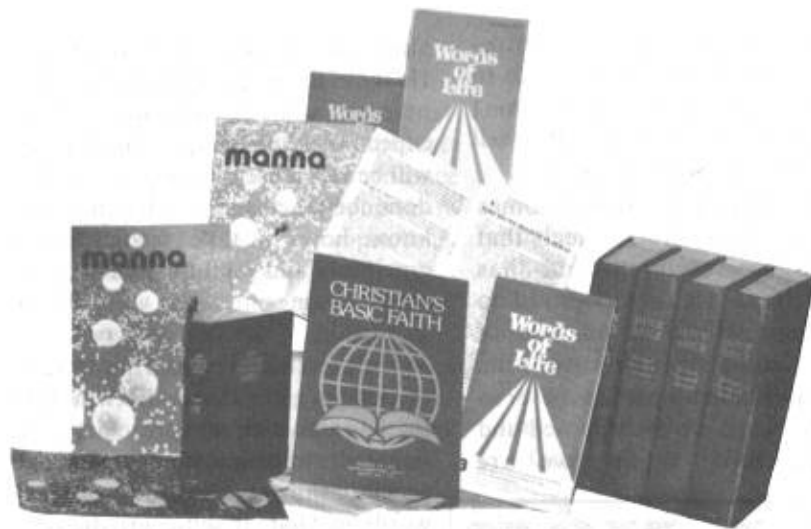
attention and admiration of others. He looks for every opportunity to tell others of what he has done, secretly expecting words of appreciation. He will be very upset if someone else has done better than he. He does not know how to take second place graciously and joyfully, and is upset when someone else is given leadership.

The presence of egoism in a worker of God is a great danger. Even in such sacred activities as preaching, he might draw people to his personal accomplishments instead of the words of God. If self-centredness is found in a leader, spiritual growth of those to whom he ministers is hindered.

III

In the parable the father's love is impartial. He loves both his sons. When the younger son arrives home, he comes out to welcome him; when his elder son refuses to come in, he also comes out to invite him in with these words of consolation: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours" (Lk 15:31). When the elder son intends to condemn, he shows mercy and compassion.

God loves us and wants to give us all that He has. But He wants us to get rid of self-centredness first. God does not love the harlot more than the self-centred Pharisee. He loves both equally, for He gave His life for both. And this divine love illuminates our hearts and makes our life meaningful.



LITERATURE EVANGELISM

Jesus' deep concern for world evangelism was magnified when, prior to His ascension, He instructed His disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15), reminding them that "this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." (Mt 24:14). In other words, His Second Coming would take place only when all mankind have heard this Gospel of Salvation. The apostle Paul understood the importance of this commission and sought to encourage the young evangelist Timothy: "I solemnly charge you in the pre-

sence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and dead, and by His appearing and His Kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (II Tim 4:1, 2).

(1) *The Meaning of Literature Evangelism*

Literature Evangelism is one of the two methods of Evangelism. While oral evangelism depends upon a person speaking and testifying for the Lord either on an individual (Jn 3:1-15, Acts 8:26-40) or a group basis (Mt 5:12; Acts 2:14; 17:22), literature

evangelism, as the name implies, relies upon written materials - leaflets, pamphlets, books, magazines ... as vehicles to spread the Gospel far afield.

(2) *The Value of Literature Evangelism*

Preaching has played an invaluable role in bringing the lost sheep back to the Lord, but the time has come for us to realise the importance of literature evangelism. Not constrained by time or space, the effectiveness of literature evangelism is not to be underestimated. Just as works of famous authors have survived the test of time and continue to influence the literary world, literature concerning the amazing grace of our Lord and His Gospel of Salvation could also remain ageless and continue to move generations: past, present and future. The Ethiopian eunuch, for example, was saved through his reading of the book of Isaiah, written hundreds of years before his time (Acts 8:26-39).

Furthermore, with ever-developing modern technology and communication systems literature evangelism could now reach an audience of much wider and larger areas than personal evangelism could ever hope to achieve.

(3) *The Scope of Literature Evangelism*

Literature evangelism could be directed towards two groups of people - the members of our Church, as well as the non-members, whether they be non-Christians or Christians of other denominations. The unbelievers need to accept the Gospel, believe in the salvation of our Lord Jesus, accept His grace, and receive the eventual blessings of the Heavenly Kingdom. Christians of other denominations on the other hand, need to recognise the True Church set up by God in the end-time, and be guided back to the correct doctrines; gathered under one flock and tended by one shepherd, united in the Truth (Jn 10:16, Eph 4:4, 5:12). Literature evangelism should also help our members in their pursuit of spiritual advancement by expounding the teachings of God, serving as a means of increasing their biblical knowledge as well as a form of encouragement to do good, to become sanctified, thereby pleasing God.

The exchange of news can also help bridge churches throughout the world, creating a better and deeper understanding among the children of God and establishing an enhanced

spiritual communion united through His love.

(4) How Can You Contribute to Literature Evangelism

Given the importance of literature evangelism, what contribution could we make towards it? This is one question that should be in the minds of each and everyone of us.

a) You can write

The Bible tells us that all our talents and abilities come from God, as gifts, exemplifying His love for us. It is only right that we should use these gifts to serve Him and to repay His grace. Those of us who are blessed with the gift of writing should therefore utilize this opportunity to bear witness for Him, remembering the words of Elder John: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have beheld and our hands handled, concerning the word of life... And these things we write, so that our joys may be made complete" (1 Jn 1:1,4).

b) You can witness

Even without the gift of writing, contributions could still be made in this area of the divine work. All of us have one time or another

experienced the wonderful grace of God upon us or our families. Unless we testify of these experiences they would remain unknown, which means that the grace of God too would remain hidden and His name unglorified. God's blessings upon us should not go unnoticed or ignored. We should instead bear witness for Him and through our testimonies, gifted writers could put them into the written word allowing readers to appreciate God's grace and praise His wonderful name.

c) You can distribute

The Church has produced numerous publications in recent years, mostly geared towards the spreading of the Gospel. The relatively simple task of distributing these publications to our relatives and friends is another contribution towards Literature Evangelism, while handing out these journals we could at the same time preach should the opportunity arise. With the help of our Lord this combination of proclamation and literature evangelism would surely bear fruits

d) You can offer

The efficient circulation of literature requires the availability of manpower and money, another area of participation for us to consider. The wider circulation, the heavier the financial burden. Our financial support would ensure that the Gospel of truth could be spread more effectively, opening the door of salvation for a larger number of people.

e) You can pray

Prayers are the chief contributor towards the success of any divine work, including literature evangelism, and this is one area which all members could participate. It is only with the guidance of

God that literature evangelism could achieve its objects in spreading the Gospel to all creation.

Conclusion

The Lord has placed the commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world upon the Church. The Church consists of all the members, and so each one of us must take up this duty to contribute to the success of the Church's evangelization efforts. Even if we are not able to contribute directly to either oral evangelism or literature evangelism, we can at least pray that the Lord will bless all the evangelical programmes of the Church. Let us share in the divine work of conveying the word of salvation to all the world and we will receive our due reward when the Lord comes.





Understanding **Ruth**

The Book of Ruth is an unusual story of a young woman who found herself entangled in a web of tragic events. Her husband was dead and her country was struck by famine. But through her love and loyalty, she became an important historical figure from whom came the Saviour. Set in the turbulent days of the Judges, this story has a rustic simplicity and charm, for it has neither intrigues nor villains.

Though the writer does not explicitly draw a moral, this book is more than just a short story full of episodic significance. Its

teachings are largely implicit and its allegorical meaning profound, which is relevant to 20th century Christians.

This article does not attempt to retell this beautiful story, but to expound the meanings of some words and names, along with its intended moral teachings, for a better understanding of the theological reflections on God and His salvation.

OF PEOPLE AND PLACES

Bethlehem in Judah

'Bethlehem' in Hebrew means 'the house of food.' Ironically in the time of Ruth, there was famine throughout the land, probably because of the frequent disobedience of the stubborn Israelites against God. If so, this speaks eloquently for the justice of God — the swift punishment for disobedience.

Elimelech

'Elimelech' means 'God is my king.' However, his allegiance faltered in the face of adversity, i.e. when famine struck, Elimelech did not hesitate to turn towards the country of the enemy of God's people, the Moabites. There he died. His two sons married Moabite women and died childless as well. Elimelech's widow Naomi and two young daughters-in-law suffered in a land which was supposed to give them comfort.

Naomi

'Naomi' means 'pleasant' or 'fair,' an accurate description of her character. She was submissive to her husband. During the famine she followed her husband always. She returned to Bethlehem pale, withered and worn.

"Is this Naomi?" some wondered, barely recognising her.

"Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara," she replied. 'Mara' means 'bitter,' for she had tasted the bitterness of life among Gentiles.

Orpah

'Orpah' means 'stiffnecked.' She was married to Chilion, one of the sons of Elimelech in Moab. Being a Gentile, she was 'not to enter

the assembly of the Lord' according to the Mosaic Law (Deut 23:3) but by virtue of her marriage, she was received into the commonwealth of Israel. When her husband died, she followed Naomi from Moab to Judah. But Orpah dropped off midway to return to her former home and the worship of Chemosh. Even so, Naomi commended her to the Lord's protection.

Ruth

'Ruth' means 'companion.' In contrast to Orpah, she was indeed the constant companion of Naomi. "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God, where you die I will die and there will I be buried," she assured Naomi.

"Many are called but few are chosen" said Jesus. Many have received Christ but few have kept the faith all the way. Like Orpah, some returned to the sinful world. But Ruth is worthy of our emulation, because she was loyal, filial, diligent, humble and chaste (4:15; 2:2-7; 2:10, 13; 3:5, 10).

Boaz

The meaning of his name is 'Strength in the Lord'. He was a kinsman of Elimelech and a man of substance and influence. Boaz appears in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1:5; Lk 3:32). Despite his position, he had an excellent relationship with his workers (2:4). He was aware of God's providence and blessings (2:12). Towards his brothers he was just and accommodating (3:12, 13; 4:1-9), and he was sympathetic, comforting and helpful to Ruth (2:14-20; 3:10-15). He did not take advantage of her when she lay at his feet on the threshing floor from night till morn. And unlike some rich men, he manifested a particular diligence. In the morning, official matters at the city gates demanded his attention, in the afternoon, the harvest had to be collected and in the evening, he had to be at the threshing floor.

OF CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

The barley harvest

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22). A 10th century B.C. agricultural calendar

found in the Gezer excavations designates a spring month (late April or early May) as "his month of the harvest." Barley ripens a couple of weeks earlier than wheat (2:23).

The Levirate marriage custom

According to the Levirate marriage practice, a childless widow is bound to marry her deceased husband's brother (Deut 25:5-10). The "nearest kin" used to refer to Boaz in 2:20 is applied in a technical sense meaning 'redeemer' (Hebrew: go'el). It designates one who 'redeems' the name of the dead through Levirate marriage. Ruth's request to Boaz to *spread his skirt* over her is an expression denoting a request to take her as his wife under custom (cf. Ezek 16:8).

Ruth's action might appear indecorous or improper to those unfamiliar with oriental cultures, but here it was a method doubtless conformable to prevailing rural usage in Bethlehem to remind Boaz of his duty.

Boaz, although honoured, was conscientious to give the nearest kinsman the opportunity to exercise his right.

However through the ceremony of the removal of his sandal and presenting it to Boaz, the next-of-kin attested to his relinquishing of the right of redemption (4:7-10).

BOAZ AND RUTH — A PROPHETIC ALLEGORY

Christ and His True Church

Boaz prefigures Jesus Christ. He is a man of wealth and authority and the master of the fields. His character is impeccable and his love unmatched. He is Ruth's redeemer who subsequently married her despite her status as a Gentile.

Jesus Christ sacrificed his heavenly riches and glory and came down to this world. His "field" is this world where men are ready to be 'harvested' and taken into his kingdom (Mt 9:37,38). God's ultimate love was demonstrated when Jesus came into this world in the form of a perfect man, to die for all. Through that supreme sacrifice, the Gentiles are given the chance to be part of the church —

the bride of the Lamb.

Ruth prefigures the church just before the marriage of the Lamb. Just as Ruth was of lowly birth from a foreign nation in the east (Moab being east of Judah), the last-day True Church comes from the East — China, a nation once despised and exploited. But she returned to Judah during the harvesting season (1:22). The emerging of this Last Days church coincides with the "harvest of the earth" period described in Revelation 14:15, i.e. the end-time.

She gleaned in the field of Boaz and in return she was well-treated by him. She was given much food and drink (Chap 2). This speaks of the labour and reward of the church. Given the word of God and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the church also receives the mandate to 'glean'; to bring to souls ready to enjoy God's salvation.

Finally, she was married to Boaz sharing riches and honour together (4:13-17). The final and crowning glory prepared for the church is none other than the marriage to the Lamb and thereafter to become co-heirs of the universe (Rev 19:7; 21:1-2).

Ruth's preparation

The sequence of things Ruth did to prepare herself to see Boaz has important allegorical significance. It refers to our own preparation to meet the Lord.

She washed herself (3:3). This speaks of water baptism, without which no man can stand before God. She was anointed (3:3). This is equivalent to our baptism of the Spirit.

She put on her best clothes (3:3). 'Clothes' is frequently used in the Bible when referring to a person's conduct (Rev 19:8; Eph 4:23, 24). A Christian is expected to manifest his best conduct.

She laid down at his feet (3:4, 7, 8). This is a gesture of submission and supplication. Sinners and sick persons prayed at His feet to receive grace and peace (Lk 7:38; 8:41, 47, 48; 17:15, 16). A Christian life should also be one of submission to and reliance on God at all times.

She remained till the morning (3:13, 14). In this age of spiritual darkness (Rom 13:11) we ought to be faithful to Christ and remain with Him until Christ comes again in triumph to receive us.

Personal Testimonies

A LESSON FROM THE LORD

by Julie Wong

Toronto, Canada

When I was a teenager in Ipoh, West Malaysia, I used to help my father in church work. One day he asked me to type a sermon schedule for the church. After typing I gave it to him to pass to the deacons for approval.

The following day he asked me to re-type it as one of the deacons was not available to speak on a particular service assigned to him. I typed the schedule the second time.

After that, another deacon informed my father of some changes, so I had to type it the third time.

Half-way through my third exasperating attempt, he made more changes and so I had to do it again. By this time I was a bit irritated and commented, "Why must the deacons keep changing their minds?"

My father explained that any work done for God must be done properly. He also added that if I was unhappy and unwilling to do the job properly, he would do it himself.

After that, he left the room, and I

started to type the schedule for the fourth time. Suddenly, I heard a thunderous voice saying, "DO NOT GRUMBLE WHEN DOING GOD'S WORK." I looked around the room, but there was no one there. I was really scared.

After a while my father returned, intending to have the schedule retyped, I asked him whether he had scolded me before leaving the room, but to my bewilderment, he said that he had not.

Then I told him about the strange occurrence. He cautioned me that it was God's way of teaching me a lesson, and advised me that if I wanted God's blessing, I must change my attitude.

My grumbling might have provoked God and all the work I had done for Him might have been in vain, for God prefers a cheerful and willing worker. He also reminded me of the grumbings of the Israelites in the wilderness.

Thank and praise the Lord for teaching me. It was a frightening experience, but I really profited from it. This incident taught me to keep a guard over my mouth, and if possible, stop this bad habit of grumbling. The Bible teaches us that those who murmur shall be chastised (Is 20:24).

We must do all things without

murmuring and disputing (Phil 2:14), so that we may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights in the world. We must also learn to live in harmony with one another and if possible, so far as it depends upon us, live peaceably with all (Rom 12:16,18). We should serve God with joyfulness and gladness (Deut 28:47) and if we take delight in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our hearts (Ps 37:4).

Think of how happy a Christian family would be if there were no grumbling or dispute.

A family at peace with God and man will achieve great spiritual progress. What a glorious church it will be when everyone tries to control his tongue and get along with everyone else. Then God will surely shower blessings upon this congregation.

If we want to improve, God will surely show us the way. With the help of the Almighty God, try to improve; it is a gradual process. With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Mk 10:27).

We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength and power (Phil 4:13).



What You Need To Know About FASTING

The enchanting strains of the *Timan's* cry wafts across the endless stretch of undulating sands as the golden skyline gracefully succumbs to darkness. A weary figure of bronze complexion trudges into a solitary tent which flutters against the continuous thrust of dry wind.

Once inside, the otherwise gloomy atmosphere outside transforms into a rather delightful one. Gathering round, he and his family share their only meal of that day with relish.

It is the month of *Ramadan*. This faithful believer of *Islam*, submitting to the injunction of the *Koran*, strictly observes a fast during the daylight hours.

He is not alone. Millions of *muslims* all over the world also

commemorate the first revelation of the *Koran* by imposing upon themselves a strict fasting during the ninth month of the year in the muslim lunar calendar. Fasting in the month of *Ramadan* is, in fact, one of the pillars of *Islam*.

Fasting as a religious institution is, however, not unique to *Islam*. Its significance is appreciated by all the major religions of the world and most religious sects.

Among the American Indians, fasting was used in consulting

totems. The *Shamans* used it to communicate with departed spirits because it was believed that prolonged hunger gave rise to visions. Similarly, the Greeks fasted before consulting their oracles.

The only significant exception to the ubiquity of religious fasting, in one form or other, is Zoroastrianism which forbids it.

What role does fasting play in Christianity?

What is 'fasting' as used in the Bible?

Fasting in the Bible generally means going without any food and drink for a period (Esther 4:16). References to the curious expression "to afflict the soul" (Hebrew: *inna napso*) in the Old Testament actually means fasting.

The Israelites fasted on the Day of Atonement. The penalty for infraction is to be cut off from the community (Lev 23:27-32; Num 29:7; Jer 36:6). On the other hand, although mention is made of fasting in the New Testament (Acts 13:2, 14:23), there is no strict law that Christians are obligated to fast.

What is the purpose of fasting?

While fasting is not mandatory in the New Testament (and therefore in Christianity), there are occasions when it becomes a necessity.

I. *To avert or remove national calamities*

The history of Israel is characterized by a constant influx of national disaster. Many men and women of great faith turn to God for deliverance. As a result of their prayer and supplications, God listened to them.

During the reign of Jehosphat, when the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Meunites joined forces with the intention of attacking Judah, King Jehosphat proclaimed a fast throughout the land, and by the help of God the Jews had a complete victory (II Chron 20:1-4, 20-23, 30).

When Haman, minister of Persia, was about to eliminate all the Jewish people, Queen Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews fasted and prayed. God listened to their prayers, and consequently delivered the Jews from the great disaster.

When the house of God (Eph 2:19) and the citizens of the heavenly commonwealth (Phil 3:20) are attacked by Satan, when heresy is prevalent (cf. Mt 24:23-24) or when persecutions are imposed upon her (cf. Acts 8:1-3), the whole church should get united, fast and pray to God earnestly for deliverance and blessing.

II. *To seek forgiveness of sins*

Prayers with fasting can not only solve the faith crisis of the church as well as the individuals, but also express our penitence before God. The people of Nineveh, for example,

responded to the warning of Jonah, "yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," they believed God and proclaimed a fast. Even the king himself put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. God saw their repentance, and so decided not to destroy them (Jon 1:1, 2; 3:1-10).

In our Christian life, God allows strayed believers to suffer poverty, disease or hardship, so that they will seek God. Therefore, if we fail the glory of God, we have to confess our sins, and contritely ask the Lord to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I Jn 1:9).

III. *To seek scriptural understanding*

Daniel fasted for three weeks in order to understand the vision given to him. During the time of fasting he prayed to God for enlightenment. As a result, God sent His messenger saying, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, as I have come because of your words" (Dan 10:1-3,12). Later, he was given the meaning of the mysterious vision.

Numerous passages in the Bible are too profound to understand. But if you are eager to know the meanings of these verses, you may, in addition to research, fast and pray so that God may grant you spiritual understanding.

IV. *To receive spiritual gifts*

The Lord Jesus once rebuked the demon and the demon came out of an epileptic boy. In response to the inability of the disciples to cast out the demon, Jesus stressed the importance of prayer and fasting (Mt 17:14-21). Sometimes, we find that we lack in power and our prayers are not effective. Under such circumstances, we ought to fast and pray for power and faith (Mt 17:20).

V. *To propagate the Gospel*

In the church at Antioch, many prophets and teachers fasted and prayed for the growth of the church. Once, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the Gentile mission. Sent out by the Holy Spirit, the apostles went about preaching the words of God, performing miracles, and leading many to believe in the Lord.

In the same way, the appointment of elders in every church was done in prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23). When we ask God to open a door of grace to the Gentiles, we must pray with fasting as well (Col 4:3, Act 14:27).

In addition to the preaching of the Gospel, our prayer and fasting is important for the special occasions when we need divine guidance. For example, Ezra proclaimed a fast at the River Shava to ask God to open a way for them (Ezra 4:16). Nehemiah fasted and prayed to

God so that he might find favour before the king, allowing him to return to his own country to rebuilt it (Neh 1:3, 4, 11). All the people of God clearly understand the true meaning and purpose of fasting, and act according to the will of God.

When is fasting necessary?

The Bible records how fasting is held at various periods and durations with an indefinite span of time. Samuel and the Israelites fasted at Mizpah for deliverance from the hands of their enemies. (I Sam 7:6). Some prayed and fasted with a fixed duration of time. Esther fasted three days and three nights to beseech God to deliver her people (Esther 4:16), whereas David fasted six days for the healing of his son (II Chron 12:16-28).

Others like Daniel fasted for three weeks in order to get the interpretation of the vision (Dan 10:3). The longest period of fasting appears in both the Old Testament and the New Testament: Moses fasted for forty days and nights to receive the Law of God (Deut 9:9,18), and Jesus, prepared for His ministry (Mt 4:2).

These instances point to one fact that there is no fixed duration of time for one to hold a fast. What matters is: we must understand why and how we fast, and faith should always be present.

The DON'TS of fasting

Fasting is a form of self-affliction.

It manifests one's devotion to God. But there were cases where fasting became unacceptable to God (Jer 14:12; Is 58:3; 1:13, 14):

- I. *Don't do it as a formality:* Very often people fail to understand the purpose of fasting and treat it as a mere formality. They fast only because others do. They may even feel proud of their 'achievement.' This is wrong.
- II. *Don't do it hypocritically:* As taught by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18, we hold fasting for some definite good cause while, leading a normal prayerful life in private.
- III. *Don't commit sin:* Just as God will not allow iniquity (Is 1:13), we must keep ourselves sanctified and show our love, faith and hope.
- IV. *Don't slack in prayers:* Prayer will support fasting and increase one's spiritual strength from God. Follow the way Jesus fasted and prayed. He was full of power and was filled by the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1,2, 14,15).

"Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not?

Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?

Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and

oppress all your workers.

Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight

and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man

to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?

Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Is 58:3-7)

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