

MANNA

True Jesus Church

ISSUE 50 OCT-DEC 2005

Our Church

To Build A Beautiful Life with God

The Lord's Church Is Unique

The Way in Which the Jerusalem Church Grew

MANNA

Oct-Dec 2005

ISSUE 50 Vol 30 No. 4

Our Church

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

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Dear Reader,

It's hard to imagine that the year has come to an end, and we are looking at yet another new year just around the corner! Right now, many of us are probably reflecting on the things that took place in 2005.

Here are a few questions for us to consider:

- Have I drawn closer to God this past year?
- Was I able to overcome challenges in my life by relying more on Him?
- Did I learn and know more about Him this year than I did last year?
- Was I able to meet the spiritual resolutions that I set at the beginning of 2005?

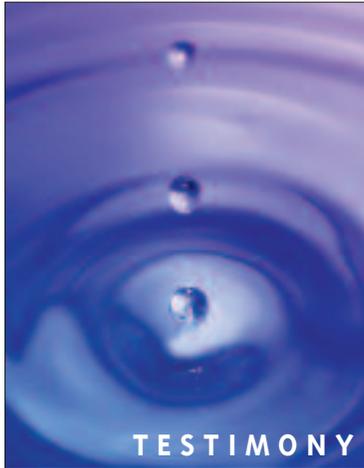
All of us probably have a mix of emotions and reflections when we survey these questions in our hearts, and perhaps we find ourselves in a good place with God, or a dangerous place, or somewhere in between. Wherever we are, we have to keep striving forward in His direction.

That is the important work that our Manna team strives to provide our readers—to encourage and to uplift each other with God's words, so that we may all grow with grace and knowledge of His love and His will for us.

And when we look back on our lives, or perhaps just the short year of 2005, we may see the wonderful paths that God has laid out for us. We can give thanks and be renewed in faith that He has kept us thus far, and He will be there to welcome us home. These are the lingering ponderings we leave with you through testimonies, reflections, and exhortations in this issue.

THE EDITOR

Our Church



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To Build A Beautiful Life with God

Amy Wang—Chicago, Illinois, USA



I was born in 1951, in Fuqing City, Fujian Province, China. Although I grew up in a Christian family, I slowly lost my faith soon after I married my atheist husband, who

was an officer in the military—an institution that strictly upholds atheism.

When the long ten-year Cultural Revolution in China finally ended, my husband was transferred back to my hometown. During that time, the True Jesus Church also began to preach boldly about the gospel of salvation, and the believers were fearless in the face of persecution.

After receiving the gospel, my parents, their extended family, and my own growing family were baptized. At that time, I worked as an acupuncture doctor at the local hospital, and both my husband and I had high incomes.

We had two daughters and a son. The army also provided beautiful housing for

us, and it was right next to our church, which enabled us to attend services every evening. Our life was full and very comfortable. It was the best time of my life.

Fortune and Loss at Wuhan

Soon afterward, China opened up her doors to economic reform, and my husband decided to ride the wave, starting his own restaurant business in Wuhan City of Hubei Province. Six months later, he asked me to join him and help with his burgeoning business, so I took a long-term leave without pay and moved to Wuhan.

People say that the business world is like the battlefield because the competi-

tion is tough, but if you work hard it will pay off. True enough, our restaurant revenue was ten times higher than my hospital salary, and consequently, I became completely caught up in the material world.

To make things worse, there was no True Jesus Church in Wuhan, so my faith quickly dwindled. Everyday, I was so busy making money and counting the cash that I became completely out of touch with God. I never prayed and never thanked God for all the success. Although we made a lot of money, I never felt it was enough. Worst of all, I took everything for granted.

When my faith was weak, it was the perfect opportunity for Satan to work. My husband was also tempted and started to gamble. At first, I was in disbelief because I thought that a disciplined military officer, who exercised strict restraint for over twenty years of his life, wouldn't be that easily influenced.

I also wasn't paying close attention to our money management, so I had no idea how much my husband had gambled away. It wasn't until later that I found out he had used our restaurant as a credit service to feed his addiction. In other words, he gave out credit to the people whom he gambled with, and they started coming in to the restaurant to eat for free.

The business seemed to be booming. Everyday we were able to sell all the good food, good wine and tobacco, and everyday we would need to restock everything. But at the end of the month, when I tried to collect the credit, I found out they were all just collateral for my husband's debts. We basically ran the business for nothing! I was furious.

I went home and fought with him. I hated him so much. At my wits' end, I

warned him never to gamble again, or I would divorce him. My husband was penitent and he asked me to help pay off his debt, and I agreed to pay a lump sum of 160,000 Chinese yen—hoping that he would quit once and for all.

Unfortunately, old habits die hard.

Although we made a lot of money, I never felt it was enough. Worst of all, I took everything for granted.

Six months later, he went back to gambling. I felt like I just couldn't forgive again, so I decided to divorce him. By then, he was so obsessed that he didn't care anymore. On the divorce paper, he added a clause to share the debts equally between us. Since I had already paid 160,000 Chinese yen, I thought there shouldn't be too much left.

Without further thought, and eager to get out of this painful marriage, I signed the papers. Afterwards, and to my dismay, I found out that he still owed another 1,400,000 yen. Just like that, I got myself indebted for 700,000 yen (approximately 100,000 USD).

This addiction had turned my husband into a totally different person and he did not realize he was under Satan's control. I found out that my husband had weaseled most of the money from my family, relatives, and friends, and all without my knowledge. So I ended up indebted to own my family and friends—people whom I simply could not just walk away from.

My divorce tore me apart. I was so anguished that I couldn't find peace for a long time. I was full of rage and hatred, and I couldn't stay to run the restaurant or

bear to see those gamblers come in to have more free meals.

Eventually I returned to my hometown and took up my old job at the hospital. I didn't go back to church right away, and I had forgotten how to cry out to God.

Everyday after work, I went home to my empty house. Where did my happy family go? I didn't think God could help me. I was miserable, for I had gone to Wuhan with the big ambition to become rich, and yet I ended up with a broken family and was drowning in debt.

Traditional Chinese consider divorce a deep-seated disgrace, so I wouldn't let people know what had happened to me. I was wary that people would despise me. Everybody thought that I had made a big fortune over the six years I was in Wuhan, but little did they know about my debt and my broken family. I was only making 2,000 yen a month from the hospital, and I had no idea how to pay off the 700,000.

My divorce also hurt my children greatly, and it was the cause of many problems to follow. I was troubled by all these matters and I had no one to talk to. I was also lost as to what to do with the rest of my life. Sometimes, I felt so depressed that I wanted to end my life.

In a state of deep agony, I remembered something that the Lord Jesus had spoken: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). With this encouragement, I was finally able to kneel down and, with all my heart, asked God to forgive the sinner that I was.

Lord, You have granted me the truth and the Holy Spirit. My life is in Your hands. Please teach me how to follow You and to be honest, righteous, and truthful. Lord, please give me the peace and strength to face the difficulties and trials ahead.

The Lord Jesus Christ knew all my sufferings and cared about every tear that I shed. He is indeed the Savior of the afflicted and Friend of the sinners. After all the tribulations, I truly felt God's presence and understood His will for me. I have walked through death's valley and I was no longer afraid because God is with me.

A New License to Life

One day, I was surprised to receive a phone call from a previous customer from the restaurant. He was an American Chinese who had just returned to China from the U.S. He asked me to help him manage his company in the U.S., and he even offered to apply for my work visa. True to his word, he sponsored my business passport, and that was the beginning of my journey to the United States.

Coming to America was indeed like the exodus rite of passage, from crossing the Red Sea and River Jordan to entering the land of Canaan—all of which was full of God's grace and guidance.

Unfortunately, it wasn't until my arrival in the U.S. that my sponsor became aware that I spoke no English and was not able to be of any help to his company. After his realization, I was out on my own.

I worked at various odd jobs to make ends meet. I tried my hand at being a nanny and a housekeeper. I toiled at a sewing shop and at a Laundromat. Even though these were very hard work, I was at least no longer pent up with resentment over gambling.

One day, I saw an article in the Chinese newspaper about how one could get a U.S. acupuncturist license by taking the test in Chinese. It was a great opportunity so I applied and took the exam. One year later, I became a licensed acupuncturist in the U.S.! I never dreamed that I could practice Chinese medicine in

America and be able to help people again. It was truly the wonderful arrangement of God.

I opened a clinic in New York and settled into my business for seven years. With God's blessings, I earned a good, steady income. Within the first three years, not only was I able to pay off my share of the 700,000 yen, I also paid off my husband's share. I felt that it was the least I could do for him, to make up for the love and forgiveness that I couldn't give him before. After all that, I bought an apartment unit for myself.

Two years after I came to the U.S., I found out that my daughter, Ling Yang, had run away from home. I also discovered later that she had gotten herself into substance abuse. Ling was unable to accept that her father had a new wife. She didn't know about our divorce and felt that her father had wronged me, so she ran away and wandered outside for a long time. My divorce tore my family apart and sent us all on our separate ways.

My husband lived with his new wife, I was in the U.S., my older son lived with his friend, and my youngest daughter lived with her grandma. Ling didn't have anyone to go to, so she wandered away. She was also at a tender and impressionable age. After I learned about Ling, I could only fast and pray for God's mercy so that I could bring her to the U.S. I wanted to make up for all the years that I was absent in her life.

During my prayer, I saw a vision of her photo on a U.S. visa, and surely enough, God granted my wish. Ling got her visa at

the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, and God's timing was impeccable.

Seeing God's Will through Trials

Being a Christian doesn't guarantee that there will always be smooth sailing. We will still go through difficulties and challenges like everybody else in the world. The difference is that our suffering is embedded in God's will and is a test of our faith.

On March 10, 2004, I received a phone call from a friend asking me to return home immediately because a fire had started in my apartment. I didn't believe it because I had just left my apartment fifteen minutes prior and everything was fine. I didn't use the stove that day, so how could there be a fire?

By the time I got off the bus, the fire department had put out the flames and was ready to leave. I went into my home and found everything burnt to a crisp. I couldn't salvage anything decent enough to be reused—not even a piece of cloth. Then I looked in the closet and found my address book intact and about two-thirds of my Illinois acupuncturist license. What remained of the license still had my license number, the valid date, and part of my name on it.

At that point, it was clear to me that it was God's wonderful mercy, and I did not panic or worry. I understood that perhaps God had a greater plan and that I should move to Chicago. Some people discouraged me from going out to the Windy City since it was far away, and I already had a practice in New York City where I

Coming to America was indeed like the exodus rite of passage, from crossing the Red Sea and River Jordan to entering the land of Canaan—all of which was full of God's grace and guidance.

had built up a client base and was making a good income.

The strange fire had burned all my furniture and medical equipment. So I went to stay with my daughter that evening and even had a good night's sleep. The next morning, I got up and watched T.V. My daughter was confounded by the fact that I could still be in the mood to watch television, to which I replied, "I didn't get hurt. Even if the furniture and equipment didn't get burned, they are heavy. It would be too much trouble to move them to Chicago. Besides, we have insurance on the apartment and the furniture."

Usually, electrical fires take hours of slow burning before they develop into a thick flame. The night before the fire, I seemed to remember hearing some strange noises from the ceiling but I didn't pay much attention to it.

Now that I think back, I know our Lord Jesus protected me and gave me true peace to get through this trial. The fire didn't start until I left the apartment, and I can't imagine the consequences had I been home, or if it had happened in the middle of the night.

Three months later, the insurance company remodeled my old apartment and turned it into a new one. Someone offered a good price for it, but I did not take the offer.

Always With A Thankful Heart

In May 2004, I moved again to a new and distant place. This time, I settled down in Chicago. At first, I stayed at the pastor's house, and his family really showered their love on me. They welcomed me with their hospitality and helped me in any way they could. With their assistance, I was able to quickly find an apartment and settle down. Later, I even found a great location



in Chinatown with affordable rent to open my clinic.

I made a big sign to put on the wall outside my shop, but when my landlord saw it, he was very upset and asked me to take it down. I had to hire someone to remove the sign. Not long afterward, my landlord suffered backaches, and I used acupuncture and massage to treat his pain until it was gone.

A few days later, I flew to New York to visit my daughter for the New Year. By the time I came back to Chicago, to my surprise, I discovered that my landlord had hired someone out of his own pocket to put my sign back up on the wall. With God's blessing and guidance, the help and care from the sisters and brothers in church, I was able to establish myself in Chicago.

By now, my mother was seventy-seven years old, and she was a faithful Christian. She had gotten sick earlier in the year and was hospitalized in Fuzhou City. All nine of her children thought that

she would get well soon, as long as we helped and chipped in on the medical expenses. But three months later, not only did her condition worsen, the doctors still couldn't diagnose the cause of her illness. They told us that there was no sense for her to continue her stay in the hospital because she was too old to fight the sickness, and she was better off going home with us.

After my mother came home, we decided to ask the pastors and members from church to pray for her. Through loving intercessions, my mother slowly and gradually recovered. Witnessing her miraculous recovery, four of my siblings were deeply touched by God's power. Their lukewarm faith was once again revived and they turned back to the Lord. Presently, my mother is able to attend Sabbath services every week, and my whole family has become fervent at church. Praise God!

Now, I deeply believe that with God's love and with Him in my life, I will be able

TESTIMONY

2006 pocket calendars are here!

to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things (1 Cor 13:7). I want to build a beautiful life with Him that is always accompanied by a thankful heart. And I don't ever want to depart from God again to pursue this world.

Finally, I'd like to share some proverbs that I heard from a pastor on the topic of money:

With money you can buy a good bed, but you can't buy good sleep.

With money you can buy books, but you can't buy knowledge.

With money you can buy good food, but you can't buy appetite.

With money you can buy medicine, but you can't buy health.

With money you can buy a nice house, but you can't buy a happy family.

With money you can buy a church building, but you can't buy the blessings of the heavenly kingdom.

May all the glory and praises be unto the true and living God of heaven! Amen. ★



The 2006 pocket calendars are here! The church name and the web site are printed on the calendars, so it's a great way to let your friends know about the True Jesus Church. Be sure to get some from your local church and start sharing your faith with others!



Jesus Keeps His Own to the End

Robert Cass—Edmonton, Canada

The First Time

My journey to Christ began when I was ten years old. A friend had invited my mom, sister and me to her church. The speaker preached a simple message: “Accept Jesus into your heart and you will go to heaven; otherwise you will go to hell.” And we did as we were told—accepting quite readily and saying a simple prayer.

I was a bit of a delinquent prior to this experience, but for the next several years I tried to understand God and to pray to Him, and I tried to be a good person. I can’t say that I deeply felt the love of God at that time. My understanding was that it was my duty to be good and God is somewhere being God.

Then the rug was pulled out from under us. I was seventeen when my father and I both contracted a subtle but complex sinus infection. It was so insidious that neither of us was aware that our blood sugar levels had slowly crept to near-death ranges over time. I became very depressed and my grades dropped. I left my good friends and was soon doing drugs in the arcade across the street from the church.

The infection plagued me for a few years and my life continued to plummet. I had lost whatever I had known of God. I was separated from my family and was now unwed with a child of my own. Finally, the cure came, and while I still maintained permanent damage from the

infection, my blood sugar level normalized and I was once again given a clean bill of health.

Within a short time, an old youth pastor invited me back to his church. I went and amazingly, I repented in great sorrow for my departure from the faith.

I began to pursue God with great fervor. I had been given a second chance and was truly grateful. I spent hours each day reading the Bible, and the spirit of God brought Jesus’ words to life in my heart.

My soul and spirit always seemed to focus on Jesus’ exhortations on giving. Moreover, my best friend, who supported a few dozen children in foreign countries, would preach to me continually on the

topic. So I decided that giving to the poor would be my way to repay the Lord, and I desired to share my possessions with the poor.

By My Own Means

I had never heard of spiritual gifts before, but one day I ended up at a Christian camp where everyone was speaking in tongues. I didn't know what was going on, but I remembered the preacher saying how he had all nine spiritual gifts.

I was coaxed to the front with several others. Immediately, he came over to me and put his hand on my stomach and prayed for me. "What is he doing?" I thought. At the time, my stomach had protruded noticeably due to the side effects of my illness. But more significantly, many came around and prayed for me. I felt this tremendous power come over me.

I was filled with an incredible love that is hard to describe other than to say that I was immersed in the love of God. For three days I walked around saying "God bless you" to everyone. I had never experienced the love of God in that way before, and I wanted to share it with everybody. All I thought about was how much God loves me. My stomach was completely healed within a few days—almost as a bonus to all of this.

I knew quickly that God was real and worked miracles, of which I saw many, and I began to believe that my purpose as a Christian was to believe Jesus' words with faith, and to see His miracles take place.

Then my faith encountered a challenge. My sinus cavities had suffered permanent damage, and I would experience terrible cracking sensations. I was in love and I wanted to marry, but I also did not want to marry in poor health. So I began praying to God and reciting the

Scriptures over and over. I fasted for several months—two or three days a week. The next year I did the same and the year after. But nothing happened.

My relationship with God became tiresome, even though I continued to worship. I raised my hands in the church while no one else did, but at the same time I questioned my spiritual well-being.

My prayers grew more frantic because I felt God did not hear me. And finally, in the midst of great pain one night, I decided to give up and never ask God about anything again.

Through His Spirit

Then I met this girl at work whom I knew attended a church called the True Jesus Church. At first, I had thought it was a cool church name. She would never come to the Bible studies I so gallantly and dutifully hosted in our office for a God I didn't seem to know. But there was something different about her. She had this joy, peace, and confidence about her that I didn't have. She seemed to have an assurance in faith that came naturally.

So I told her I wanted to go to her church. My first visit to the True Jesus Church was during a special service.

I really liked the church, and everyone prayed in tongues. I had enjoyed praying in tongues with my previous church, but my tongue was different.

Before I came to this church, I thought I knew something about God. Yes, give to the poor, I thought, and speak in tongues. And at that time, it so happened I managed to give most of what I owned to the poor. Yet I felt nothing. What else is there? I received no joy at all. What was going on? This was supposed to be the climax of my Christian experience.

The joy and comfort that came in prayer was so uplifting. Pretty soon, I was weeping in my prayers and singing spiritual songs. I felt God's love very deeply.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Cor 13:3)

Then things began to change. Within the same week, there was a spiritual convocation at the True Jesus Church. During prayer, I wondered when they were going to stop because my mouth was getting sore. Then I was coaxed up to the front again for more praying in tongues! I went up to be a good sport, but I was tired of "praying in tongues."

At the front of the chapel I said a silent prayer in my heart, "Please help me, Holy Spirit." No sooner had I said it that a pulse went through my body. My tongue started rolling as fast as a fan, and my body was shaking and vibrating. The tongues I was praying were completely different than before and not out of my own doing.

I went back home to pray on my own. What was going on? I thought. Didn't I have the Holy Spirit before? I could not stop praying in the Spirit. The joy and comfort that came in prayer was so uplifting. Pretty soon, I was weeping in my prayers and singing spiritual songs. I felt God's love very deeply.

God's Assurance

I felt a deep connection with God in finding His church, and I felt very contrite about the time I had sworn never to ask God to help me ever again. These careless

words that I had said in the past troubled my conscience.

But one day, while I was distressed over this matter, I heard God's voice saying, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." I broke down in tears for a while. My Savior loved me still. Of course, it made sense. Why, after all, had He now given me His Spirit?

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." (Rom 8:15)

Suddenly, I began to realize what being a Christian is about. It is not about my giving to the poor, or evangelizing or raising my hands in worship. It was all about God. It was about me just belonging to Him. I have to belong to Him as a child belongs to his father and to abide in Him. If He wants to do anything good in my life, I will let Him do it and let Him receive all the glory.

Thank God, I was baptized in the True Jesus Church a year later. Though baptism may be the most beautiful experience of my life—the testimony of Him washing away my sins—I also feel great assurance in His voice: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." I truly know now that Jesus keeps His own to the very end no matter where they are, or what church they began in, or how they have messed up trying to seek Him.

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. (Jn 10:28-29)

And Paul also said:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

I can now say that the complete gospel is necessary for salvation. When I had walked across the street from the first church I attended and, as a teenager, started doing drugs, no one even tried to stop me. There was no power of God to help me overcome. And likewise, when my faith strayed away from the truth, no one could rescue me. I was just following the preaching.

I give tremendous thanks to God for preserving the True Jesus Church in the true faith, so that the members can continue learning His words and remain faithful to live in the Spirit. This church has not gone off on spiritual tangents, or tried to please God by her own means. He has kept her in His truth by His Spirit and His love.

I pray that we are able to continue to abide in Him until the end. Amen. ★

Our Church

As we read the New Testament, we see marvelous portraits of the church. The body of Christ, bought with His own blood. The spiritual temple. The assembly of the elect. The fullness of Him who fills all in all. Christ's beautiful bride.

From the historical narratives to the apocalyptic visions, from the doctrines of salvation to the pastoral directives, the church takes center stage in the divine plan of redemption.

Christ's church is also our church. We who have been redeemed by Christ are each a member of this living body. We all have a share in the glory that God has in store for her, and we have all been given a role to serve. Together, we take part in the Lord's great commission and in God's grand scheme for His creation.

The theme articles in this issue invite us to look once again at our church, both from a practical standpoint on the dynamics of church growth and from a spiritual vista on the true church's incomparable splendor. May these articles be a reminder of the immeasurable riches we have in Christ as well as a call to renew our commitment to our church.





The Lord's Church Is Unique

Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA

Put Aside Your Opinions

Modern denominations differ in many ways, and they all claim to be Christian and to honor the Lord Jesus. Yet the gospel shows that Christ planned and built just one church. Should Christianity be characterized by religious unity or by division? Does our Lord want one true church today, or should we approve and accept the existence of many divided denominations? Is one church as good as another? How many true churches are there?

In most areas of life, people consider it an advantage for something to be unique, uncommon, or unequaled. Sales commercials emphasize that their product is distinctive from other products. An antique is especially valuable if it is rare. Athletes are

especially honored if they win championships or set records.

In religion, however, many people consider it unacceptable, poor taste, or politically incorrect for a church to claim to be unique or unequaled. They object if members defend a church as being special or better than other groups. Some say, "One church is just as good as another. Why are you so intolerant and strict? We need to be broad-minded in religion. Don't criticize other groups. How can one little group be right and all the others be wrong?"

People want members of many different denominations to be acceptable to God, so they object if you believe otherwise. Unfortunately, instead of considering what God says about these subjects, most people base

THEME

their views on their own opinion, what a Christian preacher on the radio or television says, what they personally want to believe, or what their parents believed.

At this moment and for our purpose, let us put aside the opinions of men and examine what God says in the Bible about the character of the church that belongs to Jesus. When we do, we will also find the answers to other questions that many people are asking.

What are People Asking? Must We Obey All of the Lord's Teachings?

To understand the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus' church, we must begin by studying the fundamental importance of obedience.

Many people believe it does not matter much whether or not a church obeys Jesus. When evidence or proof is given that a church is somehow disobeying God's word, some people say this is irrelevant because the people in that church believe in the true God and love God, etc.

This is important to our study because, if Christ requires obedience, then that is at least one way that the church needs to be unique. But if disobedience can be overlooked, then there would be no advantage in being part of a church that is obedient.

In a world of religious groups that say obedience is not essential, does God expect His church to be unique by emphasizing the need for obedience?

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23)

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Eph 5:23-24)

The Lord Jesus is the head over all things to the church. The church must be subject to Christ, just like a body must obey the instructions of its head.

And in whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Col 3:17)

...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. (Col 2:19)

Since Christ is head of the church (Col 1:18), all we do should be done in His name; that is, according to His authority. We must "hold fast the head" by obeying Him instead of following human philosophies and traditions. "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt 15:9).

Our worship to God is in vain if we follow human doctrines instead of our Lord Jesus' teachings (cf. 2 Jn 9; Gal 1:8-9; Jn 4:24). For example, Sunday worship is a commandment of men, not God.

The Lord Jesus' church should emphasize obedience to her head. When a church teaches that we do not have to obey Jesus to be saved, that church is admitting it does not honor Jesus as her head! If a church obeys human doctrine, then men are her head.

In Matthew 7:21-27 we read that it is not enough just to call Jesus our Lord. We must do the will of the Father. If we do not obey Jesus' teachings, we are as

foolish as a man who builds a house without a solid foundation. Just as that house will not stand in bad weather, so our lives will not be acceptable in the judgment.

Clearly it is a serious mistake to think that obedience is not essential. Yet many churches deny the need for obedience. So one way the Lord Jesus' church should be unique is that it should honor Christ as her head by obeying Him.

The Lord Jesus is the head over all things to the church. The church must be subject to Christ, just like a body must obey the instructions of its head.

Are God's People in the Minority or Majority?

Amazingly, most people believe that they will be saved, and they like to think that the majority of other people will be saved. If that were true, then those who are saved would not be very unique. And if most people really were saved, then that would make the Lord's church very large. So people tend to reject small churches.

It is true that God has provided a plan whereby all men can be saved. He would be pleased if everyone would follow that plan and receive eternal life (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:3-6; Jn 3:16; Mk 16:15-16). However, we have seen that only those people who obey God's plan will be saved, and all others will be lost.

So should we expect the number of saved, obedient people to be large or small compared to the number who disobey? Are most people saved, or does being saved make one unique?

Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Mt 7:13-14)

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples... (1 Cor 10:1-6)

In 1 Peter 3:20 we read that in the days of Noah, only a few souls were saved—only eight out of the thousands alive. Men in general were extremely wicked and were destroyed.

Even among those who were God's chosen people in the Old Testament, God was not pleased with most of them, so they did not enter into the promised land but instead were left to die in the wilderness. In fact, of all the older generation who left Egypt and had been numbered, only two were allowed to enter the promised land: Joshua and Caleb (Num 14:28-30). All the rest died because of disobedience. This is presented by God as an example to us.

Today, if we believe our religious views are correct and we disagree with other people, many people will object. They will accuse us of intolerance and narrow-mindedness. To their way of thinking, the very fact we think we are right automatically proves we are wrong! Yet throughout

We should not expect God's church to consist of a majority of people in any community. Nor should we reject a church or a teaching simply because it is a minority or its views are unpopular.

the Bible, those who pleased God were unique in that they were in the minority.

In Romans 9:27 and 11:2-5 we read that in Israel, the number of people acceptable to God is frequently called a remnant, which is a small part of the whole number. In Elijah's day, that remnant consisted of seven thousand men. So today those who are God's true people are also a remnant.

Note that the number of obedient people in Elijah's day was considerably greater than in Noah's day or in Joshua's day. Yet it was relatively small compared to all the people on earth. The number of people who are truly acceptable to God varies from time to time.

We should not expect God's church to consist of a majority of people in any community. Nor should we reject a church or a teaching simply because it is a minority or its views are unpopular. The Lord Jesus' church is truly "unique" in that it will always be relatively small, and those who are members of it are truly "uncommon" (cf. Mt 22:14; Lk 13:23-25; Rev 3:4).

Will There Be Many Churches that Please Jesus?

There are many denominations that teach and practice different and contradictory faiths. They disagree in name, organization, plan of salvation, and worship. People want to believe that, in spite of

these contradictions and disagreements, many of these groups are acceptable to God. If that were so, then there would be no single unique church that is right.

We have seen, however, that to please God we must obey Him. Are the few people who obey God to be found in many different denominations, or is there only one unique church teaching and practicing one true faith?

In Matthew 16:18 our Lord promised to build His church—one church, not many. And true believers have been translated out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son—one kingdom, not many.

As stated in Ephesians 5:22-25, Christ is the head of His body, which is the church, just as the head directs a body and just as a husband is head of his wife. But a head directs one body, not many bodies. A husband is head of only one wife (with God's approval), not many wives. And so Christ is head of one body. There are "many members, yet one body" (1 Cor 12:20). If Jesus had many churches, He would be like a man with many wives. This would be spiritual adultery!

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (Jn 17:20-21)

Christ prayed for those who believe in Him to be one as He and His Father are one. Do He and His Father disagree and contradict one another about how people should worship, how people may be saved, or what church people should be members of? They do not, and neither should we, for we are to be one as they are one.

Religious division exists, but we must not condone or excuse it. Nor should we participate in error for the sake of unity. To do so would be to disobey God.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same judgment...Is Christ divided?... (1 Cor 1:10, 13)

Division is contrary to God's will. Is Christ divided? Does He give contradictory commands to men? Surely not, for if He did He would be a hypocrite! Since Jesus' commands are not contradictory, it is clear that when the practices of people conflict and contradict one another, then someone is not obeying Jesus.

Religious division exists, but we must not condone or excuse it. Nor should we participate in error for the sake of unity. To do so would be to disobey God (cf. Jas 3:17).

Whenever some people obey God and some people disobey God, division will exist between those groups, but the people who will be condemned for the division will be those who disobey God, not those who obey Him. (See 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Lk 12:51-53; Jn 10:19-21; Acts 14:1-4, 19:8-9, 28:22-25; 2 Jn 9-11)

We are all familiar with Ephesians 4:3-6. We should strive for unity based on the oneness of each of the seven things listed here. There is one body (church) and one faith, just as surely as there is only one God and Father.

To say there are many conflicting and disagreeing bodies, all of which are acceptable, would be as wrong as saying

there are many different gods, all of which are acceptable.

Nor can we say that the one body is made up of many different denominations, for the passage says that the one body must follow one faith, whereas many denominations follow many faiths.

There may be many different false gods, but there is only one true God. So there may be many different false churches and false faiths, but there is only one true church and only one true faith.

Note that this does not mean there is only one local congregation. In the New Testament, there were many local congregations of God's people, and there are also many today (Gal 1:2; Acts 8:1; 1 Cor 1:2; Rev 1:4, 11).

But these local churches should all believe and practice the same common faith (Eph 4:3-6; Jude 3; Tit 1:4). In this sense, the members of these local congregations are all members of the one true church, not members of many disagreeing, conflicting denominations.

Should We Rebuke Those Who Are False?

As we have discussed, people tend to think that obedience is not essential, and they think most people will be saved. This leads them to believe that we should "leave other people alone and don't criticize other religious beliefs." But we have learned that obedience is essential to please God and that most people are not obeying God.

Should God's people speak out and warn other people about the danger of

not obeying God? Should we rebuke the people in sin and urge them to repent? If we do, once again we will surely be unique, and once again we can expect people to dislike it!

But what does God say?

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim 4:2-4)

We should continually preach God's word, reproving and rebuking sin (i.e. warn against error). Why? Because we want to help people avoid the danger of departing from truth to follow error.

Those who obey God must contend with the wicked (Prov 28:4). They must not participate in sin, but must rebuke it (Eph 5:11). They must earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3). If they fail to do so, they themselves will stand condemned before God (Ezek 33:1-9). (See also Tit 1:9-14; 1 Tim 5:20)

Faithful disciples of Christ regularly preached that people needed to repent (Mt 3:1-8; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 17:30). But when a person repents, he must admit he has been wrong and must decide to change. So to preach repentance means to tell people they are wrong.

On almost every page of the Bible, examples can be found of apostles and prophets warning people, even religious people, when they were wrong. We should imitate their example (1 Cor 11:1; Heb 13:7).

In Revelation 3:19 we read that the Lord rebuked those who were wrong. Because Jesus loved people, He also reproved and chastened them when they were wrong. He testified that their works were evil (Jn 7:7). We should imitate His example (1 Pet 2:21).

[I]n humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:25-26)

This explains why we must correct people who are in sin and why such correction is an act of love. A person in sin is a captive of the devil; he will be lost unless he repents. If we teach him and he repents, he can be saved from death and have eternal life (Jas 5:19-20).

When we warn a child not to play with matches, sharp knives, or electrical outlets, are we being egotistical and self-righteous, or are we showing love for the child? So it is also an act of love to try to help people avoid sin and false teachings.

In John 3:20 we read that the main reason why people say Christians should not point out the errors of others is because they do not want their own errors (or the errors of their loved ones) to be pointed out. The truth hurts their consciences and makes them feel guilty.

This is not to say we should rebuke others out of self-righteous motives to exalt our own pride, to win an argument, or to prove we are right and others are wrong. But when we realize how important obedience is and that there is really only one way to please God, then and only then will we appreciate the impor-

tance of speaking out against sin and false teachings.

As long as we think people can be saved while they continue in sin, or as long as we think there are many different groups that please God, then we will see no value in warning people to cease from sinning.

When we realize the uniqueness of God's true church, then we see the value in warning people to turn from sin and become members of the Lord Jesus' true church. But this practice will make us even more unique, since most people do not do it.

Putting Things in Perspective

When we learn the teachings of God's word, then we understand that Jesus' church must be unique and unequalled. This does not mean we should deliberately try to be different just for the sake of being different. Rather, we should simply seek to diligently obey the Lord Jesus. But when we do, we will find that we are different from the many people who do not obey Him.

Again, we should want everyone to be forgiven of sins, correct the error of their false beliefs and enter the church built by Christ. Yet we should not be ashamed of the church if it remains few in number, nor should we think the smallness of the church proves there is something wrong with it.

Instead, we should recognize that our Lord Jesus said it would be this way. ★

The True Church Today

FF Chong—London, United Kingdom



The concept of church can be found in the Old Testament (OT) of the Bible. It was first designated for the people of God, as the Israelites congregated together for worship and especially when they were assembled for religious matters and in the hearing of the Law.¹

In the New Testament (NT), the word “church” has multiple meanings. Its root derives from the Greek word “ekklesia”, which means “a called-out assembly”—a community devoted to Jesus and to the radical lifestyle expressed in God’s word.²

This new life embodied in the spirit-filled and committed community makes the members different from the rest of the world.³ It is sanctified by the Lord and

refers to the believers themselves as opposed to a place of worship, as the English word “church” may suggest.

The first mention of the church can be found in Matthew 16:18: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church...” If we read this verse in the Greek text it will appear: “You are ‘Petros’, and on this ‘Petra’ I will build My church.” (Note: Petros is a fragment of the huge mass known as a stone.)

Therefore, it is Jesus on whom the church of God is founded.⁴ And the church here, as Jesus put it, is the one and only one. She is the body of Christ.

The Emergence of the True Church

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD’s house
Shall be established on the top of the
mountains,*

*And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.
Many people shall come and say,
“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of
the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
(Isa 2:2-3; Mic 4:1-2)*

Although the two most powerful prophets of the same era had long proclaimed this prophecy, the gravity of their message was not fully grasped because its fulfillment is to happen in the last days. An indisputable distinction was also made in the prophecy between the church of God (God’s mountain) and other churches (all the mountains and the hills).

Many generations after their time, the author of Hebrews revealed that this mountain of God was the church (Heb 12:22-23). Through this highest mountain, God would accomplish His many tasks—such as teaching, judging, rebuking and admonishing wrong doers.⁵

Some believe that the highest mountain refers to the apostolic church that is recorded in the Bible, and one compelling reason is that the church had the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

There are, however, two convincing proofs that suggest that this prophecy points not to the apostolic era but to another time period—the latter days prior to the return of Christ. In other words, God would re-establish His church towards the end of time, the time we are living in now, and this is the church that Isaiah's and Micah's prophecies pointed to.

First, the apostolic church was the only church against the pagan world at the time, but the prophecy highlights the comparison of the highest mountain with other mountains and hills. This makes the prophetic scenario more befitting the Christian world of today, where the true church has been established above all other denominations.

Second, ever since the death of the last apostle, history has witnessed the degeneration of the church. Secularism and heresies crept in and corrupted her, which led to the departure of the Holy Spirit. But the time would come that God's church would be revived and exalted.

I am not suggesting that the Spirit had stopped working altogether after the apostles and before the emergence of the true church, for the translation and canonization of the Bible point clearly to the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶ But one thing for certain is that the Holy Spirit did not work

in the way as when the apostles were alive.

Two Periods of Rain

In the Old Testament, the Lord promised that He would give His people the former and latter rains.⁷ These were prophecies regarding the two periods in which God will pour out His Holy Spirit upon believers.

The analogy of rain as the Spirit is taken from the climate of the land of Palestine, which is pretty stable year after year. There are two major rainy seasons in Palestine. The early rain comes in the autumn from November to January—this is the time for planting. The latter rain comes in the spring—between March and April and right before harvesting takes place.

Today, believers in the true church receive the promised Holy Spirit in the same way as the believers in the apostolic church. Therefore, we have now witnessed and experienced the coming of the latter rain.

The promise of the former rain was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out for the first time. This was the beginning of the apostolic church. But this period of former rain eventually ended with the prevalence of false teachings and the decline of the church. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit came to a stop.

Nevertheless, just as God promised in the Scriptures, He poured out the Holy Spirit once again upon believers in the early twentieth century and re-established His church, the True Jesus Church. Today, believers in the true church has received

the promised Holy Spirit in the same way as the believers in the apostolic church. Therefore, we have now witnessed and experienced the coming of the latter rain.

Since God has chosen to work in such a mysterious way, our aim is not to question, "If people did not receive the Holy Spirit between the periods of former and latter rains, how did they get to heaven during the 1600 years from the apostles until now?" Rather, our focus should be on how we can participate in the harvesting work during the latter season of rain at the emergence of the highest mountain.

The rainy seasons are visible signs of God's work; especially in the establishment of the church in both periods.

*I will make the lame a remnant,
And the outcast a strong nation;
So the LORD will reign over them in Mount
Zion
From now on, even forever. (Mic 4:7)*

The second half of this prophecy is not talking about the church in heaven but the church on earth, where the Lord will summon the lame and the remnant together. And the end-time true church shall reign with the Lord on earth with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit until He comes again.

The End-Time True Church from the East

Both the OT and NT Scriptures record prophecies regarding the emergence of the latter true church. The close association between "God working from the east and Zion" has been an important idea in the Bible (Ps 50:1-2).

The OT Prophecies

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. (Ezek 43:2)⁸

The True Jesus Church was first established in China, which is situated east of the land of Israel. She has the seal of the living God, which is the Holy Spirit—the voice of many waters (Isa 42:2ff; Rev 7:2). And the Holy Spirit confirms that she comes from God in accordance to biblical prophecies.

*Surely these shall come from afar;
Look! Those from the north and the west,
And these from the land of Sinim. (Isa 49:12)*

This is one of the commonly used verses to support the emergence of the true church from the east. To explain this prophecy, there are two fundamental questions to be answered: Who are the people from afar? And is the church implied in the prophecy?

The first section of Isaiah 49 provides the details of the coming and the works of the Lord Jesus. In particular, He is to be the light to the world (v. 6b), and He is to perform the work of redemption (v. 7-9). He will ease and smooth the way for men to come to Him (v. 11). Those who are gathered by Him will enjoy His abundant mercy:

*They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
Neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
For He who has mercy on them will lead
them,
Even by the springs of water He will guide
them. (Isa 49:10)*

“People from afar” are represented by the coastlands (Isa 49:1). In verse 12 of

There would be God-chosen ones in this land, and the prophecy transpired when the Holy Spirit established the True Jesus Church in China in 1917.

the same chapter, they can be taken to mean the people of two different time periods and who came from two different locations in history. This explanation is in accordance with the disclosed plan of God regarding the emergence of His church in the apostolic times and ours.

The first are “those from the north and the west.” (We should also bear in mind that the Bible land, Israel, is always referred to as the centre of the four corners.) The book of Acts clearly depicts how the church progressed from Jerusalem and Judea northward to Caesarea and Antioch. From Antioch, which was the springboard for the gentile mission, the gospel was preached westward to the end of the world, which was Spain at the time.

Second is the reference to the land of Sinim, which is a location that has no correlation with the land of Israel. This land of Sinim was the name given to the land of the Ching Dynasty in China.⁹

The Arabians and other Asiatics called China Sin, or Tchín; the Chinese had no special name for themselves, but either adopted that of a reigning dynasty or some high sounding titles.¹⁰

There would be God-chosen ones in this land, and the prophecy transpired when the Holy Spirit established the True Jesus Church in China in 1917.

By these two groups of people, both the apostolic church and the True Jesus Church, God shall bring comfort and mercy to His people and to the afflicted—those who come to believe in Jesus. This is the work God designed to be accom-

plished according to His own time (Isa 49:8).

The NT Prophecies

For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Mt 24:27)

Luke provides a similar account but does not indicate the direction of the flashing lightning (Lk 17:34). This prophecy is part of the answer given to the second of the three questions raised by the disciples in the Matthew account, concerning the sign of Jesus’ coming (Mt 24:3).

It has two pointers. First, it is intended to guard against believing anyone from anywhere who purports to be Christ in the time of great deception (Mt 24:26), which is one of the events in the days of the great tribulation. The deception can be so serious that even the elect would become victims of its snares (Mt 24:24-25). Second, it is a similitude used to denote the pace and unpredictability of the time of His coming (Mt 24:27).

This prophecy is more relevant to us than the disciples in the apostolic time, for immediately after the tribulation of those days Jesus will come (Mt 24:29ff). To explain it in relation to the appearance of the end time true church, we have to focus on the first pointer.

It is a sign by which the disciples then, and all the more we today, know where Jesus is, so that we may not be deceived. After the resurrection of Jesus, He is no longer in the flesh. He promised His disciples, however, that He would come in the

Spirit.¹¹ If the Spirit lives in them, they would know where Jesus is (1 Jn 3:24). Using the “one body and one Spirit” principle, we know that the Spirit can only be present in the body of Christ, which is the church (Eph 2:20ff).

From what is stated, we steadfastly believe that the Spirit abides only with the true church that comes from the east and spreads the truth westward. This church is where Jesus can be found. This explanation is accurate and biblical.

By preaching the truth, the church enables those who believe to have fellowship in the kingdom of God. Those who wish to know the truth must draw close to the one and only true church.

Elder John, in a vision, saw an angel from the east holding the seal of the living God, whom He had given the authority to seal His servants (Rev 7:2-3). This angel represents the church based on three clear indicators in the book of Revelation.

1. The angel ascends from the east, which is different from others in Revelation.
2. When the angel spoke, he did so in a collective sense: “..till we have sealed...” (Rev 7:3). The church, the redeemed believers, is the agent by whom the Spirit is given to those who come to believe and obey (Acts 5:32).
3. In the messages to the seven churches, the leaders of the church are addressed as the angel of the church.

This prophecy was given to strengthen the faith of the believers in the last days. This is more so to those who are still alive

before the unfolding of the seventh seal, and right before the outpour of the complete wrath of God. They must recognize that only those who are sealed by God through His church are given protection (Rev 7:14). Therefore, the church that has the seal of God must fulfill the prophetic requirement of coming from the east.

All the truths that we preach are based on the truth. Moreover, we have clearly seen that the emergence of the end-time true church is based upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets with Jesus being the cornerstone of this foundation.¹²

The Requirements of the True Church

The True Church and the Holy Spirit

The true church has the fullness of the Holy Spirit,¹³ and she emanates from Christ and embraces His fullness, which testifies to the divine presence in the church: “And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 Jn 3:24). Without the Holy Spirit, the church does not belong to God.

It is the Holy Spirit that makes the church He abides with the Jerusalem from above (Gal 4:26). The children, whom she gives birth to, are children of promise (cf. Gal 3:29; 4:28). Therefore, God will send forth the Spirit into their hearts. The Holy Spirit distinguishes us from other churches, just as God made a distinction between Sarah and Hagar. Unlike Hagar who was a slave, Sarah, the lawful wife of Abraham, gave birth to a child of promise. Likewise, God has chosen the church to which He gives the Holy Spirit—the true church.

The Holy Spirit also affirms the authority of the church as one sent by God. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples to send them out

on their mission. He granted them the authority to remit sins, but before they did so they were firstly told to receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22), who is a vital seal of divine sanction (Heb 2:3-4).

The true church is given the same sanction in order to perform her ministry mightily.

The True Church Has the Complete Gospel

The church that has the presence of the Holy Spirit preaches the complete gospel. The Lord Jesus said, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:13). The term “all truth” is important. It is not just recognition of the baptism of John (Acts 18:25-26); it is the complete gospel that God has revealed in the Bible.

The Bible is the ultimate standard of Christian faith, and only when the church follows strictly to what the Bible teaches can she then “rightly handle the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). She cannot alter the message to suit the times or the audience, and the truth must not be prejudiced by human suppositions. As Paul exhorts members of the community of faith, they “can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8).

The church is built on the foundation of truth—the saving word of God. She is the pillar and ground of the truth. She is also the venue where the complete truth is available.

The plan of God is such that the church reveals His manifold wisdom (Eph 3:10). She upholds all the essential teachings, not only the five biblical doctrines¹⁴ but also the teachings on Jesus’ second coming, the grace of God, the Bible, the one true church and the Godhead.

By preaching the truth, the church enables those who believe to have fellow-

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ship in the kingdom of God. Those who wish to know the truth must draw close to the one and only true church.

The Church Is Accompanied by Miracles

The presence of miracles and wonders in the true church is to attest that she preaches the complete truth. The author of Hebrews testifies how the message “was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will” (Heb 2:3-4).

When the imprisoned John the Baptist instructed his disciples to approach Jesus to confirm His messianic status, Jesus did not give him a direct answer. Instead, He pointed to the miracles He performed (Mt 11:2ff). Jesus’ indirect response indicates that the true church proclaiming the true message is given the authority to perform miracles, signs and wonders (Acts 2:22).

The Lord affirms the message preached by the True Jesus Church today, as He did to the disciples some two thousand years ago: “The Lord worked with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (Mk 16:20).

Evidence from the Prophets and the Apostles

These three crucial elements concerning the true church are firmly inherited in the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah: God shall teach those who are within His mountain.¹⁵ The presence of God on the mountain represents the abidance of the Holy Spirit in the church. This is in line with the teachings of Jesus: The Holy Spirit teaches us the truth (Jn 16:13). And these teachings are in harmony with the teachings of Paul to

Timothy, who proclaimed the church as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:16b).

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.
(Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3)*

The change of attitude, from offensive violence to noticeable meekness amongst those who flood to the mountain of God, confirms the miraculous and transformational work of God in their lives.

In the NT, the Lord has appointed various offices and given gifts to the church to testify to the authenticity of the church:

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administration, varieties of tongues (1 Cor 12:28).

The primary objective of appointing apostles, prophets and teachers is, on the one hand, to preach the truth. On the other hand, it is to defend the truth that has been given to the church so that it can be imparted, as it has been first given, from one generation to another.

When the truth is upheld, miracles will follow (Mk 16:17) to testify to the truth preached (Mk 16:17). When the church starts to expand with the mighty presence of the Spirit, more gifts will be bestowed upon individuals at the Spirit’s discretion to build up the church (1 Cor 12:4-11).

Obviously, the three requirements cannot be separated when the uniqueness of the church is discussed. They must be presented as a complete unit to form the essentials of the true church. None can be

taken in isolation of the others, if the true church is to be viewed the highest mountain in the circle of many mountains and hills. ★

1 Deut 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 31:30; Acts 7:38

2 cf. Col 1:18; Eph 1:22

3 1 Pet 2:9-12

4 1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:19-22

5 1 Cor 5:12; cf. 6:4

6 cf. Jn 5:17

7 Joel 2:23, 28-31; Zech 10:1

8 cf. Isa 24:15; Mt 24:27

9 The book of Isaiah by Edward J. Young, 1993, Volume 3, pg 282

10 The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the Old Testament, 1985, pg 1460, under the section of Jamieson and Fausset

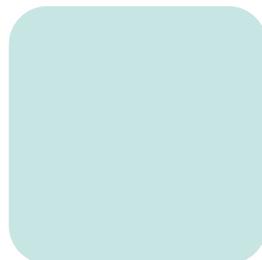
11 Jn 14:17, 23; 16:7

12 There are many verses in the OT, which expound on the prophecies concerning the True Church of the latter rain (Isa 49:12; Ezek 43:2; Amos 9:11). Jesus hinted in Matthew that the church would emerge from the east (24:27). Elder John was given the vision concerning the emergence of the true church on three separate occasions (Rev 6:1-2; 7:2-3; 19:11-16). Surely the white horse cannot be taken to mean the emergence of the apostolic church, as it was already in existence when the vision was received.

13 Eph 1:22-23; 2:20ff

14 Essential Biblical Doctrines, True Jesus Church, 2000

15 Mic 4:2; Isa 2:3



The Way in Which the Church of Jerusalem Grew (Part 1)

Holy Spirit Monthly—Issue 286

After Jesus' resurrection, He repeatedly appeared to the disciples for forty days. He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He also spoke about the kingdom of God to re-establish the weakened faith of the disciples.

Before Jesus' ascension, He especially instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit would empower them to be witnesses for the Lord in

Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world.

So according to Jesus' words the disciples gathered together in constant prayer. As Jesus had spoken, the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost and deeply moved the hearts of the disciples, and many Jews from abroad also witnessed this unforgettable event. There were about one hundred and twenty believers when the first church was established in Jerusalem.

Immediately following the downpour of the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up and delivered a magnificent speech. He used the Old Testament Scriptures and the miraculous signs of Jesus to explain how

God established Jesus as the Lord and Christ.

The Spirit deeply pierced the hearts of many as they came to realize the way to salvation. And on that day, three thousand were baptized and added to the fold.

One would foresee the onset of many problems in managing the believers, such as the lack of space for worship, and conflicts among people and such—especially with the exponential increase that they experienced.

But instead, the expansion of the church created a special style of spiritual living that brought harmony among the believers, who came from places all over Europe, Asia, and Africa (Acts 2:9-11). They became the seeds of the gospel and

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were significant to the birth of the gentile church later on.

Looking at our present-day church, we can identify many difficulties related to church growth, and if a church does grow there are other challenges in pastoring the members and administering the work of the church. Therefore, we need to observe and learn from the spiritual characteristics of the early Jerusalem church in order to benefit and edify the faith of the believers today.

The goal of our church should focus on how to revive the same spiritual qualities and lifestyle that once existed in the early church in Jerusalem. The remainder of this article will analyze these characteristics and how they are crucial to the development of the church.

Be Diligent in Learning the Word—They Devoted Themselves to the Apostles’ Teachings

After the Pentecost, faced with such a large number of new believers, the apostles actively pushed forward the work of teaching the members to break through their old beliefs and to truly understand the salvation of Christ.

Together, all the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and submitted to their authority—which laid a beautiful and solid foundation for the way of the truth (Acts 2:42).

A solid education in God’s word, and especially at the beginning phase of one’s faith, is a crucial factor for the development of the church as a whole, and it becomes a good motivation for the growth of all believers.

Build Up the Faith of New Believers

For a new Christian, especially one who has been converted from another religion,

he or she often continues under the influence of old beliefs, which can mire the growth of his or her faith. One such example in the Bible is the reaction of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai, where they took things into their own hands because of their impatience and reverted back to their worship of a golden calf (Ex 32:1-6).

Therefore, to ensure that every believer’s faith starts off on firm ground, the church should emphasize the teachings of biblical truths, because the Bible testifies about the Lord Jesus and possesses eternal life. Therefore, one should come before Christ to diligently study the Scriptures (Jn 5:39-40).

A solid education in God’s word, and especially at the beginning phase of one’s faith, is a crucial factor for the development of the church as a whole, and it becomes a good motivation for the growth of all believers.

Studying the truth should begin at the early stages of seeking the truth. The church needs to encourage seekers to learn from the example of the Bereans, who received the gospel with great eagerness and daily examined the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). This way, all who come to seek the Lord will recognize the need to rid themselves of all their immoral ways and humbly accept God’s words.

Over time, they will shed the newness of their faith and become strong and mature Christians—ones who can live out the truth and receive the blessings of the Lord (Jas 1:20-25).

Submit to Authority

The unity of the church leaders is also a key factor in the effectiveness of the work of teaching and spreading the gospel (Acts 2:1,14). Also, the believers should respectfully acknowledge those who lead them as men who must give an account to God (Heb 13:7).

Even though some leaders within the church may not be better than the believers in terms of their social status, education, or abilities, the message that they deliver is of the Bible and according to the truth, and it should be accepted not as words of men but God’s word, which is working in those who believe (1 Thess 2:13).

Among our predecessors, there have been many church leaders who have received spiritual authority from God. They might have been uneducated, ordinary men like Peter and John, but they displayed astonishing courage and were recognized as men who had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

God also used miracles and wonders to confirm the words they preached and to mark them as apostles (Acts 2:43; Mk 16:20; 2 Cor 12:12). How shall we escape if we ignore these testimonies because of our own personal prejudices (Heb 2:3-4)?

In comparison to these predecessors, the church leaders today in fact have more advantages. Therefore, they should put more effort into spiritual cultivation, prayer, and training to serve, in order to receive the same authority as the apostles and be worthy of the respect of believers.

Emphasize Holy Spirit and Truth

Every person who has received the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of Him is able to regard the priceless treasure that is this gift from God, and to feel the joy and wonderment of this guarantee of heaven.

Imagine the spiritual excitement of the Jerusalem church when they first experienced the Holy Spirit. Everyone must have rejoiced in praying in tongues and being immersed in the joy of the Spirit. It is just like what many of us have experienced before—in dance, in laughter and weeping, and in miracles.

The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of truth, and He comes to guide us into all truth and to reveal to us the things that are to come (Jn 16:13), for the Spirit searches all things—even the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10).

However, if spiritual experiences are not based on the truth, then it often leaves room for Satan to work. It causes people to become proud, allows the evil spirit to infect prayers, and even corrupts the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ to change the gospel (2 Cor 11:3-4). There are numerous examples of such incidents throughout church history, and they should serve as warnings to us.

Be Filled with Love—They Devoted Themselves to Fellowship

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

Here we can see how the early church displayed such a beautiful image of unity and harmony among the believers. They had fellowship with each other and lived according to the order of love. Not only did they comfort and help one another, but they also had all things in common.

This was not an institution of communism; rather, everyone voluntarily shared with one another what they had, based on their love for each other. They under-

Such fellowship of love tightly knit the hearts of the believers and resulted in the formation of a special spiritual bond. And great grace was upon them all—none amongst their midst was found lacking.

stood that their possessions were only entrusted to them by God and did not belong to them. So they were willing to offer according to the needs of each one.

Such fellowship of love tightly knit the hearts of the believers and resulted in the formation of a special spiritual bond. And great grace was upon them all—none amongst their midst was found lacking (Acts 4:32-35).

In modern society, many churches have become like the Ephesian church of the early days and have forsaken their first love (Rev 2:4)—becoming estranged from the church. They no longer feel they are a part of the spiritual family and naturally lose their connection with others. This is why the church needs to actively promote the establishment of a life of fellowship and encourage believers to show love and support for one another.

A Life of Fellowship

Philippians 2:1-2 provides us with a great setting of this kind of fellowship lifestyle. Fellowship allows us to receive consolation in Christ and to be comforted by His love. When everyone fellowships within the Holy Spirit, there exists an affection and mercy among the believers—everyone is able to be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one love. Apart from material things that we can share in fellowship, we ought to share the perfect life that we possess and eventually become one with God (Jn 17:21).

Today, our church life is a life of a larger fellowship. It is something that

every believer should devote himself or herself to in participation. No one can alienate themselves from this fellowship unless they do not belong to Christ and are not part of Christ's body.

Within this larger fellowship, smaller fellowships can be formed based on specific needs such as age, racial background, common interests, etc. These fellowships are established to address believers' varying needs.

However, they are all for the sole purpose of helping us learn how to live a life of community and to help us experience the spirit of love within the church. As members of one body, we can have communion with one another, learn to give, learn to receive, and learn to share in joy and suffering. Not only is each individual edified in love; ultimately, the body of Christ will be built up (1 Cor 12:25-27; Eph 4:16).

Have All Things in Common

Many believers have seen the needs of the church and made offerings of land, possessions, and great sums of money. They do this because they themselves have experienced God's grace. Some offer to help with the building of a new church structure, while others offer themselves to do specific work within the church. But all offer willingly and sincerely out of their love and gratitude towards God.

Apart from such love and generosity, every household's regular tithe offering, as well as the same type of offering as the widow's two small coins, are all great contributions that further holy work in

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church. After receiving these offerings, the church then effectively and efficiently utilizes them so that every member can share in them, which is the true spirit of “having all things in common” within the church.

What is the Bible referring to when it describes how the believers “gave to anyone as he had need”? Some suspect that the church was so eager for the second coming of the Lord at the time, that they no longer emphasized worldly pursuits. So they met together every day and stopped working, and everyone was living off of the offerings that were made to the church through the selling of their possessions.

The Bible does not detail exactly what happened, but even if that were the case, it must have been to fulfill God’s wonderful will so that the workers of God at the time could preach the gospel without worrying about their families.

When applying this description to the church today, it contains a special meaning. How can the church, based on various church plans and budgets, use the money that it receives from members’ offerings to fulfill the needs of different groups, fellowships, and the growth of each member within the church?

The church has the responsibility to utilize the resources it receives from members, to properly manage its finances, and to ensure that yearly work plans are implemented, so that the church is not advancing without a clear or constructive direction. Ultimately, everyone can enjoy the goodness of being in God’s household and be spiritually fed.

We are also reminded to “give to anyone as he has need,” for Christian fellowship is also about Christian caring, and Christian caring is about Christian

sharing. It is the responsibility of a spiritual group as a whole to take care of the members’ needs so that no one lives in poverty.

Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth, because only the kind of love that is accomplished by actions has true value (Jas 2:15; 1 Jn 3:18).

The Breaking of Bread and Prayer

The pursuit of the truth focuses on personal establishment of a genuine faith, and a life of fellowship of love emphasizes giving and receiving between individuals. But the most basic and precious thing about faith is how one establishes a close relationship with God.

A great spiritual power tied everyone closely together and helped the church operate smoothly and grow rapidly without losing harmony or direction.

To have a close relationship with God depends on how we fear Him and interact with Him through daily activities. These activities include singing hymns, praying with thanksgiving, worshipping at church, having meals with other believers, partaking of the Holy Communion, building good relationships with others, etc.

We can see how the members in the Jerusalem church devoted themselves to worship and lived a life of faith. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts—praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:46-47). A great spiritual power tied everyone closely together and helped the church operate smoothly and grow rapidly without losing harmony or direction.

Similarly, today’s church should also stress more than sermon preaching and teaching of the truth; she should emphasize helping the believers’ growth in body, heart and spirit, so they might know how to worship God in their lives and in every corner of society.

The church should emphasize the following:

1. A balanced and diverse style of worship

As we consider the way the members of the early church worshipped, we see that there were some who taught, some who gave testimonies, and some who sang hymns as they broke bread and prayed together. They also had long sessions of

service, and their service activities included many different styles. There were prayers and evangelism in the temple as well as fellowships in their homes.

In the same way, the church today should avoid inflexible styles of worship, especially when faced with diverse congregations in which people have different needs yet desire to have more interactions with each other. If church service only consists of unidirectional sermon listening, it is insufficient to satisfy people’s empty spirit.

Therefore, the church should make use of the regular scheduled service time and other annual events such as spiritual convocations and special services to plan different types of services that target different groups of people, and encourage every member to participate in the preparation of these events.

However, no matter what kind of service it is, preachers along with other ministers should lead the whole congregation in worship to create an atmosphere that is both reverent and joyful. Consequently, everyone who comes to church can naturally experience the true joy and love that “the Lord’s tabernacle is among the people.”

But there are also erroneous concepts that we need to correct. For example, some people consider eating and chatting in church unspiritual, so they always rush in and out of services and refuse to have meals and converse with other brothers and sisters.

Interactions between church members is part of our life of worship. As long as we are not gossiping, speaking things that are not beneficial to others, and we are not like the Corinthian church in creating divisions, arguments and mixing Holy Communion with regular meals (1 Cor 11:17-31), then God is among us in everything we do.

God is willing to share His blessings with those who belong to Him and love Him. In Old Testament times, people were able to eat and enjoy their offerings after they gave sacrifices to the Lord (Deut 12:6-7). Some suggest that in such a corrupted social culture, where recreational activities are polluted with immorality, the church can provide a healthy recreational environment for the believers, where they could enjoy activities without having to find them elsewhere.

Therefore, apart from planning and pursuing a higher quality of worship, church leaders should not neglect to create a healthy and pleasant church environment so that believers can have more opportunities to mingle with others and unite in God’s love.

2. The importance of both church and family service

After many Jews were converted to believe in the Lord, they no longer participated in the rituals of sacrifice in the temple, but continued to join in the regular temple prayers and preached the gospel. At the same time, they also held less formal, freewill services in their homes to substitute for the rituals in the temple.

Even though we also focus very much on chapel worship today, and we have many regular services scheduled, we should also not neglect the importance and value of having family services.

Family services provide a more informal and friendly atmosphere, and allow believers an opportunity to be more relaxed and open about their feelings and thoughts. This format is especially suitable for fellowship sharing and getting to know visitors and those who seek the truth. Also, family services provide a conducive learning environment for all.

During family services, we can focus on becoming good mediators between the church and our unbelieving family, friends, and relatives. At the same time, we can make use of this opportunity to train more pastoral workers by giving them a place to practice the things they learn. Furthermore, it is an excellent way to allow the believers to know and understand more about each other, and help them learn how to live a life of love.

Each local church can divide the members into small groups according to their geographical locations, and arrange to have family services in each area. If there are families with special needs, then the church can arrange to have special family services to address their needs.

In addition, having family services in each other’s homes is a good way to

establish family altars. It gives the children an opportunity to learn about the words of God from a young age, so that their faith can grow steadfastly. It also helps to nourish good family relationships.

A healthy and complete life of faith must be a balance of a more formal and reverent worship at church, as well as a more informal and dynamic worship at home. Neither should be neglected. ★



The Way in Which the Church of Jerusalem Grew (Part 2)

Holy Spirit Monthly—Issue 287

The apostolic church was a blossoming church full of growth and power from on high. There were spiritual newborns every day, and this spiritual household added great numbers to its fold.

Why was the work of evangelism so mighty at that time? How many evangelical services did they hold? How much human and financial resources were accessible to them? Which famously eloquent evangelist preached in a way that moved so many? We should all have a good understanding of the factors that contributed to their progress.

Similarly, being the present church, we have expended so much effort and resources, holding various evangelical services every year and utilizing every tool in the Internet and media front to spread

the good news, yet why can't our numbers reflect our efforts and compare to the apostolic church?

Perhaps human hearts have been hardened, or maybe societal advancement no longer recognizes religion, and all the while Satan has upped the ante on his devious works! Nevertheless, the church must continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, despite these ruinous hurdles.

In the second part of this article concerning the way in which the Jerusalem church grew, we address the principal reasons as to why "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Be Passionate in Preaching Let God be the Prime Mover

Much of today's church expansion efforts depend on modern technology as well as man's effort and wisdom. As a result, we tend to overlook the most essential

element, which is God's personal involvement and accomplishment.

Paul once said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor 3:6). We may be willing to put in the effort to plant and water, but do we humbly rely on God for direction and power? Or have we lost sight of God's place in our ministry? We may be willing to offer money and resources, but do we in fact love ourselves more than we love God?

The growth of the church in Jerusalem serves as a reminder to us that preaching the gospel is based not on a superficial endeavor but on the strength of the church's inner spiritual life. When the life of Christ is fully manifested through the church, it is able to win people's hearts. Therefore, as the disciples gathered daily, enjoyed fellowship meals, praised God and lived in peace with all, God Himself caused the church to grow. While this

model does not exclude other forms of evangelical efforts, it does underscore the fact that the spiritual vitality of the church itself is the driving force of spreading the gospel.

Grow with Quality Faith

The meaning of the verb “saved” is three-fold: the beginning of salvation, the continuation of salvation, and the result of salvation.

While the author of the book of Acts, Luke, noted how “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved,” he specifically pointed out the necessity of quality faith in those who believed. This continuation—to grow with quality faith, to take root in the spiritual church, and to be a mature believer—is paramount to every member’s salvation.

Therefore, to ensure a winning result requires the dual effort of the spiritual church group and the individual believer to: 1) pursue after God and 2) to continuously experience the fullness of salvation from beginning to end.

Such continuous diligence was rewarded as the Holy Spirit filled them and worked among them so that as the number of saved souls multiplied, so did the quality of each one’s faith. And in such a utopian milieu, there was no lack of rejoicing.

Preach at Every Occasion

In the original text, the terms “being saved” and “added” meant that there were people continuously being saved following the Pentecost. This tells us that the work of evangelism in the early church was not intermittent pockets of effort but a daily practice integrated in their regular worship.

Learning from the exemplary efforts of the early church, we can also examine

the work of evangelism in the early church was not intermittent pockets of effort but a daily practice integrated in their regular worship.

the condition of worship and preaching in our own local area.

Sometimes, we may develop tunnel vision in the ways in which we move forward with God’s holy work. Continuing with the example of evangelism, we are prone to associate regular church services with catering only to internal members, whereas evangelical services are meant for nonbelievers and visitors.

Therefore, we seldom invite friends and acquaintances to our regular services, and when evangelical services take place, members feel it’s not an event meant for them. The fact is, however, any form of service or worship can serve the two purposes to pastor internally and to evangelize externally.

Regular church services provide one of the best opportunities to plant spiritual seeds. Some of them are sown earlier, some later, but all of them wait for God’s time to grow (Eccl 11:6). Therefore, if we can place emphasis on every opportunity of worship to share God’s word, then people who are added to the flock and being saved will be a continuous occurrence.

Share the Workload and Divide the Labor

As the number of believers grew, the administrative workload within the early church inevitably amplified.

Not only did the apostles have to devote time in prayer and preaching, they also needed to oversee the daily distributions of food and the needs of all the believers. Gradually, the workload swelled

to such an unmanageable proportion that some believers started to complain about being overlooked.

Fortunately, the apostles were able to identify and resolve the problem immediately, and they came up with appropriate solutions to prevent the church from unraveling.

Confront the Issues

Wherever there is a place for people to gather, problems will pop up, and this is the case even for a spiritual gathering. The most critical factor is whether the church has the courage and resolution to face the problems and put in the best effort to properly handle every crisis.

Problems that the church faces today are similar to the ones that the Jerusalem church encountered. These problems are not merely the result of cultural differences, but they are also the result of administrative imbalance.

Every church consists of people from different backgrounds, languages, and levels of education, and it is inevitable that some small groups will form within the church. But if believers cannot bond and unite under the Holy Spirit and love of God, then dissensions and factions will seep in and separate the church.

Therefore, church leaders should learn from the apostles’ spirit to actively seek improvement and be willing to lead and guide the believers to search for solutions together (Acts 6:1-7). They should not mix their priorities and be led by the problems, which result in a loss of spiritual and practical direction.

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Instead, church leaders need to bravely and calmly tackle the root of the problems, wisely and creatively find the best solution, and strive forward to the right goal. It is more important to do the right thing than to do things right.

Delegate the Responsibilities

As the church starts to see an expansion, she will see the expansion of administrative tasks, too. If at this point the heavy workload falls on the shoulders of a few select workers, especially ministers, then they will quickly and easily run out of fuel and become ineffective and inefficient. Even the apostles of the early church recognized this dilemma and voiced such a concern: “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables” (Acts 6:2).

This is not to say that the works of food distribution or waiting tables are less noble and insignificant tasks, nor is it degrading for preachers to wait on tables. All kinds of services are equally important and none better than one or the other.

Someone who is filled with the Holy Spirit should faithfully carry out each of the different church works, and the only difference between the various tasks is the required gifts and calling that are dependent on and unique to each worker (cf. Rom 12:4-8).

In fact, the apostles were at first in charge of all these works, but it turned out that these growing responsibilities were impinging on their fulltime duty to preach the gospel, and this was not congruent with the original intent of God’s calling for them.

Recognizing this dilemma, the apostles gathered the believers to make the appropriate delegation of work among them. Such delegation allowed equal opportunity for every servant of God to fulfill his

own responsibilities within God’s house—each according to his level of faith and gifts received.

Unfortunately, we see many churches today heading in the opposite direction, and we need to recognize this problem and learn from the solutions passed on to us by the early church. Presently, instead of seeing the correct allotment of church work, we see that there is a confusion of responsibilities within the church.

Instead, church leaders need to bravely and calmly tackle the root of the problems, wisely and creatively find the best solution, and strive forward to the right goal. It is more important to do the right thing than to do things right.

It is not that preachers are too busy to have spare time to serve the believers; rather, they are too busy with the wrong kind of services. As a result, preachers spend most of their time and energy on tasks that can be shared by other ministers, and this can lead to a loss of focus in their intended duties of evangelizing, giving sermons, counseling, and training church workers. In addition, some of our preachers are so overworked that they put their health in jeopardy.

There are many possible factors that lead to such a predicament. Perhaps the preacher is exceptionally gifted and is capable of many things; perhaps the church council and the congregation dote and rely too heavily on their preachers and insist that they attend to every project within the church.

Eventually, such an imbalance in the distribution of church work will take a toll on everyone. Our preachers and pastors will run out of steam, the members will cease to grow because of the lack of opportunities to serve, and all of these will affect the development of the church.

The church needs to establish a proper system that clearly defines the responsibilities of each worker, so that every minister and council member can become good helpers to our preachers. Indeed, such wise handling of duties will be a spiritual and physical blessing to the entire congregation.

Choose Quality Workers

When the apostles realized that there was an acute problem with how the church was being managed, they immediately gathered all the disciples together to discuss it, and the proposed solution pleased everyone. Resolutely, they chose from among them seven exceptional brothers to take care of the administrative tasks of the church.

The apostles also prayed and laid hands on these new workers and, very quickly, their problems were resolved. It was because they were able to tackle and find a good solution to their problems that the number of believers continued to increase without being affected by an internal glitch.

Choosing suitable workers to take care of different church works is an imperative factor affecting the development and progress of the church. In addition to training new workers and knowing how to use them effectively, it is also important to appoint good and suitable church ministers.

Look at the current situation within the church: we observe that either local churches do not have enough ministers, or

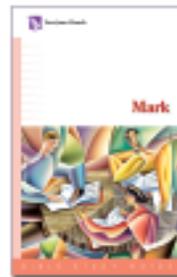
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the ministers who oversee the congregation are too advanced in age and no longer capable of handling certain matters. A possible reason for such a dilemma is that the current system of appointing minister is still not complete.

Another observation is the lack of opportunities for good youths to grow in training to serve the Lord. Either because their opportunities are limited or because the church does not spend sufficient effort to identify and train them, many eventually turn their hearts towards the world and focus their time elsewhere.

Therefore, being able to effectively appropriate human resources within the church is a key necessity to church growth. Every local church should carefully re-examine their current system and find ways to improve and refine their distribution of church work and training. The goal should be to utilize and mobilize every member of the church and involve them in holy work—all the while improving the quality of each one's faithful service to the Lord. ★



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Rise

Samuel Kuo—Champagne, Illinois, USA

I signed off-line and I sat dejected at my desk.

Fortunately, I was about to begin Bible reading for the evening.

It turned out to be a taxing May—mostly from the growing number of personal problems and conflicts I had been hearing from church members about church members. Usually these disheartening and ugly situations are disclosed to me to request my prayer, and sometimes for advice. But every time, I wind up leaving the conversation with the burden of a heavy heart.

This time was no exception. My mind raced and questions flew.

“How can this happen in the true church?”

“What happened to our church’s glory?

Where is our glory now?”

“Isn’t the glory of the second temple greater than the first?”

“I’ve long heard about the early days, but where is it now?”

Sure, perhaps these are spiritually immature questions, but they are very real nonetheless—questions that have often surfaced in my thoughts. Questions—especially in the recent past—that became noticeable fissures in my faith.

“When will this church prosper?”

“When will this mountain be exalted above all hills?” (Isa 2:2)

That week, I had been revisiting the book of Ezra by the suggestion of a friend, so I continued onward with chapter three that night.

After many years of captivity, the Israelites had returned to their motherland and were beginning to rebuild the second temple. As I read, I couldn’t help but notice the increasing relevance of the passage to my reoccurring despondent thoughts.

I was stopped cold by verses 12 and 13:

But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted with joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

My first thought was, "Why are these older Israelites weeping? Were they tears of joy because the second temple had begun construction? Or were they tears of sadness? And if so, why?"

I quickly skimmed to the bottom of the page of my study Bible. The comment read:

Fifty years after its destruction, the temple was being rebuilt (536 B.C.). Some of the older people remembered Solomon's temple, and they wept because the new temple would not be as glorious as the first one. (NKJV Life Application Study Bible, 784)

Really? I did not see a biblical reference included for support.

Not trusting this interpretation, I wondered where I could find the truth. Thankfully, a couple moments later, God reminded me of a verse in Haggai 2:9: "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former."

I quickly turned to that chapter to look at the context. Sure enough, I found verse nine, but then started to skim upward, and then very plainly:

The Lord said, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it is this not in your eyes as nothing?" (Hag 2:3)

Wow, they really wept because the second temple did not compare.

It was at this moment that I began to weep. It seemed like God was addressing the very doubts that had so often clouded my mind. I felt the Spirit churning and stirring within me. As the tears poured, I began to feel comfort.

They went through the same, exact, experience. Yet we find God faithful to His word.

In time, the second temple was more glorious—two times taller than the first (cf. 1 Kgs 6:2; Ezra 6:3). Furthermore, along the emotionally rough journey, prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to encourage and to stir up the hearts of the Israelites, since they were eventually so disheartened they stopped temple reconstruction at the first sight of trouble (cf. Ezra 4). Indeed they wept because the second temple did not compare, but God spoke through Haggai and Zechariah with dawning encouragements like these:

"The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts, "And in this place I will give you peace," says the Lord of hosts. (Hag 2:9)

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," Says the Lord of hosts. (Zech 4:6)

It seemed as if God was telling me that night, "Everyone goes through this. Child, just have faith in Me. If I can do this twenty-five hundred years ago, I can just as well do the same in due time."

Our "foundations" may seem just as unglamorous now, especially in comparison to olden days. We will sometimes be unsightly, and there will be weepers, as in that generation. But assuredly—the true

church will rise. We just need to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7).

After finishing the chapter, I rose and prayed and went to bed with much thanksgiving and a renewed faith. ★

Songs of Homecoming

125

1 THOSE WHO TRUST IN THE LORD ARE LIKE MOUNT ZION, WHICH CANNOT BE MOVED, BUT ABIDES FOREVER. 2 AS THE MOUNTAINS SURROUND JERUSALEM, SO THE LORD SURROUNDS HIS PEOPLE FROM THIS TIME FORTH AND FOREVER. 3 FOR THE SCEPTER OF WICKEDNESS SHALL NOT REST ON THE LAND ALLOTTED TO THE RIGHTEOUS, LEST THE RIGHTEOUS REACH OUT THEIR HANDS TO INIQUITY. 4 DO GOOD, O LORD, TO THOSE WHO ARE GOOD, AND TO THOSE WHO ARE UPRIGHT IN THEIR HEARTS. 5 AS FOR SUCH AS TURN ASIDE TO THEIR CROOKED WAYS, THE LORD SHALL LEAD THEM AWAY WITH THE WORKERS OF INIQUITY. PEACE BE UPON ISRAEL!

Song of Ascent, the Sixth

Those who trust in the Lord
Are like Mount Zion
Which cannot be moved...

I have read these words,
committed them to memory.
They speak a mighty message.

Greatly though
do they elude my touch.

For I am not
one likened
to Mount Zion.

I am not a Psalmist's muse,
a serene or natural scene:
not the tree
lush and unwithering,
not the stream
profuse and unceasing.

I am perhaps
a dusty hill
the wind levels flat,
a meandering brook
the dry bank laps.

I see my brothers and sisters,
standing stalwart and tall –
they are a range
of mighty Mount Zions,
casting vast shadows
across the plain I am.

My spirit shrinks
at the contrast.

And I wonder
why I even try
if every new word,
if every new sight
effaces the faith
I aim to hold.

I search
for a foothold.

All I see are words.

From a child,
I have heard and read
Your acts of creation
O Lord.

How You spun the mountain, the sea
out of unbreathing air
into a world of daunting dimension,

And how two thousand years ago,
You sparked light and life
against the darkest, hardest hearts.

Yet, for all this knowledge
of creation, all I can say is,
*I have heard and read,
I have heard and read.*

But Lord,
do not let me
lisp this refrain
much longer.

As I find entrance
into the birth of every new day,
may I see also
Your creation in my life.

Create the mountain
Create the tree
Create the river
Out of the nothing that I am.

Let me intone Your words,
believe Your acts,

that my unsteady voice
may sing back those songs of life

You've played
since the beginning.

125

1 WHEN THE LORD BROUGHT BACK THE CAPTIVITY OF ZION,
WE WERE LIKE THOSE WHO DREAM. 2 THEN OUR MOUTH
WAS FILLED WITH LAUGHTER, AND OUR TONGUE WITH
SINGING. THEN THEY SAID AMONG THE NATIONS, "THE
LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR THEM." 3 THE LORD
HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US, AND WE ARE GLAD. 4
BRING BACK OUR CAPTIVITY, O LORD, AS THE STREAMS IN
THE SOUTH. 5 THOSE WHO SOW IN TEARS SHALL REAP IN
JOY. 6 HE WHO CONTINUALLY GOES FORTH WEeping,
BEARING SEED FOR SOWING, SHALL DOUBTLESS COME
AGAIN WITH REJOICING, BRINGING HIS SHEAVES WITH HIM.

Song of Ascent, the Seventh

When the Lord brought back the captivity...

I did not know I was free.

One envisions returns as idyllic events:

Families holding hands,
singing and skipping on a
dusty, homeward road,
cheeks flushed with freedom, or—

a line of serene, holy men
humming their way up the temple steps,
black robes cascading behind them,
faces placid and assured.

For different people
are different returns
though the destination is one.

I think of Paul and his
Damascus moment,
when light exploded his darkness
and scales fell from his eyes.

Without a doubt,
Lord, You can be grandiose,
but are not always so.

For my part,
I waited for the marvelous:
I waited for You to come
in a burst of blinding light.

I waited to hear shackles
clank definitively at my feet.

I even waited
for Your still, quiet voice,
which, I thought,
should still be pretty loud—
since it is Yours, O Lord.

But while I was waiting,
I realized
You had come.

For here I am,
the most petulant pilgrim,
standing in the midst of these hills.

127
 1 UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, THEY LABOR IN VAIN WHO BUILD IT; UNLESS THE LORD GUARDS THE CITY, THE WATCHMAN STAYS AWAKE IN VAIN. 2 IT IS VAIN FOR YOU TO RISE UP EARLY, TO SIT UP LATE, TO EAT THE BREAD OF SORROWS; FOR SO HE GIVES HIS BELOVED SLEEP. 3 BEHOLD, CHILDREN ARE A HERITAGE FROM THE LORD, THE FRUIT OF THE WOMB IS A REWARD. 4 LIKE ARROWS IN THE HAND OF A WARRIOR, SO ARE THE CHILDREN OF ONE'S YOUTH. 5 HAPPY IS THE MAN WHO HAS HIS QUIVER FULL OF THEM; THEY SHALL NOT BE ASHAMED, BUT SHALL SPEAK WITH THEIR ENEMIES IN THE GATE.

I was hesitant to come,
 yet I came,
 Reluctant to praise,
 yet I did,
 Resistant to accept your grace,
 yet I have.

And the pervading emptiness that
 pressed against my heart
 has long disappeared,
 though I never knew it left.

Such things would not be possible
 if You had not come.

And so,
 I know,
 Lord, that You have come.

And so,
 I know,
 Lord, that You are here.

Song of Ascent, the Eighth

Unless the Lord builds...

What a mound of rubble
 we are bound to form.

This conclusion
 grates hard against
 my spirit.

For why can we not
 be Your children in
 our own right and effort?

I strained to the utmost
 to reach You,
 attempting reform on
 every inch of my life.

I pushed all energy
 to please You,
 finally breaking
 my strength, my will,
 my voice.

At last, I sat hopeless
among my own wreckage,
not touching, not seeing,
not sensing You
in any real way.

My mind knows
You are here.

The daily miracles
You breathe into my life
declare, You are here.

And yet,
I only stand, staring out
into the retreating horizon of
Your presence.

My heart
still needs to journey
a thousand miles of
spiritual distance.

The bridges I've built
with clay, with wood, with iron
with all the tools, with all the ways
within my arm-stretched reach
fall short.

I've tried to touch You as I know how.

But Lord,
what is needed to bridge spiritual space
but the invisible strength of faith?

I say, Yes
I must reach through faith
but faith dances lambent,
glossed, in my mind.

Love, hope and grace
are other abstractions
my heart cannot begin
to imagine to envelop.

These are spiritual materials
made to span spiritual distance
but how can I acquire them,
O Lord, and
how can I build?

I search my soul,
and where is faith?

I scavenge for Your love
but what is that in me?

I yearn for hope,
yet hope stays as desire.

I mine for what I do not possess.
I harvest empty every time.

But You,
O Lord, have said
all things are possible.

And somewhere
within me,
I do believe
You can gift what
I now have no hope of holding.

If it is Your will,
You can gift them.

Gift them,
then, O Lord.

Gift them,
that I may touch You,
see You, sense You,

that I may gaze up,
and with a child's relief say,
My Father.

CREATIVE WRITING

128

1 BLESSED IS EVERY ONE WHO FEARS THE LORD, WHO WALKS IN HIS WAYS. 2 WHEN YOU EAT THE LABOR OF YOUR HANDS, YOU SHALL BE HAPPY, AND IT SHALL BE WELL WITH YOU. 3 YOUR WIFE SHALL BE LIKE A FRUITFUL VINE IN THE VERY HEART OF YOUR HOUSE, YOUR CHILDREN LIKE OLIVE PLANTS ALL AROUND YOUR TABLE. 4 BEHOLD, THUS SHALL THE MAN BE BLESSED WHO FEARS THE LORD. 5 THE LORD BLESS YOU OUT OF ZION, AND MAY YOU SEE THE GOOD OF JERUSALEM ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE. 6 YES, MAY YOU SEE YOUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN. PEACE BE UPON ISRAEL!

Song of Ascent, the Ninth

Blessed is every one who fears the Lord,
Who walks in His ways.

Why is it, Lord,
the simplest messages
are the hardest to believe?

Shall I wax like Solomon
and observe with wizened voice,
*I have seen those who fear and
those who walk with the Lord
yet suffering and unblessed?*

The fate of the righteous
troubles me.

I am no brave
biblical hero.

I do not like persecution.
And when I am reviled,
it is not my first inclination to bless.

Why, yes,
I am moved
—almost to tears—
when the apostles rejoice
they are counted worthy
to be flogged in Your name.

And yes, I speak
unflaggingly of Paul
when he gives thanks
in all circumstances.

Let faith briskly march on the page
in its emblazoned-lettered path.

But should some of Your grit-edged
blessings stride right into my life,
Lord, I assure You,
my rallying cry will
soon be rendered mute.

I know Your ways
surpass the physical,
soaring above and scaling
beyond the strata of the world.

Yet, here is the bare fact:
I struggle for the spiritual
being as physical
as ever.

In plain dumb wonder
of Your ways and blessings,

my eye alights on a seed,
a sapling just rooted,
uncurling into this
immense world.

And I think,
this is it:

All I am
is a seed,
You've created.

All I am
is a seed,
I will bury
deep
within the mystery of
Your word.

And so I simply ask,
let me be the seed,
blind perhaps to
how life grows,
but stretching out
sure and steady
to the world around,

to the sun and soil
You have so
amply provided.



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

Christian Living

A *Christian Living* article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives. Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A *Bible Study* explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives. Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A *Doctrinal Study* examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs. Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An *Exhortation* encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith. Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A *Testimony* recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader. Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Word, Wordperfect, ASCII text) to manna@tjc.org, or send hardcopy and disk to:

Manna
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Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or
Phone: +1-714-533-8808
Fax: +1-714-533-8878

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 & Editorial Calendar

Issue #52

Theme: Spiritual Renewal

Articles due: May 31, 2006

How do we become spiritually renewed, and what is the process of becoming a new creation? What does the apostle Paul teach us about renewing our spirit, and why is it so important in these last days?

Issue #53

Theme: Dealing with Calamities

Articles due: August 31, 2006

How do we deal with the possibility that calamity may strike us at any time? What lessons or messages does God want us to learn? How do the people in the Bible resolve their calamities?

Issue #54

Theme: Overcoming Temptation

Articles due: November 30, 2006

Why is it important to overcome temptations in our lives? How can we identify and overcome them by relying on God and not ourselves? What constitutes as relying on God and relying on ourselves? What spiritual blessings and benefits await us if we strive to avoid temptations?

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

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide, except for He/Him when referring to God/Jesus.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

The One True God was manifested in the flesh. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, was resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the only True God.

Holy Bible

The Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible are inspired by God and are therefore the only authentic scriptures which testify to the Truth.

Church

The True Jesus Church was established by our Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (the Latter Rain) and is the revival of the True Church of the Apostolic Days.

Salvation

Salvation is given by grace through faith. However, it is necessary to rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness and to keep the biblical teachings of honoring God and loving humanity.

Baptism

The Baptism of Water is the sacrament for the remission of sins and for regeneration. The baptist must already have received baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit. The baptism must be immersion in natural, living water and must be administered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the candidate's head facing downward.

Foot Washing

The Washing of Feet is a sacrament which enables one to have a part in the Lord and teaches mutual love, holiness, humility, service, and forgiveness. The sacrament of the washing of feet must be performed in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to all newly baptized members. Mutual washing of feet may be practiced when necessary.

Holy Spirit

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for entering heaven; speaking in tongues is the evidence of having received the Holy Spirit.

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 may have eternal life and be raised on the last day. This sacrament should be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice should 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 redemption and with the hope of eternal rest.

Judgment Day

The Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven on the Last Day to judge all people; the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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