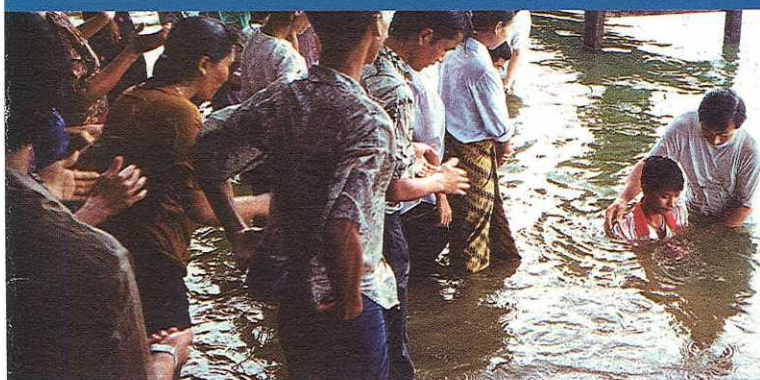


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SERVICE TO THE LORD



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Preface

Only when Christian faith has been substantiated, can it be enjoyed. The realisation of faith is, according to James, a golden rule of 'practical faith'. In Christian history, multi-faceted ministry has a dynamic expression in one key word: service. This spirit of service has been underlined by a maxim of Francis of Assisi. In his willingness to offer himself as an instrument of the Lord's peace, the altruistic monk would take love, pardon, and faith as remedies for hatred, injury and doubt. As he would also hope, where there were despair, darkness, and sadness, let hope, light, and joy prevail. To manifest the love of God, this maxim crystallises the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ: I have come to the world not to be served, but to serve and to become a ransom for mankind.

Serious believers and ministers of God have ennobled 'service to the Lord'. They willingly contribute time, money, and energy, simply because they love God and the body of Christ. They work with others to fulfil the basic task of church ministry at two levels. Locally, they participate in chapel cleaning, food preparation, or visitation to home or hospital. In their all-out effort, they help enhance the work ethic and brotherly love. The function of a church in worship and general work is thus maintained. Globally, they fulfil the Lord's great commission in evangelism. They participate unflaggingly in domestic and foreign missions.

Service to the Lord underscores the underlying spirit of stewardship. In the parable of talents recorded in Matthew 25, Jesus Christ commends the two 'faithful and good' servants, but condemns the 'wicked and lazy' one. A worker of God must be faithful and diligent, but it is equally important to be morally and spiritually sound, perceptive, and fruitful. What is wrong with the third servant is his total lack of creative stewardship. The lazy steward does not violate any moral or legal conditions by storing up the entrusted talents, but he is lacking in vision, truthfulness, and assiduity. Mishandling God's assets because of one's presumptuousness is a grievous wrong. Doing so renders the talents unproductive. The wicked servant is deservedly punished.

The parable of talents prompts us to reflect upon the genuine need of church work today. Needless to say, it is imperative to pray for spiritual fullness and the endowment of wisdom and power. But the church in general needs visionary and creative leadership. People entrusted with ministerial duties must be Spirit-filled, morally laudable, and capable of identifying problems and offering solutions. In setting long and short term goals, they should plan strategically and solicit concerted effort. While relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, effective planning with feasible goals and objectives are highly desirable for establishing new churches and outreach. The International Assembly, national, and local organisations must seek ways to develop human resources and a service network for global and local ministry. With the participation of more people equipped with appropriate training and spiritual qualities, co-ordination among and mobilisation of churches will improve. We must strive towards more effective, less expensive, and more productive organisation. We must also strive to overcome the off-cited incompatibility between spiritual excellence and professionalism.

Let us all pray that workers and ministers receive abundant spiritual gifts, wisdom, and fortitude for the glory of God. Despite self-denial and suffering, serving the Lord is rewarding. As the Bible states, our labour in the Lord is not in vain. Indeed, heavenly rewards are great.

Service, Suffering & Salvation

The Gospel of Mark depicts a series of scenarios that deeply perplex us. While travelling through Caesarea Philippi, Jesus revealed His Messianic secret for the first time to His disciples. He told them He "must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk 8:31). In view of this tragic end, He solemnly advised them to continue to be His disciples, deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him (8:34). The disciples, however, seemed unaware of the seriousness of Jesus' revelation.

As wandering missionaries, Jesus and His disciples kept travelling and came to Galilee where Jesus again predicted His Passion. The disciples "did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask Him" (9:32). They were, in dramatic contrast, arguing about who was the greatest amongst themselves. Jesus at that moment reproached them and preached that "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (9:35). The disciples were still ignorant of what their

Master had instructed them and were not sensitive to the relationship between Jesus' eventual death and this resurrection.

So when they were approaching Jerusalem, Jesus for the third time foretold His imminent destiny, intending to awake the unenlightened students (10:32-24). Again, we read that the disciples failed to heed their Master's instructions. Instead of realising the need to be servants, they were contending for the future glory which, as they understood and anticipated, their Master would bestow upon them as a reward of simply being His followers (10:35-41).

In disappointment and with sadness, Jesus again pronounced to the disciples, "... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (10:43-45).

As we read these passages what immediately strikes would be the stubbornness and insensitivity of the disciples. What kind of people were they?

Why would Jesus select them as His inner-circle followers? Did He not pick them from among a great multitude after long hours of prayer? (Lk 6:12). Were they worthy of being His successors? If they did not know Jesus' salvific life and death, what was the point of gathering around Him? Jesus must be spiritually lonely, surrounded by such a group of ignorant and immature students! If we were they, we would have behaved much better! We would not have competed for leadership in a time of impending crisis! We would have understood Jesus' mission and followed Him to the end!

Maybe. Maybe not. It is not the intention of the Gospel of Mark to ridicule or belittle the Twelve Disciples. Rather, it depicts the situation of universal humanity more than the particular disciples. Were we the Twelve, we might have behaved exactly like them or, even worse, we might have failed Jesus more miserably.

Jesus was born into a poor family and raised in the insignificant Nazareth (Jn 1:46). No one in His neighbourhood had expected Him to achieve anything spectacular (Jn 6:42). It was common understanding that only the rich, the famous and the powerful accomplished great things, and Jesus belonged to none

of these. Although His disciples were chosen from the many, they were also of low status, being mostly fishermen (Lk 1:16-20). They did not follow Jesus in order to give away their meager possessions or to save others from a poorer situation than theirs. They were the lowly and the very poor who followed Jesus for gain. The strong should save the weak. The disciples thought that Jesus, with His healing power and eloquence, was strong. He would bring them a good fortune and elevate them to a happier and brighter state which they were not able to achieve by themselves.

Jesus, however, acted against the disciples' wishes and instructed them otherwise. In the first place, He came to the world not for fortune, power or glory. He was keenly conscious of His mission and knew that He came to serve, to suffer and even be killed. That He repeatedly conveyed this message to His disciples illustrates His self-awareness. Based upon this understanding, He taught what true discipleship means. One has to give away all things, to take up one's cross, and to face all kinds of tribulations, even death itself. It also means that one has to serve and to be least among all humankind. This was indeed a difficult message to accept. Who would trade glory for suffering, life for death? No wonder after hearing Jesus, the rich young man's countenance fell and

he left sorrowful (Mk 10:22). Likewise the disciples were astonished, exclaiming, "Then who can be saved?", if the actualisation of the true discipleship remained the only way to the final, heavenly reward (10:26). This is the paradox we find in Jesus' teachings. But as Jesus Himself testified, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (10:27).

The way God saves humanity contradicts our human understanding. It is not by means of our intellect or wisdom that we can probe into God's mystery. Rather, it is through Christ crucified, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23) that God reveals His saving grace. It is neither the powerful nor the noble who can more easily reach God. On the contrary, God prefers to choose the weak and the lowly, bestowing upon them more blessings. So in the matter of salvation, what we are humanly proud of does not count. It is always God who takes the initiative, and when He does, He "subverts" our logic and intellect.

What Jesus exemplified on earth manifests God's way of salvation. In order to save, He humbled Himself. He demonstrated God's power not through

His divinity but through His humble humanity. Therefore, while His disciples were quarrelling for leadership, He reminded them as their Master He assumed lordship not by giving command but by serving them (Lk 22:24-27). He was lowly and gentle in heart (Mt 11:29). At the Last Supper, to show that He loved His disciples to the end, He washed their feet. Then He added, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). What He emphasised was that service, and even suffering, are the source of saving power. That He came to this world, took the form of a servant, emptied and humbled Himself, and obeyed unto death on the cross demonstrates how God wants to accomplish salvation. This is the mystery of God.

The way of God's salvation is from the "bottom up". He wants to save the poor, the weak and the foolish. And He does that through what seems to be poorer, weaker and more foolish. When He reaches the lowest point, His saving power manifests, pervasively and mightily.

To be exalted by God, one begins with serving. Many admirable personalities in the Bible earned their lofty status by service.

We should be reminded that the heavenly angels who always elicit our marvel and love are not God's creation for beauty show. Rather, they are "ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation: (Heb 1:14). The apostle Paul assumed his apostolic authority not because of his worldly pedigree but because of his faithful service to God (1 Tim 1:12). One of the qualifications for being church leaders, such as the elders and the deacons, is the willingness to serve (1 Tim 3:1-5, 8-13; 1 Pet 5:3; Acts 6:1-6). They gain the congregation's respect from being good examples themselves, as well as from contributing to the enhancement of the general spiritual welfare.

We read the passages in the Gospel of Mark about the anxious Jesus and His inert disciples from a critical distance, hence fully aware of where the disciples' blindness lie. But reflecting upon ourselves, we might easily have made the same mistake. Do we not always come to the Lord asking for more grace even though we have already received much? Do we not sometimes take pride in the Christian identity because it might bring us a sense of honour or even privilege? How many of us would think that when the term "Christian" was coined in the early time

(Acts 11:26), it connoted a strong sense of depreciation? We certainly would like to draw near to Jesus not for loss but for gain, wouldn't we? Actually we very much resemble the Twelve Disciples!

Just like the early Christians, not many amongst us are wise, strong and powerful in the worldly sense. But by God's grace and love, we are called to be His co-workers to realise His salvation plan. Very often we tend to think that if we can be "empowered", such as by gaining more knowledge, achieving a higher social status, securing more money, reorganising the church as a more effective group, utilising more advanced mass media, etc, we can easily and quickly carry out God's salvation. In a secular and competitive world, this kind of idea seems reasonable enough. But examined under Jesus' teaching, it simply misses the point. What God demands most is our willingness to serve and suffer for Him; everything else is minor. God knows that we are weak and lowly, but that is not a hindrance to the completion of His saving work. It is exactly our weakness and lowliness as well as our recognition of them that God would use for His divine purpose. As long as we are willing to contribute whatever gifts we have received to the church community, God's work is closer to completion (1 Pet 4:10). In the kingdom of God, service accomplishes all things.

*Tsai Yen-Zen
Taipei, Taiwan*

ALL
AUTHORITY
IN HEAVEN
AND
ON EARTH
HAS BEEN
GIVEN TO
ME

When questioned about our commission, many of us readily quote the Lord's instructions in Mt 28:19-20, to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." But if we study this quote carefully, we would notice that it is conditional and dependent on the preceding verse 18 - because "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me", [namely, Jesus], "go therefore and make disciples of all nations ..."

In our service to God, we may encounter seemingly insurmountable obstacles from within and without; and even receive threats to our very lives. We need strength. But living amidst great social and economic progress, we may have forgotten the source of our strength.

*How Did Jesus Receive
Such Authority?*

If we study the four Gospels, we would realise that Jesus only indicated the presence of such authority after His resurrection. Why? The apostle Paul provided the answer in the Phil 2:5-11 when he described how the Lord Jesus "though in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

Not only that, even as a human being, He humbled Himself to the extent that He was willing to die on the cross for humanity. Because of this, God exalted Him and bestowed upon Him a name "above every name" At this name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The Lord Jesus has taught us a lesson in humility and service. If the church wishes to progress and experience the power and authority of God, her members must learn from Jesus and serve with humility. It is not sufficient for members to be equipped with biblical knowledge or possess great academic knowledge and good social standing. What is important is that their daily actions and their church participation manifest the lowliness and humility of Christ.

This biblical teaching may well go against the very essence of secular leadership skills. To develop the latter, we are encouraged to be assertive, to always speak our mind and to do things our way. But in the church, if we truly wish to serve God and want Him to accept our service, we have to be humble and to acknowledge that we are but unworthy servants who are only discharging our duty (Lk 17:10). After all, the authority rests with Jesus and not with us.

The early workers understood this principle. That was why God worked with them and manifested His authority through them. Consider the healing at the Beautiful Gate. Peter knew that it was Jesus who had the authority to heal the lame man

(Acts 3:6, 12-16). Rightly so, he credited the miracle to Jesus. In Acts 4, we see how Peter and John boldly defended their healing of the cripple; Peter proclaimed the sovereignty of Jesus, stating categorically that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). His audience was clearly astonished by such courageous words from an uneducated fisherman. Peter's recognition of God had given him the courage to defend his faith.

In Acts 5:29-32, we see again how the faith of the apostles gave them great courage and strength to stand by their conviction, despite fierce opposition from the religious leaders of that time. Peter's defiant statement "we must obey God rather than men" could have cost him his life. But he knew that life was in God's hands; even if he were killed, surely God would receive him in the heavenly home. So, he continued to boldly preach the gospel all the days of his life.

From the episode of Bar-Jesus the magician, Paul's response shows that he too had this recognition. He rebuked the magician saying "the hand of the Lord is upon you ..." (Acts 13:11). The episode of the slave girl in Acts 16:16-18 also reveals Paul's acknowledgement of God's authority.





It is important that in our service to the Lord we have the same recognition as these early workers. Otherwise we would become demotivated whenever we face difficulties in our ministry; and develop inferior complexes, thinking that we are not eloquent, lack secular education and the necessary leadership skills. These factors are not critical. What is critical is our faith towards God. If we truly believe that the Truth is given by God who has the sovereign authority, then we will know that He will give us strength. In many cases, church progress is hindered not because we lack the ability, but because we fail to believe in God's power and authority. This is one obstacle that everyone needs to overcome.

Think of the people of Israel in their rebuilding of the temple. The older generation wept when they saw the wilderness that was the site for the second temple. Surely it paled in comparison the grandeur of King Solomon's temple. But the Lord encouraged them to work and reminded them that He was the Lord of the universe and promised them that the "latter splendour of this house shall be greater

than the former" (Hag 2:9). All they had to remember was that work was accomplished "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zech 4:6).

Today in our service, we may form committees and hold many meetings but what is more important is our ability to rely on God, our recognition that spiritual warfare requires spiritual weapons, that God's work should not be accomplished by man's methods but by God's power.

Paul's life of ministry was not an easy one (2 Cor 4). Yet towards the end, he revealed to Timothy the secret of his successful missionary life: "the Lord stood by me and gave me strength" (2 Tim 4:17). No one, including Paul himself, could have physically seen that Jesus was with him. But Paul knew, because he walked his life "by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). Since Jesus was with him, he could do all things in Christ who strengthened him (Phil 4:13). In our life of service, we need to possess such faith too. We in the True Jesus Church are the Christian soldiers of the end time. We must be equipped with such faith to be able to launch out into the world to fight the good fight for Him. As we journey through our life of faith, we have to constantly remind ourselves of Jesus' assurance that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." Since we have been chosen by Him, what is there for us to fear?

*Adopted from a sermon by
Yang Shyh Kwang (Los Angeles)
in Singapore*

Spiritual Discernment



“And it is my prayer
that your love
may abound more and
more, with knowledge
and all discernment,
so that you may
approve what is excellent,
and may be pure and
blameless for the
day of Christ, filled with
the fruits of righteousness
which come through
Jesus Christ, to the
glory and praise of God.”
(Phil 1:9-11)

Paul remarked that through religious training and the study of the truth, a Christian should progress in his love. Relying on the Lord, he will be able to bear the fruits of righteousness and actively practise Christian love. The growth of such a love in tandem with one’s spiritual maturity will bring glory and praise to the Lord.

In his prayer, Paul clearly delivered an important message: Love should be rooted in spiritual knowledge and discernment. We need the wisdom from the Lord to love with spiritual discernment. Love alone without discernment may turn us from the will of God and hinder the Lord’s work.

I. What is undiscerning love?

“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men' (Mt 16:21-23).

Peter was loyal to his master. His love for Jesus seemed greater than the others. Why then did Jesus rebuke, rather than praise him after he had demonstrated his love and concern?

Peter believed that his Lord was capable of preventing this affliction. Thus he, Peter, would make every effort to help, if necessary. What Peter displayed here was genuine affection and loyalty. Unfortunately, while trying to show his concern, he failed to comprehend the essence of Jesus' words and to exercise spiritual discernment. Meanwhile, Satan grasped the opportunity to exploit Peter's imprudent affection and tried to diminish Jesus' determination to head for Jerusalem. It became obvious that the more such an affection was displayed, the greater the obstructive force to hinder the plan of salvation. Without spiritual discernment, good intentions turn out to be stumbling blocks to God's plan.

Those who would be righteous in today's world are often bewildered by the constant change of social and moral values. In the matter of marriage, divorce is often justified on the grounds of love, i.e. the absence of love for one's original spouse

and often a new-found love for someone else. People question why they should be bound to a 'loveless' marriage and answer that they have a 'right' to happiness in their lives. The church must be aware of subtle shifts of morality such as this and she must never relax her beliefs to accommodate human flaws. Since creation, God has wanted man to honour the sanctity of marriage (Heb 13:4). His will remains inalterable even though the practice of repeated marriage is prevalent today. Any church that tolerates such a fickle attitude toward marriage or condones this licentious practice is accepting adulterous behaviour and perverting the truth. This is not compassion but rather an obvious example of undiscerning love.

II. What is undiscerning faith and zeal?

"And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with Him. And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking, when a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to

Him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only" (Mt 17:1-8).

Peter underwent a dramatic experience which ranged from the joy of seeing the transfiguration of Jesus to the awe of hearing the voice of God. Witnessing the glorified Jesus and the appearance of two venerable patriarchs of Israel must have exhilarated Peter. Impelled by his religious zeal, he wished to build three individual booths for them. Unfortunately, his faith and fervour were not complemented by spiritual discernment. To Peter, these three transfigured were great and admirable leaders. He probably wanted to serve all of them with equal respect; forgetting to distinguish the Lord Jesus from the other two religious leaders. God reminded Peter through the voice in the cloud to solely concentrate his faith on His beloved son, Jesus.

When faith is not rooted exclusively in Jesus, deviation from His teaching will follow. For example, in today's Christian arena, emphasis is placed on the credentials and reputation of the evangelist rather than the gospel and truth. Many Christian publications and videos go into great detail about the preacher's family life, his likes and daily activities

before conveying the actual message. So the audience may just be overwhelmed by these spiritual superstars and fail to distinguish between faith in a celebrity and faith in Jesus.

Peter's zeal on the Mount of Transfiguration was based on an undiscerning faith. The more intense such devotion, the worse the obstruction for the preaching of the gospel. Such indiscriminate eagerness will not elevate one's spirituality. Instead, it will most likely create a haze for others in search of the Lord.

Similar events of undiscerning devotion which impeded the progress of holy work can be found in the book of Acts. While Paul was preaching to the gentiles, some Jewish believers were so zealous about the traditions of Judaism that they excessively stressed the necessity of circumcision and followed Paul everywhere to affirm the practice (Acts 15:1). Such religious devotion not only hindered the progress of the gospel but also destroyed the essence of Jesus' grace.

Today, such a lack of spiritual discernment continues to exist. Take for example the banners we see on the corners of busy streets. "We are all sinners."

"Believe in Jesus and be saved, or else be condemned!" Though the messages are accurate, lack of proper explanation makes them read like threats and curses. These negative statements would unnecessarily annoy the general public. In contrast, warnings and reminders softened by kind-hearted explanations from the Bible demonstrate Christian concern for the spiritual welfare of others. Without a clear altruistic motive, stern admonition can have a negative impact on the public's perception of Christianity.

The task of visiting is an important part of tending the flock. Often, the purpose of this work is to counsel absent believers. Out of zeal, certain church members would actively participate in this task. However, without proper training, some members of the visiting team may speak inappropriately or behave impolitely. Zeal is not the only criteria when carrying out divine work. Such indiscretion may even nullify the effectiveness of other workers.

III. What is discerning love and zeal?

"When the days drew near for Him (Jesus) to be received up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51).

Our Lord Jesus came to this world for one purpose. Throughout His life, He worked diligently to achieve it. And that was Jerusalem. To Jesus, Jerusalem was a dreadful place where He was to be condemned to the agony and anguish of the crucifixion in order to atone for our sins; and to consummate the task of bringing salvation to humankind. It was however also a place where He brought glory to the Father and was glorified (Jn 12:23; 13:31).

For this glorious purpose, Jesus knew that He had to experience unspeakable torment. Recognising the purpose and resolved to bear the suffering, His steps toward Jerusalem were never hesitant nor faltering. Spiritual discernment motivated Him to demonstrate a divine love that was unwavering. About 2000 years have passed and Jesus' unreserved love still deeply touches our hearts.

"Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given Me?'" (Jn 18:11)

How did Jesus manifest His divine power and love? He countered Satan's temptation with scriptures, calmed the sea, performed numerous miracles, healed the sick, cast out evil spirits, and even raised

the dead. Ultimately, He demonstrated this unyielding love by taking the bitter cup placed before Him.

With His power, Jesus could have easily avoided these dangers, including the capture in Gethesemane (Mt 26:53) and the crucifixion on Golgotha (Mt 27:38-40). But He chose not to exercise these privileges. Motivated by divine courage and discipline, He chose to accomplish the noble plan of salvation. He was spiritually filled with such sound discernment that nothing, not even the sacrifice of His own life, could alter His determination.

The author of Hebrews encourages us to "leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, with instruction about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement" (Heb 6:1-2). Constantly increasing our spiritual knowledge will help us to know and love the Lord.

Paul shared the same belief. He said, "Be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col 1:9-10). In short, if we truly know, then we will truly love and truly believe.

Our church is the body of Christ. We ought to reflect the virtues of Jesus - pure, glorious and full of love. This love should originate from the thorough understanding of the truth of salvation, rather than impulsive affection. Through the church, God is "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" and what "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:8-11) is. A church with spiritual discernment will not only have abundant love, but will be able to provide guidance to the correct path. Being members of such a church, we should constantly ask the Lord to grant us spiritual vision so that we can plan for the future. As individuals, we should strive to know the will of the Lord and work to achieve this will.

May the true love of God abound!

K C Tsai
Toronto, Canada

「Set your
house in order,
for you
shall die
and
not live.¹」

A Lesson from Hezekiah's Life



“**W**hat immediate thoughts would race through our minds if we receive such a message from the Lord? To Hezekiah, it was so shattering that he broke down and wept bitterly. Immediately, memories of his faithful service to the Lord surfaced as he pleaded with Him². Indeed, Hezekiah had been a good king who served God faithfully and revived the faith of the people³. God’s forewarning of his impending death was, therefore, special grace to a faithful servant, for how many in history have had the blessing of knowing when they would depart? Ironically, instead of appreciating this special grace, he felt as though God had cursed him. Instead of preparing to meet his Lord to receive the rewards of his labour, he wept bitterly.

Though once a faithful servant, Hezekiah resisted the will of God over this

matter. God relented and extended his life for 15 years⁴. But why was Hezekiah unwilling to leave? Surely it was not because he had been unfaithful and was thus unsure where he would end up? Was there any work yet undone? Was it his people that he could not bear to leave?

Unfortunately, it was not any noble reason which prompted Hezekiah to resist God's will for him to depart. His additional 15 years were a far cry from the former decades of his life. Instead of devoting the precious time to accomplishing more for the Lord, glorifying God and edifying man, Hezekiah squandered his extended life glorifying himself. When some ambassadors from Babylon visited him, God tested what was in his heart,⁵ and he failed the test. He did not attribute the nation's peace and prosperity to God. Instead he took the opportunity to exalt himself by displaying all the treasures he had acquired, and in so doing, incurred God's wrath.⁶

Suddenly the reason for Hezekiah's reluctance to die became clear. If he had had to die, his greatest regret would not be any unaccomplished task of the Lord, but rather, his unsatisfied ego. He had spent much effort reviving his people's faith and strengthening his nation. By God's grace, he had accomplished this

arduous task. Yet just when he thought he could enjoy the fruits of his labour, he received the untimely message of his impending death! He did not understand and was totally unprepared. He had, for all his life, walked in line with the will of God. Yet over the matter of his death he adamantly resisted God's will.

Not surprisingly, the additional 15 years of his life were hardly in line with God's will. He did more to incur the wrath of God than to win His favour. He lived for himself rather than for God. Though he had pleaded so vehemently with God and received the special grace of another 15 years, he ironically squandered every minute of it!

Hezekiah's life has indeed left an important message for us. Do we assume, albeit subconsciously, as we retire to bed each night, that we will surely be able to greet dawn the next day? Have we ever considered that each new day is indeed special grace from God? If the Lord were not willing, none of us can boast of living another day or plan to do this or that.⁷ The message to Hezekiah of his impending death is also relevant to us today since all our days are numbered. In fact, we could have died yesterday. We could die any time now! Hence we must view each new day as a special God-granted extension of our lives. But how have we conducted our

grace of God, the additional day He adds to our lives? How would we react if we receive a similar message as Hezekiah?

If we know that we would die very soon, we will probably realise that we have squandered much of our time on things that do not really matter. The movie ticket for which we spent hours queuing, the round-the-world tour which we had taken much pains to plan, the coming exams that had burdened us so much, the wealth we had exhausted so much energy to accumulate, and the career which we had devoted our lives to build - all these would suddenly become of no value. More so, the petty argument with our spouse or the irreconcilable difference with some church brethren would become meaningless. Our salvation which we have taken for granted, the bad and unspiritual habits with which we know we cannot meet the Lord, the work in church which we never have time to accomplish, our loved ones who are yet unsaved, the friends which we repeatedly tell ourselves we will preach to the next time we meet! Our minds would probably be plagued by this unending train

*But how have we
conducted our lives?
Have we also squandered
this special grace of God,
the additional day
He adds to our lives?*

of thoughts. There is just too much that we should have done! In deepest remorse and regret, our hearts would probably cry as loudly as Hezekiah. With all sincerity, we may plead with God to extend our lives, and we will surely re-examine the way we live, and devote our time to things which really matter.

Indeed God has already heeded our plea continually with each new dawn that we greet. Each new day is an extension of our lives which God has granted just as He had to Hezekiah. The only difference is that Hezekiah was given another 15 years whereas we may be given more or less. Yet the number of years is not important. What is important is how we use this special grace of God. Hezekiah squandered the additional 15 years of his life satisfying his personal ego. How do we deal with our lives?

To an unbelieving, dying artist, his greatest regret may be an unfinished masterpiece, and (his only) wish, an extension of his life to be squandered on applying the final stroke of the brush. Likewise, a dying novelist may seek to extend her life only to squander it on the concluding passage of her novel. As God continues to extend our lives today, let us examine what really matters. Let us devote God's special grace to matters which He has appointed us to accomplish; just like Paul, who chose to remain only because it was more needful for the believers,⁸ though he was ready and desired to depart to be with Christ, knowing and believing that it was far better.⁹

1. 2 Kings 20:1
2. 2 Kings 20:2,3
3. 2 Kings 18:1-5
4. 2 Kings 20:4-6
5. 2 Chron 32:31
6. 2 Kings 20:12-18;
2Chron 32:25
7. James 4:13-15
8. Phil 1:24
9. Phil 1:23

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The LORD'S Pruning

F *The young tree, its trunk not quite stiff, arches gracefully in the wind. Its slender branches spread upward, and hints of blossoms peek out among the tender leaves. It basks in the warmth of the sunshine, revelling in the strength it receives from the sun's rays. Suddenly, a crack rips the air as a pair of sharp clippers snap off the tip of a branch. The clippers reach for yet another appendage, this time cutting deeper and taking off almost one-third of the branch. The gardener continues on with his job until a significant amount*

of withered leaves lie on the ground and most of its branches end in stumps.

As the satisfied gardener walks away, he is confident that, come spring, the tree will produce more leaves and blossoms. Perhaps, even some fruits.

Presently, however, the tree slumps a bit, for the garland of leaves no longer crowns its head and blossoms cease to adorn it. It sits in silence; it does not understand... **┐**

At first look, the act of a gardener's pruning defies logic. Why would you cut what you want to grow, or strip what you want to flourish? However, the gardener in his wisdom cuts off the unwanted parts of the tree - the decaying leaves, a mouldy

branch, and even some "good" parts to make it appear neater. The gardener foresees the greater potential of the tree - a thriving, strong and rooted tree. And he accomplishes this in part by pruning.

In the same way, the Lord foresees our potential to become objects of grace, beauty and, ultimately, perfection. Our Lord Jesus has said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). This is not a lofty ideal that the Lord has set for us to gaze wistfully upon; it is a direct command. Since it is so, the Lord has given us the means to accomplish it, and He will help by "pruning" us. He is the gardener who cuts off every branch "that bears no fruit...and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will bear more fruit" (Jn 15:1-2).

"Self-Pruning"

The Lord's pruning may come in various forms, one of which is "self-pruning." The Lord has equipped us well with the tools to prune ourselves. His Word and the Holy Spirit are effective devices which we can use. Through His Word, we can see a clear reflection of ourselves. It

helps us to understand which areas need to be cut off and which need more care. The author of Hebrews describes the word of God as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

In addition, the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to look in this spiritual mirror and to correct ourselves. Paul understood the power of the Holy Spirit, saying, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7). The Holy Spirit residing in us is not a dormant being; He is not an inert "ticket" we keep in our pockets until the day we reach the heavenly gates. The Holy Spirit is God's own life-changing, life-giving Spirit if we choose to let Him fill us, teach us and change us.

"God's Pruning"

If we fail to use these God-given tools to prune ourselves, pruning may come in other ways - namely by God's own hand. God may use a sudden turn of events in our lives - sickness, natural disaster, loss of a job, etc.- to remind us that we are not on the right track. Jonah, who was swallowed by a big fish as a direct result of disobedience, is a classic example of this fact. Three days and three nights in the belly of the fish effectively changed his attitude.

"Peer-Pruning"

Sometimes, however, God's discipline is not always as obvious as being swallowed by a fish. In fact, God's discipline often comes in ways we would never expect - through the people around us. We often overlook this type of "peer-pruning". This kind of pruning is the hardest to recognise and to accept. It is easy to accept chastisement from God above, or we may choose to better ourselves - but discipline from our peers? Chastisement from the people around us? That may be a different story altogether.



Can we see the Lord's discipline in a parent's rebuke, or in a suggestion given by a church brother or sister? To take it one step further, can we accept the harsh words or criticism given by someone whom we don't particularly like or respect? We are often blind to the possibility that God may be using the

people around us to correct, mold and discipline us. "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Prov 27:17).

One of the greatest and most obvious obstacles to accepting "peer-discipline" is pride. This self-defence mechanism, which

exists in all of us, protects us from hurt and wounded egos. So the first and most natural reaction when confronted with wrongdoing is often denial, either to others or to ourselves: "No, I didn't mean that..." or "You don't understand..." Another immediate reaction could be blame: "He pushed me to it. If he weren't so annoying..." or "I was under a lot of stress at that time. I wasn't myself..." We look everywhere and to everyone for the cause of this surely displaced criticism. But seldom do we look in the mirror.

"Peer-Pruning"- An Example

Although it may not be the most obvious type of discipline, the effects of "peer-discipline" can be great. It was peer-pruning that awakened David to his grave sins of adultery and murder. From his example, we can learn to recognise peer-discipline, to accept and to change our lives so that we may be more pleasing to the Lord.

After securing his kinship, David's faith slowly began to decline. No longer fighting the Lord's battles, he lived an idyllic life of luxury, lounging on his bed until sunset and taking strolls on his roof. His decline in faith culminated in adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. At this time, God used Nathan to confront David with his serious sins.

After Nathan told David the parable of a rich man who stole a poor neighbour's only cherished ewe lamb, David still did not recognise himself as the offender. In fact, he wanted to put the rich man to death. He did not recognise the Lord's discipline through Nathan's words. Many of us, like David, are oblivious to our own sin. We often pick at the specks in others' eyes, while we ourselves have enough planks in our own to build our small raft.

When Nathan saw that David still did not understand the parable, he bluntly said to David, "You are the man!"

Let us now note David's extraordinary reaction. David did not deny, nor did he blame and make excuses. The words of Nathan pierced David's conscience and these heartfelt words left his mouth: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:1 - 13)

If we remember, David had a lifetime of experiences in the Lord. He exhibited his faith in God as a youth by killing Goliath. He composed the psalm that proclaims, "The Lord keeps me in the palms of his hand." He displayed his righteousness by refusing to kill King Saul. And now, God had made David king over all Israel.

However, David did not use his past righteousness or his current position as a badge of pride. Instead, in humility and repentance, David accepted the harsh words of correction which he knew to be true.

Very few of us today can accept peer-discipline as David did. Many times, a correction must pierce through layers of pride, blame and excuses before it reaches our heart. We hold on to the righteous deeds we did in the past, or our current positions in church or society. However, past deeds and current positions do not guarantee righteousness; neither do they absolve from sin. All too often, we adeptly fling away all seeds of instruction before they have a chance to reach our hearts and grow.

David accepted this seed of instruction, and it grew immediately into a heart of repentance. Seeing David's sincere heart, the Lord immediately forgave. Nathan said, "The Lord has taken away your sin." In the same way, God promise to forgive our sins if we ask. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9)

All this time, David composed Psalm 51 expressing his deepest thoughts and prayers to God. David states, "The sacrifice acceptable to god is broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps 51:17). David must have experienced the natural reaction of shame and contrition, as so many of us do when

confronted with correction. These feelings often paved the way to repentance, which ultimately leads to forgiveness.

Psalms 51 illustrates how David dealt with these feelings of sin and shame constructively. He asked the Lord to purge and wash him, to create in him a clean heart, to restore to him the joy of salvation. He asked the Lord to uphold him with His generous Spirit, to deliver him from guilt, and to open his lips to show forth his praise (Ps 51:7-16). While his son was on the brink of death, David fasted and wept for him. After his son died, however, David got up, washed and anointed himself, worshiped the Lord and ate. David did not dwell on his sin; he went on with his life and forgave himself.

Though God has forgiven us, we may still have to suffer the immediate and long-term consequences of our sin. The immediate consequence of David's sin was the death in his family. The long-term effect was that murder would be a constant threat to his family, his household would rebel against him and his wives would be given to another in public view (2 Sam 12:10-11). Despite the serious consequences of David's sin, God's grace was still manifested in his life. He gave him a second child from Bathsheba named Solomon, or Jedidiah, which means "loved by God." This son may have been a sign to David that, despite his past sin, God still loved him.

We, too, may have to suffer the immediate or long-term consequences of our sin, but that does not mean that God no longer loves us and has not forgiven us. God never gives up on us, as the father in the parable never gave up on his prodigal son. God does not expect us to be perfect tomorrow, but He does want us to improve. He is long-suffering and compassionate toward us, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). We can be sure that God disciplines us and prunes us because He deems us His precious children (Heb 12:7-11).

So let us cherish the Lord's pruning, for after His work is done, we will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. We will not fear when heat comes, our leaves will always be green. We will have no worries in the year of the drought and we will never fail to bear fruit (Jer 17:7-8). Blessed is he who heeds discipline, for "he who heeds instruction is on the path to life" (Prov 10:17).

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the BODY of CHRIST

Occasionally, I have to put up with sniggers when I say that I belong to the True Jesus Church - "What? Can you say that again?" And when I politely repeat the name, the look says it all - *"You mean to say my church is false?"* He wonders how anyone could be so audacious as to imply that his church is false. Meanwhile, from the pulpit of his own church and in his own mind, he is reminded that there are many false churches in the world. And so begets the illogical reasoning - *Your church must be false because you say that mine is!*

I have been in the True Jesus Church since my baptism as an infant. I am not moved by such illogicality. But because the True Jesus Church as a matter of course encourages its members to confirm the teachings of the church from the Bible, and when I realised what it meant to be a member of this unique church, intellectual and spiritual freedom have led me to do some serious soul searching. Let me share with you some of the questions that I brought myself to face as I grew up in the church.

So Many People Unserved?

I grew up experiencing the grace of God. I learnt the wonderful Word of God. One of these teachings was that Christ had but one body. Now, this meant that there is only one church of God. It was easy to accept initially because all was well in the church. However, when I saw the bigger world around me, it troubled me to realise that if what I believed were true, there would be so many people who would not be saved.

It would be so much easier if one belonged to a larger denomination or accepted an ecumenical perspective that Jesus has true believers in all the different churches. It would be so much more convenient. However the underpinnings of religious education required that I not take the easy way out but instead search the scriptures for God's point of view.

I found out that throughout history, the people of God were always in the minority. More often than not, a very small minority. There were only eight persons saved when God destroyed the world with the Flood.¹ When God decided to choose a people for His own, He only chose Abraham and his offspring through Isaac and Jacob.² He did not choose one Abraham from each nation throughout the world. The Chinese, Indians, Europeans and the native tribes of the Americas had to wait till Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility between the Gentiles and the Jews.³ The Jews were never a large nation in the world. When Jesus was in the world, the number of His believers was always small. When the number increased tremendously, Jesus would say something really difficult and those who remained were again few in number.⁴ Jesus alerts us, "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few"(Matt 7:13,14). The Christians during the time of the apostles were always fewer than the Jews. In fact, they were often considered a deviant sect of the Jewish faith.⁵

I was reassured from the Bible that being in the minority doesn't mean that one is immediately wrong. Quite often, the true prophets of God such as Elijah⁶ and Jeremiah⁷ were a minority in their time. This however should not be taken to mean that the majority is always wrong. Instead it teaches us that we should look beyond mere democracy and not heed only the cry of the crowd when it comes to knowing the will of God.

Exclusive?

A common barb aimed at the True Jesus Church is that she is 'exclusive'. By this, her detractors mean that her claim of being the only true church smacks of arrogance. They are hurt, understandably so, when they think that the teaching of the church excludes other Christians from being the children of God.

From the many years I have been in the church, I can see that it is never the intention of the church to claim that she is better than everyone else. In fact, the church is highly aware of the limitations of her members. Not many of us are rich, powerful or intelligent. Indeed, our claim lies in the belief that what we are doing is right and is the will of God. We sustain our effort not through our power, for we have nothing to boast of in ourselves but in the power of God. While I have seen some church members who are smug on the

belief that we are the one true church, these form the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, the Church frowns on such a lack of love. Members are reminded that God has chosen them not because they are of great value but because of His grace.⁸

The teaching from the Bible is that Jesus has one fold and that there are other sheep of His that as yet do not belong to His fold.⁹ The solution to this situation, as the Lord said, is to seek out His sheep so that there will be one Shepherd and one flock. For this reason, the True Jesus Church is best perceived as 'inviting' and open to any who seeks God and would obey His voice. We are not exclusive in the sense of a posh country club where membership is restricted to those of the highest social order. Instead, the love of God invites all to His body with this just qualification of faith - For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn 5:3. See also Jn 8:31,32).

Can't we live and let live?

Once, when I was in secondary school, three other Christians in my class asked me to join them in preaching Christ to the rest of our class. Since we belonged to different churches, one of them suggested that we divide the class into four equal groups. Each of us would then preach to one group each and we were not to infringe on another's

turf. I could not agree. My friends asked why I couldn't let others preach Jesus according to what they believed. They reasoned that if they could accept that I was a Christian, why couldn't I also accept them? "Isn't it enough that we all preach Christ to those who don't even know Him instead of fighting with each other over the interpretation of the Bible?"

By then, I had realised that preaching the gospel was not as straightforward as my friends had made it out to be. Firstly, it is not enough to just preach Jesus. We must preach the true Jesus.¹⁰ Secondly, although my friends had seemed to indicate that they were willing to accept me, in reality, they had rejected my belief. They did not sincerely examine nor search for the truth, instead they held on to their beliefs and refused to fully discuss with me the doctrines of salvation. Because of these reasons, it was not fair that three quarters of the class would not be allowed to listen to what I believed was the complete saving truth.

I also realised that the majority of our church members are genuinely concerned about the salvation of other Christians. To them, it is not a matter of why the True Jesus Church cannot 'live and let live' but rather if we shirk our duty of preaching the complete gospel we will 'live and let die'. This is our sincere belief.

On the other hand, I have also become

aware that bigger churches do give comments which are backhanded compliments. They claim that they accept us as Christians and wonder why we do not accept them also. On deeper inspection, the remark implies that our doctrines of salvation are wrong because these churches want us to accept them without the need for them to change in any way. It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of the necessity of baptism for salvation with the common Protestant belief that one is saved just by confessing Christ as saviour.

Again, there are many that do not mince their words and simply tar us as heretical. At the same time, they feel offended when the True Jesus Church preaches that if one does not follow the teachings of the Bible, they do not belong to God. The True Jesus Church has encountered much abuse, judgement, spite and plain ignorance against her from bigger churches. We have been accused of drowning babies during infant baptism. Many churches brush us aside because of their unshakeable belief that anyone who does not believe in the Trinity is a heretic. Consider the similar situation between Jesus and the religious leaders of that time - The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them,

"Why did you not bring him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man!" The Pharisees answered them, "Are you led astray, you also?[Judgmental] Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?[Pride] But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed.[Spiteful]" Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee [Exposing their own ignorance"]" (Jn 7:45-52).

How sure am I that the True Jesus Church is true?

The members of the True Jesus Church are far from perfect. In virtue and knowledge, we have much to improve. What distinguishes the True Jesus Church from the other churches is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the observance of the basic doctrines of salvation. These do not require a person to be superior to others. Rather it is the grace of God to those whom He has chosen and who has accepted His gift in humility.

So then this is it. I believe that the True Jesus Church is the true church of God because the church has the Holy Spirit. I can see this because the members speak in tongues.¹² I also believe that the church is true because the doctrines of salvation taught by her is easily verifiable from the

Bible. There is no theological double-talk to squirm around difficult questions. This is often done in churches which have a long tradition. So what happens is that leaders have to justify the traditions of man masquerading as the teachings of God.¹³ As in the days of the apostles, the gospel is not to be understood only by the wise in the world but to anyone who will be guided by the Spirit when he searches the Scriptures¹⁴. The truth was never meant to be the sole domain of theologians in musty libraries of old universities. It is however also not so simplistic and illogical that only those who are brainwashed can actually follow.

In addition to these two important reasons for my faith, the True Jesus Church, since her beginnings, is imbued with power to perform signs, wonders and miracles to testify of the presence of God.¹⁵ I have heard and read reliable testimonies of wonderful miracles performed in the church. In addition, just as many other believers, I have experienced in my own life, some wonderful works of God. These wonderful acts in the church are not the sole basis of our faith but they do testify strongly that God is with us.

What is God's Framework of Salvation?

Predominantly, when a person opposes a certain concept, it is because

he has already his own different concept. Consider the issue of the one true church. The arguments against such a concept can be seen to be based on a particular view of God's framework of salvation. Firstly, because God is gracious and loving, many conclude that He will save many people. Hence, a church of God must be big. Next, the older the church, the more probable that it is close to God. This means that new young upstarts are to be viewed with suspicion. Finally, since God is glorious, His church on earth must also exhibit a similar secular authority and influence. Thus the church of God must walk with princes.

Let me expand on the earlier Biblical examples so that God's framework of salvation can be made clearer.

In the case of the Flood, God saved only eight human beings. God chose Noah and his family because Noah was righteous in His eyes. God's love seeks to blot out sin through the acceptance of the cleansing blood of Jesus in faith. But it does not force salvation on those who would reject Him, either outright or by refusing to obey His will.¹⁶ Because man is more likely to reject God and not because God's love is limited, God's framework of salvation includes only very few people. Read Matt 7:13,14 and the story of Abraham's intercession and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah¹⁷.

One of the main reasons why the Jews rejected Jesus was that they perceived He

was teaching something opposed to the established order.¹⁸ The disciples later faced the same problem¹⁹ and the early Christians were often seen as a deviant sect of Judaism²⁰. We know that the teachings of Jesus were founded firmly in the Old Testament and that the Jews at that time were dogmatically holding on to their own interpretation of Judaism. In fact, they could not even agree among themselves on many matters of the Law.²¹

Jesus was a carpenter and the son of a carpenter. This fact made it difficult for many to accept that He was the Christ.²² Christians in the time of the apostles were generally not powerful nor influential. Christianity was not a religion you joined to hobnob with the high and mighty. It is mentioned earlier that God often chooses the things which are despised to shame those who would think that they are great in the world. This is often the framework of God - that His power may be shown through those who are not mighty in the world. Consider also the chosen nation of Israel. They were not a mighty people in the sense of numbers or geographical size. But God chose them. The true church of God need not be a powerful church with

great political influence. What is important is that there must be the power of God with her.

In short, God's framework of salvation is such that one should not be surprised that the church of God is not huge, is not powerful nor influential and is not old.

What does the Bible tell us about the church of God?

1. It is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22,23). The body is one (Eph 4:3-6). The body without the spirit is dead (Jas 2:26).
2. It is the pillar and the bulwark of the truth (I Tim 3:15). It must uphold the truth which is founded on the teachings of the apostles and the prophets with Christ Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20).
3. It is the bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-32). Jesus has only one bride.
4. It is a chosen people, separated from the world (I Pet 2:9). The church is in the world but not of the world. In many ways it is like the chosen nation of Israel in the Old Testament. There was only one chosen nation. There were others whom God had chosen but they had to be one through the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus which reconciled Jew and Gentile. Yet again,

Conclusion

It is good to accept the differences of others and to live with them in peace and harmony. There are however some differences important enough to separate us for Christ and from the world.

I pray that this article will help members in the True Jesus Church understand our doctrine of the one true church. With this understanding, we may grow stronger in the conviction that God is truly gracious to us who do not deserve Him. He who chose us from among the many millions of souls in the world. All the more, we should find in our hearts the desire to repay the debt we owe Jesus by preaching the gospel so that as many souls as possible may be saved. We should also have compassion for those who belong to God so that like Cornelius they may be brought back to the Good Shepherd. Then there will be one flock and one Shepherd.

1. I Peter 3:20
2. Genesis 35:9-12
3. Ephesians 2:11-16
4. John 6:60-66
5. Acts 24:5
6. I Kings 18:17-40
7. Jeremiah 20
8. I Corinthians 1:26-31
9. John 10:16
10. Matthew 24:24; John 15:1
11. Isaiah 9:1
12. Acts 10:44-46
13. Matthew 18:1-9
14. I Corinthians 2:1-13
15. John 11:40-45; Matthew 11:2-6
16. Matthew 7:21-27
17. Genesis 18:22-33, 19:1-29
18. Mark 2:23-3:6
19. Acts 5:27-40
20. Acts 24:5, 28:22
21. Acts 23:6-10
22. Mark 6:3-6; Matthew 13:55-58

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Special

Our Church In Indonesia



Establishment of the First Church

In 1920, Jao Hoan Tek from Phutian, China, emigrated to Indonesia and settled in Mukasa (now Ujung Pandang), South Sulawesi. Twelve years later, he returned to China to get married. Three months after his wedding, a fever kept him bed-ridden for six months. All efforts to cure him were unsuccessful. His mother visited temple after temple, praying to numerous idols, but to no avail. Then one day, his aunt visited him. She encouraged him to believe in Jesus and to attend services at the True Jesus Church (TJC). Jao agreed and was carried to the church on a stretcher for

prayers. Thank God, after staying and praying in the church for 28 days, he recovered. He and his mother accepted Christ and received baptism. Towards the end of 1932, he returned to Mukasa.

In January 1936, Jao visited China again. Stephan Siau, the preacher who had baptised him, asked him to apply for a licence from the Indonesian government to preach in Indonesia. But the licence was granted only in 1939. By then Jao was already working in Jakarta and had met up

with an elder, Tan Chauw Sin, also from mainland China. Eld Tan offered his house as a place of worship. Thus on 1 February 1941, the first TJC in Indonesia was formally established.

Development of the Churches

The Lord continued to work in Indonesia and over the years, churches (and prayer houses) in different parts of the country were established:

Year	Church	Location
1941	Jakarta Church	Jakarta
1943	Bandung Church	West Java
1947	Cianjur Church	West Java
1950	Pontianak Church	West Kalimantan
1951	Banjarmasin Church	South Kalimantan
1956	Tasikmalaya Church	West Java
1959	Tangerang Church	West Java
1969	Solo Church	Central Java
1974	Salatiga Church	Central Java
1976	Siantan-Pontianak *	West Kalimantan
1980	Lasem Church	Central Java
1984	Sukabumi *	West Java
1985	Sendangcoyo Church	Central Java
	Sewan-Tangerang*	West Java
1987	Surabaya Church	East Java
1988	Cilacap Church	Central Java
	Tewah *	Central Kalimantan
1989	Sandung Tambun*	Central Kalimantan
	Malang *	East Java
1990	Nusa Indah-Cilacap *	Central Java
	Layur-Cilacap *	Central Java
1991	Bekasi *	West Java
1992	Bogor *	West Java
	Perum Nelayan-Cilacap*	Central Java
1993	Purwokerto *	Central Java
	Semarang *	Central Java
1994	Palangka Raya *	Central Kalimantan
1995	Bonang-Tangerang *	West Java
1995	Ujung Pandang *	South Sulawesi
1996	Kopo-Bandung *	West Java
1997	Sunter Church	Jakarta

* Prayer Houses

Currently in Indonesia, there are 14 churches and 17 prayer houses.

The membership too has grown over the years. Based on our records, the growth has been as follows :

Year	Membership
1967	1,406
1975	1,583
1984	2,472
1990	4,613
1997	5,415



There are currently 17 full-time preachers and 25 ordained elders, deacons and deaconesses.

The Kanaan Christian School (KCS)

On 15 January 1970, KCS in Jakarta was established, offering kindergarten, elementary school and junior high school education to the general public. This was a major milestone in the history of the TJC-not only in Indonesia, but also internationally - for this was the first time the church had established an educational institution.

KCS is a formal educational institution recognised by the Indonesian government. It has full private status and does not receive any government subsidy. It follows the national education curriculum of

Indonesia. Today, there are also branches in Tangerang (from 1986), Cianjur (from 1991) and Banjarmasin (from 1992). The total student population from kindergarten to senior high number some 3,000.

Unique features of KCS are that teachers and students are required to attend Sabbath services, and students in the elementary and high schools are given two-hours of religious education every week by teachers from the Indonesian General Assembly (GA).

Theological Education

In 1984, the GA started a three-year theological education system to train members for full-time ministry. Lecturers are invited from other general assemblies, such as Taiwan. Amidst the peaceful surroundings of Cibodas, students devote themselves to the study of the Word of God, striving to attain deeper spiritual communion with Him. Since its inception, a total of 22 students have graduated and 17 are now serving as full-time preachers in Indonesia, while the rest are religious education teachers in KCS.



The True Jesus Church Marches On

No one knows when our Lord Jesus will come again. But one thing is certain, His second coming is imminent. Therefore, it must be with a sense of urgency that the church fulfils her mission of saving souls and prepares her members to be



guiding
lamps
which lead
people to
peace and
salvation.

Looking ahead, many things need to be done. Externally, we have to be known and reach out to those who do not believe. We also need to understand the social, economic as well as technological developments taking place in our increasingly complex world. Internally, we have to strengthen our members' faith against the increasing tides of materialism and false teachings. We must have effective and progressive church organisation, and more importantly, spiritually mature workers with the correct mindset to serve God.

Under the Lord's gracious guidance, our membership in Indonesia has grown in recent years and the Lord has led many to return to His fold. But in a country that spans over 76 miles and has a population of 200 million, it is clear that there is still a

lot of work to do. We pray that the Lord will continue to guide and direct us so that the True Jesus Church in Indonesia will become a dynamic, progressive church that can confidently and boldly accomplish the commission to propagate the complete gospel throughout the 17,000 islands in Indonesia.

Readers who would like to know more about our churches in Indonesia, are most welcome to contact our GA office at -

Gereja Yesus Sejati Pusat

Indonesia

Jalan H. Samanhudi

(Pintu Besi) No 23

Jakarta 10710, Indonesia

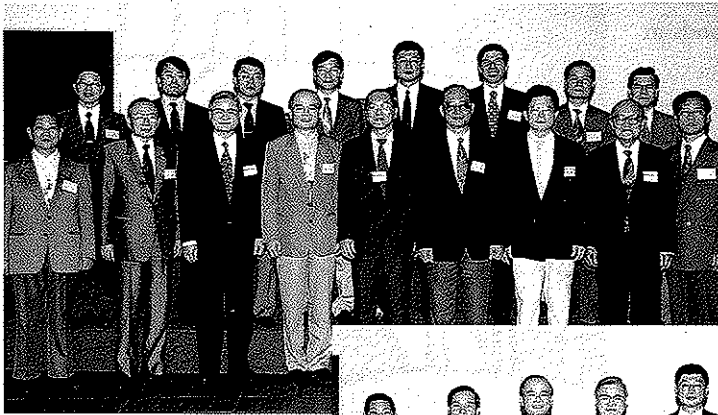
Tel : 6221 - 3450646 Fax : 6221 - 3450614

*General Assembly
Indonesia*



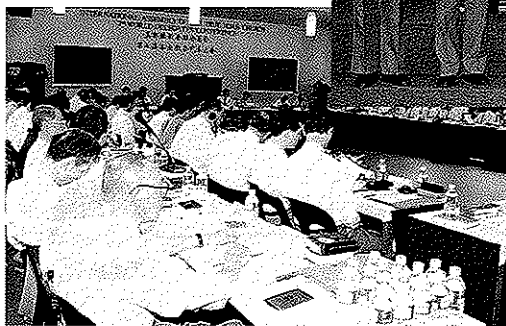
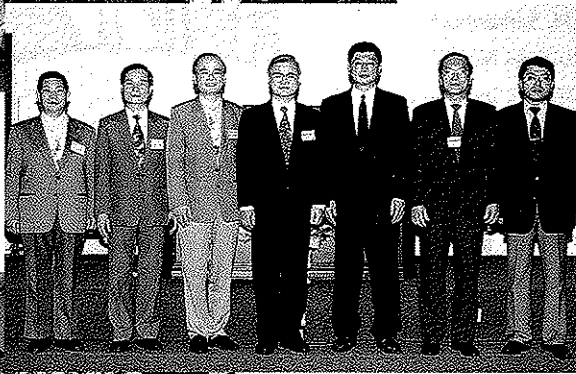
Special

The Seventh World



IA Exco Members

IA Standing Committee



Meeting In Progress



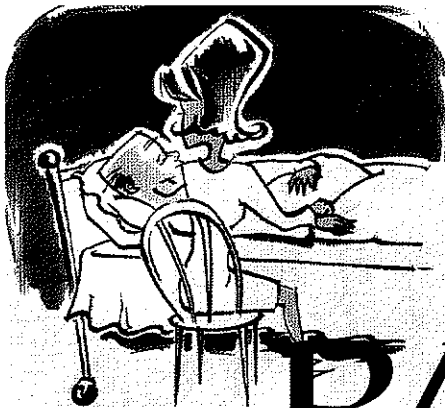
Delegates' Conference

Delegates Group Photo



Testimony

GOD'S GRACE UPON MY PARENTS



Hallelujah! In Jesus' name I testify to God's grace on my elderly parents, especially my dad.

In October 1995, my dad was diagnosed with cancer of the larynx. The cancer was already between the third and fourth stage (an advanced stage). The doctor prescribed 35 sessions of radiotherapy for him, from late November to first week of January 1996. The doctor also warned us that from the third week of the therapy onwards, my dad would not be able to take any solid food, he would have to be fed intravenously. Moreover, they might have to make an opening at the base of his throat for him to breathe. My siblings and I were very sad that our dad, who was in his eighties, had to suffer. We were not sure if he could take the pain.

In my sadness and worry, I asked the church to pray for my dad. I did not inform my parents of my request because they were idol-worshippers. I prayed to God to have mercy on my parents and let them receive His salvation. I also prayed that my dad would not have to suffer the side-effects of radiotherapy. I was told by many that these could be terrible. For instance, patients would have difficulty eating. Even

**「I thank God
for answering my prayer.
My dad did not
suffer any side effects.」**

soft oats had to be pureed. My sister-in-law's uncle, who suffered from an early stage of cancer, refused to go for therapy after the fourth session as it always gave him pain. But I thank God for answering my prayer. My dad did not suffer any side effects. At home after each therapy session, he could still potter around his plants. Sometimes he would cross the overhead bridge nearby his house to go shopping, or take strolls around the town centre with my mum. He did not look like one suffering an advanced stage of cancer.

After completing the course of therapy, the doctor examined him and found that the growth had become dormant. It was then that I told my parents about the grace and love of God and how He had helped my father even though my father did not know Him. However, because my siblings and I never told him the seriousness of his illness, my dad was a little sceptical that it was God's grace which had helped him. I then told him the truth about his illness. He was very quiet for a while and then he started asking about God.

My siblings and I speak English at home. Though I'm a Cantonese Chinese, I have limited knowledge of my own dialect. I knew that sharing the gospel of Christ with my parents was going to be quite a task for me. So I prayed. I asked God to be my spokesperson and to guide me as I preached to them. Thanks and praise be to our Lord, I was able to explain how God created the universe, why He had to incarnate as a human being and why He had to suffer and die on the cross. My parents started attending Sabbath services with me. However, I could see that my dad did not totally believe. In my parents' house, there was an altar for my grandfather. My parents felt that converting to Christianity would make them unfilial. I realised that years of upholding the Chinese tradition of ancestor worship could not be so easily discontinued. So I prayed again. This time I told God that there was only so much I could to explain about His gospel and saving grace. Furthermore, my mum, who is in her seventies, is illiterate and so cannot read the bible. I asked God to show them that He exists and that He is the only one and living God.

After every Sabbath service, a few members and ministers would approach

*「I asked God to show them
that He exists and
that He is the only one
and living God.」*

my dad and inquire about his health. On one particular Sabbath service, when members inquired about his health, my dad answered that he was feeling very well. He continued to explain that ever since he started drinking the 'Lingzhi' herbal drink, his coughing had stopped and he was able to sleep well at night. Each time a member asked about his health, he would give the same answer. But that night, he coughed so much that he could not sleep. The next day, he could neither eat nor sleep. His throat was very swollen. He could not even drink water. My parents began to wonder why this problem had cropped up now when it hadn't during the therapy, despite the doctor's warnings. They finally realised that it was due to what my father had said the day before. Instead of giving glory to God, he had given all the credit to the 'Lingzhi' herb. My parents then knelt down to pray and asked for mercy and forgiveness from God. They prayed for about five or six times that day. The swelling subsided and my dad was able to eat and



drink. I was unaware of the whole incident until my mother telephoned me that evening. She explained what had happened and that they now fully believed that God truly exists and that He is true. I then told her how I had asked God to show them that He exists. Thanks and praise be to God - my parents received baptism on 30 June 1996.

However, after his baptism, my father had a relapse. The doctor advised that he undergo surgery to remove the growth as well as his larynx. This was to ensure that the tumour would not spread. Thank God, despite my father's age, the operation went smoothly and during this difficult period, my father experienced the warmth and care of our members. They would visit him at the hospital and pray for him. These made him realise the goodness of being a member of the household of God. Thank God, gradually my father recovered from his operation and regained his health.

Before I end this testimony, I want to take this opportunity to thank all those brothers and sisters who have been praying constantly for my parents; the ministers who visited and are still visiting them and especially the brethren who drove them to church when I had to work. Help from other brethren is very important when we want to share God's salvation with others and to bring them to church. We must work together in the name of our Lord.

May all glory and praise be given to our Lord. Amen.

Ann Yeow
Singapore



John says of himself in his Gospel, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that His testimony is true" (Jn 21:24). Taking John's self-authorisation as a starting point, I would like to share my personal testimony of how Jesus saved me by bringing me to the True Jesus Church.

My name is Bernard Leacock. Before I came to the True Jesus Church, I used to attend an Apostolic Faith congregation. I was already baptised and a fervent member of that church. Even though the full Truth had not yet been revealed to me, I had numerous spiritual experiences.

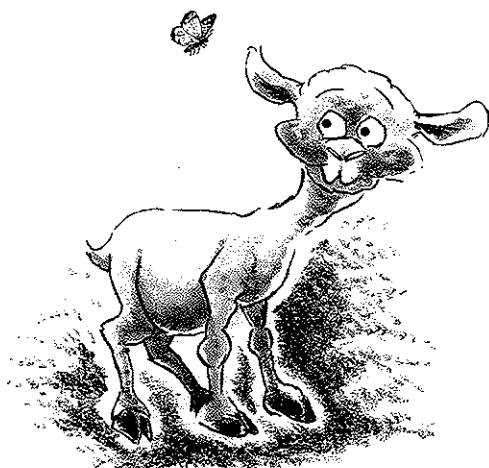
In 1982, members of the True Jesus Church visited the church I was attending and one of their deacons was invited to deliver a sermon. To my amazement during prayer with the visitors, various members of my congregation, including my brother who was 12 years old at the time, were moved by the Holy Spirit. I was deeply touched to see that God bestowed His grace upon the children as well.

Some time lapsed during which I heard a lot of different gospels, and even visited places where miracles were performed. And during this period I reached a point of crisis in my life as my kidney transplant operation was unsuccessful. Despite these

difficult conditions, I continued to search for the Truth and asked God why there were so many different gospels being preached and why those preaching the different gospels could sometimes perform miracles and heal people. At this time in my life I was no longer sure of anything. In this time of confusion, anxiety and almost at a breaking point, I received a letter from the True Jesus Church inviting me to a service at a spiritual meeting. I made up my mind and attended the spiritual meeting. With patience, I listened carefully to the sermons that were preached.

The brothers and sisters were so kind to me. A deacon spoke to me personally about the correct mode of baptism according to the bible. When I heard this, it became clear this was the Truth, and I decided to be baptised again according to the teachings in the bible.

I was baptised in August 1987. When I emerged from the water, I noticed that two sisters were crying. This baffled me. I asked myself, "Why are they crying?" I later learnt that one of them had seen the precious blood of Jesus in the water when I was baptised. Glory be to God.



I thanked the Lord for His grace and love and for leading me to the True Church. However, after baptism, I still questioned why there were other denominations. I wanted God to show me if this were really the true church and to tell me why there were so many different denominations preaching different gospels and performing miracles. So I asked God, "Lord! Is this really the church where you want me to go and is this really the True Church?"

Thanks be to the Lord Jesus, not more than two days after my baptism, He answered my prayers. I had a dream and in this dream I was standing in front of thousands of people from different denominations. Behind me was the True Jesus Church. I was proclaiming to these people, saying, "This is the True Church! This is the True Church!" I am so sure this was God's way of telling me that many people will come from different denominations and enter the True Fold of which I am now a part.

The above events took place ten years ago and during this period, I have undergone trials and sufferings, but I have also tasted the goodness and beauty of the Lord. Today I am more convinced than ever that the True Jesus Church is the true church that can lead humanity back to God. Jesus says, "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16).

Bernard Leacock
London, UK

exhortations
christian living
doctrine
THIS PAGE COULD HAVE BEEN FILLED BY YOU FOR HIS NAME
special
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