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SATAN'S AGE-OLD TRICKS

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Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:1-5)

God commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He also made it clear that the consequence of eating from the tree was death. This command established the proper relationship between God and man. As long as man honored God's authority, he could live to enjoy the Lord's rich blessings.

All was going well until the serpent came along and spoke with Eve. This short conversation did enough damage

to sever the loving relationship between God and man, as it led Eve to choose to rebel against her Creator. Why was this conversation so deadly? Where did things go wrong?

The serpent didn't simply say to Eve, "you should disobey God and listen to me. Go ahead and eat from the tree." Instead, the serpent played tricks with Eve's mind and removed her reasons to obey God. Likewise, today, if the devil just appeared to us and told us to break God's commandment, we would surely rebuke him and drive him away in Jesus' name. If he tried to lure us with attractive

can see that the question itself implied that God's word was absurd.

Likewise, Satan may tempt us through our school, through our friends, and through the mass media. God's commands often come under the attack of scoffers who challenge the teachings of the Bible. By making fun of our beliefs, these people encourage us to question God's word. More and more, believers have to withstand the ridicule and slander of the godless for upholding God's word. Concerning the insults that Christians would undergo, Peter wrote: "They think it strange that you do not

pent's deception when warning against false doctrines. Satan can lead us into misbeliefs in the same way that the serpent led Eve into sin. Like the Corinthians, who faced the threat of heresy, we today are also living in a time of great apostasy. Just as Satan is able to transform himself into an angel of light, false teachers and prophets will come in sheep's clothing, preaching misleading doctrines to believers. We must remain steadfast to the true gospel in the midst of these great deceptions.

Sometimes it is tempting to try to enlarge the narrow gate of salvation, in order to let more people in. It may appear more in line with the Christian spirit to include people of different faiths. But when we think that we know better than God's command, we are likely to disobey His word. God wants us to obey Him with simple faith. We should preach only what the Bible preaches, even if some people feel that it doesn't seem very logical or fair. We have no authority to change God's standard. Our job is to bring people to the narrow gate, not to widen it so that it looks more appealing. If we remain faithful to God's word, we will not be led astray by Satan.

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offers, we would also turn away in disgust. But Satan has a much more effective tactic—deception. It has proven to work ever since the beginning of human history, and he still uses it today. By his crafty persuasion Satan has fooled many people into rebelling against God. As believers, we must learn to perceive Satan's schemes, for only if we have spiritual discernment can we remain faithful to God and withstand Satan's attacks.

The Genesis account reveals to us the nature of Satan's cunning. It shows us how Satan tries to set us off guard, damage our relationship with God, and convince us to rebel against our Lord. By studying the four tricks that the serpent used to lead Eve to contemplate sin, we can strengthen our own resistance to his deceptions.



Trick 1: Challenging God's Authority

The serpent started out with a question: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" By beginning with a question, the serpent made the conversation seem harmless. After all, what could be so harmful about such a simple yes-or-no question?

The serpent's misquotation of God's command shows that his question was a test. God's word was final—there was no need to bring it up for reexamination. But the serpent hoped to "revisit" God's command in order to challenge it. The tone of his question was sarcastic. Looking at the whole conversation, we

run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Pet 4:4).

These days, it is no longer "politically correct" to believe that there is an absolute moral standard. Your high school friends may laugh at you if you are still a virgin, and people will protest if you say that abortion is wrong. Satan tries to make believers look like fools for obeying God's commands. He bombards us with secular ideologies and philosophies in order to weaken our conviction in God's word.

Even more subtle is how Satan works in religion. People will constantly challenge our belief in salvation through Christ alone: "Would God really be so narrow-minded to save only Christians?" "Has God indeed said that there is only one gospel of salvation?" It is also more and more difficult to preach that there is only one gospel and one true church. More than ever, many people today are willing to condone false religions and doctrines in the name of unity and Christian love.

In the apostolic period, false teachings arose to challenge the true gospel. In the epistles, time and again the apostles warned the believers against the deception of false teachers. Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning the threat of false doctrines: "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor 11:3).

Notice that Paul quoted the ser-



Trick 2: Reducing Sin's Seriousness

When the serpent spoke to Eve, instead of denying God's word outright by saying, "You will not die," he reduced the seriousness of God's warning by saying, "You will not surely die." This statement is ambiguous, because it contradicts God's command in a subtle way. In other words, "God said that you will surely die, but the fact is that you probably won't die." The serpent offered Eve the false promise that she might be able to eat from the tree and not suffer the consequences.

In a world where evildoers and the ungodly prosper, it may seem as if the warnings of the Bible are not all that serious. During the time of Malachi, when injustice was rampant, the people said to themselves, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them." They also asked, "Where is the God of justice?" (Mal 2:17). The line between right and wrong was blurred. God's justice was scorned.

Today, Satan tries to remove the

seriousness of God's commands and imply that God's warnings are just meant to scare us. He deceives believers into thinking that God doesn't really mean what He says. "It won't be that bad. You are not going to die. Why should you be scared?" Satan knows that if a person no longer takes God's word seriously, he will much more readily choose to disobey God.

In the end time, when there seems to be no sign of impending judgment, mockers will taunt believers who still hold to the true faith: "Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Pet 3:3-4).

Satan hopes to make us see God's word as a lie. He wants us to believe that no one will ever suffer in the lake of fire. He gives people the false hope that they can somehow escape God's terrible judgment, even if they live in sin. Such a misleading message is very appealing. "You will not surely die"—that's what people like to hear. They don't like to hear about hell, or about God's just punishment. People like to be told that no matter what they do, God will always accept them.

Paul warns us against such deception: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6:7). God's word is absolute. He means what He says. Let us take every word of God seriously and not fall into Satan's trap.



Trick 3: Questioning God's Love

The serpent asked Eve: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" It seems as if the serpent was quoting God, but actually he was misrepresenting His words. God commanded: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." The serpent changed God's word, portraying it negatively.

In the same way, Satan today tries to make God's word seem unreasonable. He wants us to question God's love for us. In today's society, God's command is often twisted and misrepresented as

nothing but rules. Many refuse to accept God because they think that if they follow Him, then they will be deprived of all pleasure with an endless list of do's and don't's.

The serpent also deceived Eve into thinking that God is not as good as He appears to be: "If God is good, why does He keep you from having knowledge? He is afraid that you would be as wise as He." The serpent made it seem as if God was keeping something good from her, and he challenged her to make the decision for herself rather than listen to God. Likewise, Satan makes us question God's intention. When we begin to doubt God's wisdom or the good intentions behind His commandments, we begin to slip into sin.

If we suspect that God is withholding something good from us when he tells

the wilderness, they often complained and asked God why He had led them out to die in the desert. Before they went into Canaan, they sent spies to find out about the land, but the spies who were without faith reported bad news and weakened the people's heart. Then the assembly complained against God and demanded to go back to Egypt. They even wanted to stone the two faithful spies who tried to dissuade them. These people exhausted God's patience. If it wasn't for Moses' intercession, they would all have perished.

As punishment, God swore that they would not enter the promised land. When the people realized their great sin and its serious consequence, they mourned and asked to go up to possess the land (Num 13:31-14:45). Moses disapproved of their proposal, knowing

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us not to do certain things, then we are all the more tempted to do them. For example, God told the Israelites not to keep any extra manna overnight. Some didn't listen. Perhaps these people thought that God wanted them to suffer by making them go out every morning to gather food. They decided to keep some food for the next day, but it spoiled. God also told them that they didn't have to gather manna on the seventh day, but again, some didn't listen. Perhaps they thought that God intended to starve them on the Sabbath. They went out, but found nothing (Ex 16:19-30).

Because of our rebellious nature, we tend to do the very things we are not supposed to do, while refusing to do the things we are commanded to do. For example, we know that we are to rest on the Sabbath. But we may think that by doing so, we are losing out. So we may decide that it's all right to continue with our business, personal plans, or studies on the Sabbath. But in the end, like the Israelites who disobeyed God, we often find ourselves wasting much time without getting anything accomplished.

When the Israelites were in Egypt, they groaned in their slavery. So God delivered them out of Egypt with His mighty arm. But in the journey through

that the Lord would not fight for them. But again, they refused to listen to Moses and attempted to confront their enemy. The Amalekites and Canaanites attacked them and utterly defeated them. What a tragic end for that generation of Israelites! All of this happened to them because they failed to believe and trust God.

When we grumble, we show our suspicion of God's love, just as the Israelites did. Although they could not trust God's love, we must be careful not to make the same mistake (1 Cor 10:10). Even when we do not understand the purpose of God's commands, we must first of all trust that God is good. He will not give us commands for no reason, or to make our lives miserable. When we trust God, we will not complain when adversity falls on us. Rather, we will always be full of hope and thanks.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deut 10:12-13)

All of God's commands are for our good. He does not withhold from us anything good (Ps 84:11).

Paul was fully convinced of God's love for him. He trusted that God would surely give us His best: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:32). God demonstrated His ultimate love for us through the cross. Why would He hold back anything good from us? Why should we try to seek anything good beyond God's commands? Even when we suffer for the sake of keeping God's word, we must learn to trust that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8:28). If we have complete faith in God's love, Satan will never be able to come between us and God.



Trick 4: Justifying the Wrong

By giving Eve a very logical reason to eat from the tree—to gain God's wisdom—the serpent made it seem legitimate to disobey God. Justifying sin is perhaps Satan's deadliest weapon. The devil knows the Scripture, but he distorts it to tempt us. He gives seemingly "biblical" reasons for breaking God's commands. For example, when Satan tempted Jesus, he misused God's word as an opportunity for self-gratification. He asked the Lord to turn stones into bread to show that He is the son of God. He challenged Him to throw Himself down from the temple to demonstrate that God would save Him. In both temptations, Satan offered some justification for submitting to his demands.

Throughout history, people have done terrible things in the name of God, misusing His word to support and justify their lusts. Why did the Pharisees slander the Lord Jesus? They thought that they were keeping God's commands, but their motive was selfishness. They were jealous of Jesus when they saw that He was gaining popularity, and they often accused Him of breaking God's law. They sought ways to entangle Jesus with His own words by asking Him questions. In the end, they put him to death. They did all this evil, they felt, in the name of God (cf. Mt 26:59-67).

Like the Pharisees, if we are not

careful, we may sometimes distort God's word to suit our own needs. One warning sign is when we try to look for "loop-holes" in the Bible in order to satisfy our own desires. Believers with selfish ambitions may sometimes use "doing it all for God" as a justification for seeking after the things of the world. They may say, "I will donate a million dollars when I become rich," or "God's name will be glorified when I earn three Ph.D. degrees." But deep down inside, they are

seeking vain glory and self-gratification. Then there is the example of "missionary marriages." Believers may sometimes claim that they are trying to win another soul to Christ by marrying someone of a different faith, when their real intention is simply to justify their own desires.

When we become spiritually blind and believe that our wrongdoing is justified, there may be no turning back. Sin's deceitfulness can harden our hearts (Heb 3:13). By fooling ourselves with false justification, our ears become dull and our eyes become blind. We will be guided by our lusts rather than God's commands, and we will continue in the path of sin without feeling any remorse.

"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 4:3-4). Rather than looking to God's word for instruction, people will listen to false teachers who tell them what they want to hear. People enjoy listening to words that justify their desires, because such false teachings remove the sense of guilt in the listeners and encourage them to continue living in sin.

As true believers, we must learn to approach God's word with the sole purpose of learning from it and seeking God's will rather than our own. Instead of searching for verses to justify our sin, we need to be taught, rebuked, and corrected by God's word and let it act as a mirror to reflect our shortcomings and blemishes (cf. 1 Tim 3:16). Only then will God's word take its effect in our lives.

Only then will we not be blinded by Satan's trickery.



Overcoming Satan's Deception

The nature of Satan's deceptions has not changed since the days of Eden. Our study of the Genesis story helps us recognize his age-old tricks. Being aware of Satan's tactics enables us to guard ourselves against his schemes.

But as we keep a constant watch for

Justifying sin is perhaps Satan's deadliest weapon. The devil knows the Scripture, but he distorts it to tempt us.

Satan's deception, we must also actively seek to draw closer to God (Jas 4:7-8). The story of the serpent teaches us that Satan's first line of attack is to weaken our relationship with God. Just as the serpent planted doubt and error in Eve's mind to lure her away from her Creator, Satan likewise hopes to pull our hearts away from God with his deceptions. When our relationship with God is weak, we are vulnerable to sin. When God's word loses its authority in our lives, we obey our own desires rather than God's will. When we feel that God's commands are burdensome, sin becomes more attractive.

Therefore, the best immunity against sin is a strong relationship with God. Whoever abides in the Lord does not sin (1 Jn 3:6). We need to spend more time with God's word than in front of the TV, more time speaking with the Lord in prayer than chatting with friends, and more time seeking to do God's will than seeking for pleasure. We should be filled with God's word, His Spirit, and His love. As the hymn goes, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of his glory and grace."¹ If we are always deeply in love with God, we will show no interest in sin. If the Lord is constantly present in our lives, Satan's temptations will become completely powerless. ★

1. Helen H. Lemmel, *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*

Overcoming Society's Subtle Influences



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With the rapid disintegration of ethical values in modern society, it is hardly surprising that today we face ever-greater challenges to our faith. What the liberal world offers to humankind continues to corrupt in all conceivable aspects of life. Beginning with the basic family unit through to the society at large, domestic problems such as broken marriages, teenage pregnancies, and child neglect are ever on the increase, compounded by an increase in violent crimes and a decline in moral standards. Even among Christians, God's principles are often ignored. Keeping faith today has become a much more difficult struggle in comparison to generations past.

THE LURE OF MATERIAL WEALTH

With regard to our own obedience to God, there are, without a doubt, big holes in the fabric of our personal faith. In the past people lived much simpler lives, with less cares and concerns. But now, in our economically confident society, we feel the need to keep pace with the modern lifestyle and its inevitable demands for more material prosperity. Without even realizing it, we are easily influenced by this world, and we find ourselves yearning for that “little bit more”—a bigger house, a faster car, more designer-labeled products, and more stimulating entertainment.... The list goes on.

It is not surprising that our value system changes under such conditions, causing us again to embrace the worldly ideal that we once discarded, and to become materialistically inclined (cf. Phil 3:7-9). The time we allocate to God decreases in proportion to the amount of time we put into secular pursuits. As our love for God grows cold, our faith in Him subsides. Taking care of our daily necessities becomes our principal priority, and when there is time left (which rarely happens), we half-heartedly seek for His righteousness and kingdom (cf. Mt 6:30-34). When we pursue material prosperity, we can never pledge total allegiance to God. Although we are well aware of the plight we are in, we nevertheless turn away from the principles of God.

THE CORROSION OF ENTERTAINMENT

Our prosperous existence has exposed us to the corruption that TV and the popular entertainment world bring forth. This corrosive influence has ensnared both children and adults alike. As TV programs become increasingly amoral, we become less sensitive to their destructive elements. For example, TV

soap operas, which often highlight extramarital affairs and loose relationships, have become part of our everyday leisure enjoyment. As a result, our moral judgment and discernment are losing focus. Instead of reducing the chance of drifting further away from God, we use our prosperity to buy even more, so that the TV set becomes a treasured item not only in our dining or living rooms, but even in our bedrooms.

To worsen the situation, we feel the pressure to install satellite, digital, or cable TV. In the name of relaxation we engross ourselves in an endless diet of movies that reveal nothing but the products of depraved minds, the anarchy in the streets, the violence and immorality

Our faith is further compromised by the wider social belief that every way of life is legitimate and acceptable, as long as everyone is happy. Instead of having God as our absolute moral standard, we adopt a secular model.

of contemporary society. This stream of unrestrained behavior directly affects the younger minds in our families. But parents still provide what their children ask for. Playstation and other video games are filled with violent elements, and yet long stints in front of the box have become integral parts of the daily habits of young people today. They have absorbed this visual garbage all of their lives, which has rendered them virtually no different from nonbelievers.

We have lost our moral sense of direction and spiritual moorings. When it comes to worshiping God, we feel that His word is monotonous and hard to digest. His grace becomes only vaguely visible to us, and like the Israelites, we find murmuring and complaining against God to be the only available option in life. Such latitude in our spiritual observance results in the dismantling of our faith.

THE CONFUSION OF RELATIVISM

The problems we face are further compounded by the influence of secularism on the family and church. With Christian values and devotional time for God quickly vanishing at home, there is much room for moral relativism and individualism to seep in. When this change occurs, we tend to shift our focus away from God and His church, toward our nonbelieving friends and their attitudes. Lacking a moral compass and a true love for God (1 Jn 2:15-17), we find it difficult to make sense of our own belief.

Our faith is further compromised by the wider social belief that every way of life is legitimate and acceptable, as long

as everyone is happy, and that no one should pass judgment on others. This attitude tremendously weakens our resistance to sin—instead of having God as our absolute moral standard, we adopt a secular

model. As a result, many believers fall back to their old habits, such as gambling, drunkenness, and acts of immorality.

For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, then having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘a dog returns to his own vomit,’ and ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (2 Pet 2:21-22)

STANDING AGAINST THE TIDE

Although the world presents constant subtle influences to draw us away from the right path, we have the promise of Jesus—with God all things are possible (Mt 19:26)—to root us steadfastly in Him. The only thing that stands out in this promise is God Himself, who works in and achieves all things for us, if we

allow Him to take full control of our lives. This promise truly has come to pass for those who fully trust in Him. Some examples include the transformation of the people of Nineveh, who responded to the call of repentance preached by Jonah, and the willing repentance of the Corinthians after the stern warning of Paul.

■ Return to God

For the transformation of the church to take place, all members of the congregation need to be awakened to the necessity of changing their lifestyles (cf. Rom 12:1-2 ; Eph 4:21-24; Col 3:10), to recognize that it is wrong to be busy at the expense of serving God. We need to return to observing His commandments and looking after the spiritual welfare of our children.

If we can confess our wrongs in prayer, we can rediscover the path of divine strengthening and reestablish a solid relationship with God (Neh 1:5-11). This is an urgent matter. We must start now.

■ Live a Simple Life

Right and wrong are clearly differentiated in the Bible.

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isa 5:20). This same confusion was equally devastating during the time of Malachi, who witnessed the staggering problems that occurred among the people of God when they mistakenly thought that "...everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord" (Mal 2:17b).

With courage from God, we must dare to return to a simple life, one that is pleasing to God, as opposed to our present life full of worldly cares, which repels Him.

■ Redeem the Time

A simple life starts with making the most of our time in order to understand the will of our Lord (Eph 5:16-17). We must strive to live a prayerful life in the Spirit (Jude 20), with a greater emphasis on inner transformation. The Bible defines a normal life as one of holiness (Lev 20:7; 1 Pet 1:13-16; Eph 1:4; 2 Cor 10:12). It is a life in which we can thrive in the abundance of God. We must return to this life of normalcy by reducing the influences of TV and movie viewing to a level that is harmless to us spiritually. Spending more time with our children and conducting regular family service, rather than watching TV or playing computer games, can undoubtedly achieve this goal. God desires all of us to live up to this eternal command. We must strive to be as perfect as our heavenly Father is (Mt 5:48).

foiled by his fear of God. His strong moral character simply would not give in to the persistent amorous advances of the temptress: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). His uncompromising moral value, even at the risk of imprisonment, is a lesson to us all.

We consider ourselves to be the saved ones, whom Jesus has called into His kingdom out of the multitudes in this world. Most of us are aware of this God-given grace, yet today the pursuit of material prosperity has become our only object of adulation. Our hearts are not with God: we have forgotten our heavenly status, our obligations and commissions. Instead of spending time in fear, servitude, and cultivation, we are too preoccupied with what secular entertainment can provide.

When God is replaced, our families become fragmented, subject to the influence of the world. Our children turn rebellious, demanding the right to do as they please. They begin to accept alternative lifestyles that are contrary to the way that Christians should live.

In view of this precarious position, it is time to champion the idea of following God's way, with the leaders of the church making the first moves. Since God has given us a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind, it is not at all impossible for us to live a simple life that revolves around Him. Through constant prayer and spiritual refinement, we can then surely build up a strong moral character in the face of worldly depravations, standing firm in the Lord. ★

■ Adopt God's Values

When we strive to abide by God's principles, we take His values to be our own. This is a natural defense against the creeping influence of moral relativism and individualism. God is our compass in everything we do, for God's word embodies complete veneration for Him and denial of ourselves, and it offers protection against worldly influences. Through practicing the truth, we can form a strong moral character. A classic example of this strength is Joseph, who resisted the seduction of Potiphar's wife. Her repeated efforts to trap Joseph were



MISLEADING SIGNS, FOOLISH WISDOM

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It is probably no great shock to hear that most people would never willingly commit themselves to believing something that they know is wrong.

Many people, in fact, think that the beliefs they have settled on and the ways in which they have chosen to live are the best possible ones—otherwise why would they hold to them? Indeed, regardless of the objective truth or falsehood of what we believe, we usually have at least the subjective impression that we are not mistaken.

But this attitude is exactly where the danger of falling away from God begins. So is there some kind of standard, some kind of perfect mirror in which to reflect and self-reflect? In the biblical passage below, Paul shows us how to raise up the Lord Jesus Christ as just that standard and mirror:

... For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:22-25)

While this is but a short passage from one of Paul's letters, what the apostle is getting at is striking and profound. For when Paul speaks here of Jews and Greeks, he is not just commenting on two communities of people at a certain time and in a certain place. He is in fact highlighting two types of disbelief that

existed in his time and that still exist today.

To Paul, disbelief is not a simple refusal to believe in God, but is something more complex and insidious. What's deceptive here about the demanding of signs and the seeking of wisdom is that these quests constitute seemingly worthy spiritual goals in and of themselves. Hence, they can lead us into that most subtle of traps: straying from the truth precisely when we think that we are pursuing it. Let's take a closer look.

DEMANDING SIGNS

■ Seeking Proof

To begin with, let's look at the idea of "demanding signs." We could say that signs have to do with having proof of what we believe. We might wonder what Paul's problem is with this idea. After all, would you buy a car before you had first driven it? Would you sign a contract before you had read the terms? What is so bad about seeking proof for what one commits to?

But this desire for proof is precisely the problem. In a world that demands instant verification and instant gratification, we as Christians are called to do something different, to have "assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1).

Like Abraham being called out of his old homeland toward the hope of a

better land, we are called to a new life and a hope of something better than what is before our eyes. Like the people of Israel, who sank their feet into the roiling waters of the Jordan in the firm expectation that God would open up the waters, we too are called to step out in faith, to live with the constant assurance that God has already taken care of our needs and prepared our path. When we do so—and only when we do so—we are met with the gracious response of God.

■ Seeking Power

On another level, seeking after signs is really seeking after power. How is this so? The people of Jesus' time were constantly asking Him to perform some sign to show that He was indeed from God. Many of them were more interested in pyrotechnic displays than in listening to the words of Jesus, the real source of saving power.

Throughout human history, it seems that power is the true currency of the world: might is right, they say, and power is persuasive. It is in this respect, however, that such a seeking becomes a dangerous sideroad away from the ultimate sign, which has been given to us once and for all: Christ crucified—and not only crucified, but resurrected and triumphant over death.

Jesus said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign

shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:38-39). He also said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

What does this mean? It means that the cross issues a direct challenge to the prevailing values of a world that has always been awed by displays of sheer power—brute strength, might, and force. Instead, Jesus came to show us a completely different ideal, which He demonstrated by forgiving us, loving us, and giving Himself up for us before we even knew Him.

On Golgotha there were no armies and no grand spectacles, only the sight of a lonely man dying on a cross. But when Jesus rose again, He triumphed over all of the transient "powers" of this world, over evil, sin, and death itself. Our crucified and risen Savior is the only sign that we need: the sign of a new life in Him.

SEEKING WISDOM

Turning now to the seekers of wisdom, let me first say that I don't think Paul was making a blanket statement against any and all attempts of human beings to gain insight. After all, the Bible itself constantly admonishes us to seek wisdom, that is, to come to know who God is. Instead, Paul is trying to identify the dangerous tendencies that a person pursuing wisdom can fall into. In my mind there are at least two of these tendencies: misidentifying wisdom with the prevailing "common sense" of the world, and accepting the assumption that human efforts alone can provide the answers to life's basic problems.

■ Common Sense?

On the first count, we might be reminded of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which can be found in chapters 5-7 of Matthew. While He addresses Himself to the adherents of the law of Moses, Jesus was also attacking the way that people in general have gradually fashioned for

themselves a brand of human wisdom that we might also call the "common sense" or prevailing wisdom of the world.

Over and over again, Jesus speaks out against this view, saying "You have heard..." and answering "But I say to you..." While the prevailing wisdom of the world tells us not to kill, Jesus tells us not even to hate. While the prevailing

In the end, it is the "foolishness" of God, a foolishness that would make Him come down and die on a cross, that ends up trumping the wisdom of the world.

wisdom tells us not to commit adultery, Jesus tells us not even to tolerate lustful thoughts in our hearts. While the world teaches us to "love your neighbor and hate your enemy," to practice the retributive justice of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," Jesus teaches us, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

The Lord wants us not to be content with being simple rule-followers, following only an outward shell of goodness or simply submitting to the prevailing "wisdom," which would convince us that the world is one big, zero-sum rat race. We are children of God (and not rats!), and the Lord gives us the insight and the power to rise above the limitations of any secular system we may find ourselves in. Thus, we live in the plenitude of God's love, not in the impoverishment of the world's lowered standards.

■ Human Effort?

Second, seekers of wisdom may often fall for the appealing illusion that human efforts alone will provide the answers to life. We can see this attitude today in the New Age, pop-psychology messages that teach self-knowledge and self-empowerment as tools to tap into the power within ourselves, trying to find acceptance, love, and freedom. While such messages are attractive and to some extent can bring positive changes in people's lives, they tend to miss a very basic point. Paul poignantly reminds us of this point in the eighth chapter of Romans:

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

This passage tells us many things. For one thing, it tells us that mere knowledge is not enough to help us. Just knowing that we should or should not do something does not in fact give us the power to act accordingly. And this passage points out a basic fact of human nature: that it is fundamentally flawed, compromised by evil and the power of sin. That is why any idea or system that relies only on the innate power of human nature is destined to fail, for we are not gods, and we are certainly not God.

In the end, it is the "foolishness" of God, a foolishness that would make Him come down and die on a cross, that ends up trumping the wisdom of the world. For the utterly incomprehensible love of God accomplishes what no human scheme ever could—it opens up a fountain of life through Jesus' blood that washes us of sin, and it dwells within us as the Spirit to guide us into His likeness. Finally, we realize that worldly wisdom fails because it cannot truly transform human nature, and because it cannot save our souls. God's seeming foolishness is revealed as the highest wisdom of all.

May God grant that we hold on not to dazzling signs of proof or might, but to the saving power of His love. May He grant that we seek not prideful and self-reliant human systems, but the wisdom that comes from knowing Him and being redeemed by Him. ★



When A Gentle

Article from Holy Spirit Monthly #253 Oct 1998

During Paul's imprisonment, he and some other prisoners were escorted by the Imperial Regiment centurion, Julius, aboard a cargo ship destined for Italy. They sailed slowly through the Mediterranean Sea and, after many days, docked at Fair Havens, on Crete, where they stayed until the Jewish Fast was over. Sailing after the Fast was considered dangerous because of the increased winds and likelihood of severe storms, yet the majority on the ship wanted to press on, hoping they could reach Phoenix and spend the winter there. What should they do? Should they take the risk and press on toward Phoenix, hoping that the weather cooperates, or should they stay at Fair Havens

for the winter? (Acts 27:1-8).

Guided by God regarding their journey, Paul advised the crew to be patient and wait until more favorable conditions prevailed. When a gentle south wind began to blow, the centurion and the crew thought they had obtained the sign they were looking for. After considering Paul's and the crew's opinions, the centurion gave the command to weigh anchor and sail toward Phoenix. But before long, the ship was caught in a tempest that lasted for many days, endangering everyone on board. Despite barely securing the lifeboat, lowering the sea anchor, and throwing the cargo and tackle overboard, they were battered and unable to control the ship. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued to rage, they lost all hope of being saved (Acts 27:9-

10).

Fortunately for Paul and the rest of those on board, God showed mercy and delivered them from the angry seas (Acts 27:22-24). Following this harrowing experience, the centurion came to know the power, mercy, and grace of God. He learned that all of his experience and knowledge amounted to nothing. Even a gentle wind blowing was not the signal he understood it to be. Nothing was guaranteed except the word of God, which never changes and is fully trustworthy. Realizing this, the centurion began to respect Paul and took his suggestions seriously, and all hands were saved (Acts 27:22-26, 31-32, 34-36, 41-43).

BY FAITH OR BY SIGHT?

With the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that the centurion did not make the right decision. Yet when we consider the

process he used in making his decision, he seems to have chosen a rational course of action. After all, he understood the dilemma facing him and the risks involved. He asked the ship's owner and crew for expert and experienced advice, listened to the majority, and, when the gentle south wind began blowing, he recognized an opportunity to reach his goal.

Unfortunately, he did not consider one critical element: God, the Creator of heaven and earth. God gives life to men, determines their lifespans, and, more relevant to the ship's occupants, controls the winds and the seas (Ps 95:3-5; 104:1-10; Acts 17:25-28). On the surface, it might seem that men have the freedom to decide their own fate, but clearly, it is the Lord who ultimately decides (Jer 10:23).

This episode highlights what hap-

to discount His power and His will. The proud do not acknowledge God's sovereignty or trust Him. Instead, they only trust their own wisdom and understanding, living by sight rather than by faith, worshiping the advice of "experts" and respecting the rule of the majority. Like a gentle wind, pride lulls the unsuspecting into a false sense of complacency, driving them toward destruction.

We must entrust ourselves to God and be vigilant against such complacency. While men may be deceitful, God is faithful (Rom 3:3-4); where there is indecision, God stands firm (Ps 119:89); and while the imbeciles consider themselves wise, God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom (1 Cor 1:25). Compared to the Creator, the nations of this world are worthless (Is 40:13-17). The rationality and intelligence that God has given us must be tempered with the humble real-

Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain; and unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stay awake in vain (Ps 127:1). Reliance on God is the only way in which we can confidently walk through the valley of death.

Still, our confidence in the Lord often erodes; while Jesus never changes (Heb 3:14), our faith wavers from time to time. We complacently drift along, surrendering ourselves to the trends and pleasures of the moment. We replace our confidence in the Lord with a confidence in human rationality, and we perversely alter the truths of the Scriptures to suit our own needs. Like the scoffers found in 2 Peter 3:3-7, we may begin to wonder about the validity of the Scripture: "Where is the second coming that Jesus predicted? Everything is the same since the beginning of creation." Is this what God desires of us? Clearly, the

South Wind Blows

pens when the paths of human judgment and the will of God converge. Faced with a challenge, the rational person will naturally begin an analytical process that will culminate in a decision. The decision-making process may take into account past experience, general knowledge, observation of the environment, and the pros and cons of the decision. This all sounds very logical and reasonable, yet the decision maker runs into trouble when his judgment contradicts God's will. The centurion certainly made what, at first, appears to have been a reasonable decision. A gentle south wind was blowing, which in past experience had always signaled a calm journey. In the same situation, how would we decide—by faith or by sight?

Rational decision making is a healthy and necessary process in the course of daily living. However, we must never let pride distort our decision making. Pride incites people to forget God,

ization that we are nothing without our Lord, the Creator.

RELiance ON GOD

As the men in Paul's boat could attest, life is rarely smooth sailing. Unforeseen events happen, and we are surprised by their suddenness. Can our rationality predict such incidents? Could it have predicted the tragic death of Princess Diana? Or an airplane crash? In spite of the rapid advance of science and technology, we still cannot predict or prevent many accidents.

Yet we are not helpless in the face of such unpredictable events. They attest to the undeniable fact that unless the

answer is no.

Yet on a daily basis we are faced with choices that force us to answer a very basic question: do we decide by sight or by faith? Do we rely on God or on our own rationality? Let us not be like the centurion, who allowed the gentle south wind to caress his face and cloud his judgment. Instead, let us choose to rely on God and not become complacent in our own intelligence and knowledge.

★

THE CALL FROM MYANMAR

Fu-Ming Che—TAIWAN
(Adapted from an article in Holy Spirit Monthly #266, Nov 1999)

From June 17 to 30, 1999, I was unexpectedly sent to Myanmar to help in the holy work, because the two ministers originally scheduled to go there were no longer available. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would go to Myanmar; I wasn't familiar with the country or the people, and I didn't know how I could help. But since time was a factor, I hurriedly applied for my visa, packed my belongings, and entrusted everything to God in prayer.

When I arrived at the Myanmar airport, I was supposed to meet a brother named Thomas Yen, but I didn't know who he was. As I left the gate, I saw a group of people and approached the person who I thought would be the most likely candidate. Indeed, it was Thomas, for after we greeted each other with "Hallelujah," it seemed like we were old friends. We are truly one family in Christ!

The next morning, Thomas and I visited a sister from Taiwan who had married and moved to Myanmar. We talked about faith, shared the mercy and grace of God, and encouraged one another in the Lord. We pray that God will keep this sister in His love and bring her whole family to Christ.

That afternoon on the way back to Thomas' home, there was a huge thunderstorm that flooded the roads and caused our car to stall. Several Burmese workers were kind enough to help us push the car to the side of the road, where we were able to restart it and

return to Thomas' home safely. That night, we headed over to our prayer house in Shwebogan. When we arrived, there was no electricity, which was quite common in that area after thunderstorms.

On the second day, we left before dawn to go to Upper Myanmar for Sabbath service. This trip required a plane ride, and my ticket was ten times the price of a native's, just because I was a foreigner! When we got off the plane at Kalaymyo, I discovered that the "airport" consisted of a wooden fence (which served as the gate), a run-down wooden shack, and wooden benches.

TOGETHER IN SPIRIT & LOVE

Since it was against Burmese law for foreigners to stay at the church, Thomas and I dropped off our bags at a local motel, which charged \$5 a night for extremely meager accommodations. During blackouts there was no electricity for the fan to run, so it became extremely hot. There were also many malaria-carrying mosquitoes there during the summer, so we took malaria pills and asked the Lord to pro-

tect us from sickness so that we could do His work.

Along the side of the road there were many small, blue "taxis"—rejected Japanese automobiles that were originally made for farmers. After agreeing on the price, we got into the pile of scrap metal and clinked and clanked along the bumpy road for the twenty-minute trip. Thankfully, the engine was still good, and we managed to reach our church in Taungphila on time for Sabbath service.

Our church in Taungphila is a wooden, two-story building, with the chapel on the second floor. A large sign



A sign in front of a church member's home

at the front of the door says "True Jesus Church" in Burmese, and at the bottom of the sign it says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). At the front of the first floor is a small guestroom, and in the back is a dining area and kitchen with a grass roof. These are used for spiritual convocations and seminars.

Though the church is simple, it is very beautiful. The members themselves live poor and simple lives in run-down shacks. Above the front doors of their own homes, they put a sign with the church's name on it. They are very proud of being members of the True Jesus Church, and they witness to others, spreading the fragrance of Christ. On the wooden walls of their homes, they write Bible verses or thoughts expressing their love for the Lord. Though their lives are very poor and simple, their hearts are

Taungphila members in front of the church kitchen



The True Jesus Church in Taungphila and her members



abundantly filled with joy.

There are over 120 native believers in Taungphila, and the reputation of this town is good since there are many church members there. Before service, you will hear the sounds of prayer and strong, heartfelt hymn singing. These members put all of their heart, soul, and strength into praising and thanking God. There is no piano, organ, or keyboard in the chapel, only a large drum and a guitar. When I was with them, I learned some new hymns: "We are One Family," "Jesus Loves You," and "Love Brings Us Together." We truly were brought together in spirit and in love, and I experienced the wonderful love and hospitality of our brothers and sisters there.

PEACE AND JOY IN THE SPIRIT

During our short time at Taungphila church, we held a Bible seminar on the basic beliefs, a seminar for holy workers, a spiritual convocation, and an evangelical service. During the spiritual convocation, nineteen people were baptized and eleven received the Holy Spirit.

After the spiritual convocation, we held three days of evangelical service at Nud Kyi Kone. Since there was no electricity there, we used oil lamps. Every night there were over a hundred truth-seekers who were hungry and thirsty for the truth. The members in this area are looking for a piece of land where they

can build a church. We pray that the Lord will guide them in this endeavor so that the name of the Lord may be glorified.

Thomas and I left early every morning and came home late every night, but we never felt tired. We deeply experienced Paul's words: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). It really moved me how the church workers and members listened so attentively to the truth and had such sincere hearts to learn. They truly have "chosen that good part" (Lk 10:41).

A FERTILE FIELD FOR EVANGELISM

Currently there is one church in Taungphila, one church in Pyindaw Oo, and prayer houses and service areas in six areas: Pyidawtha, Sakhamayi, Tiddicm, Falam, Nud Kyi Kone, and Yangon Shwebogan. There are a total of 69 families, 211 members, and 87 truth-seekers.

These people need our care and more workers to spread the gospel. Since there are currently no full-time workers or pastors in Myanmar, the International Assembly has assigned the Singapore General Assembly to help with the holy work in Myanmar. They need help in literary ministry, religious

education, youth fellowship, and training of holy workers. Indeed, "the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Mt 9:37). We hope that all the brothers and sisters around the world will incline their ears to this call from Macedonia.

The Burmese members live poor and hard lives, but they are very simple-hearted and pray fervently, relying on the Lord. Because they thirst and hunger for the truth, the grace of God abounds in their lives. Though Myanmar is a

A member's home (left) and the Taungphila church



Buddhist country, it is a fertile field for evangelism.

I am really thankful for God's guidance and protection during these two weeks, and also for the love and hospitality of Thomas, his wife, and the native members. Though we come from different cultural backgrounds, the gospel is not separated by nationalities. It does not matter whether you're Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female; we are one body in Christ. God redeemed us by His blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev 5:9). From east to west and from north to south, people will come to enjoy the banquet of God's kingdom (Luke 13:29).

May God abundantly bless the members in Myanmar and His work there, so that they can stretch their roots downward and produce fruit upward, enlarging the tents of the gospel and glorifying the name of the Lord. ★



Preacher Fu-Ming Che (second from left) and Taungphila members

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH IN MYANMAR

- 1987** Four ministers of another church discover the True Jesus Church in the "Sabbath Observer," a publication introducing all major Sabbath-keeping churches around the world. These ministers begin to preach the complete gospel, and at one point, four hundred people are ready to receive baptism. This group attempts to contact the church through postal mail, but without success. Eventually, the four hundred people disperse and return to their former churches.
- 1989** A minister of another church by the name of Mr. Thang discovers our church publication, "Words of Life." He writes to the International Assembly (IA) of the True Jesus Church and asks that ministers be sent to preach and baptize.
- 1990** The IA sends Pr. John Lo and Dn. Jonah Yapp to preach in Myanmar. They hold evangelical services at a member's house, and twenty people receive baptism, including the original four who discovered the True Jesus Church in the "Sabbath Observer."
- 1993** Pr. John Lo and Dn. Jonah Yapp hold evangelical services at a member's house in Yangon, and thirty people are baptized.
- 1994** Pr. John Lo and Dn. Jonah Yapp hold evangelical services in Yangon, and forty receive baptism. But because there are no ministers there to help root the members in the faith, some of them leave. A church in Pyindaw Oo and a prayer house in Sakhamgyi are established. Bro. Thomas Yen moves to Yangon from New York for business. He witnesses fervently and holds family Bible studies with the abidance of God.
- 1995** Pr. John Lo and Dn. Jonah Yapp hold an evangelical service at the YMCA in Yangon. Fifty people are baptized. A church board is established to help pastor the church.
- 1997** Pr. John Lo and Dn. Jonah Yapp evangelize in Pyindaw Oo, Sakhamayi, Taungphila, and a few other places. The members work fervently, and there is not enough room in the churches to seat all the people. Members actively begin to build churches; currently almost all the churches are completed and are ready to be dedicated to the Lord.

THE "LAND OF PAGODAS"

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is a country in Southeast Asia. This kite-shaped country is bounded on the west by Bangladesh, on the northwest by India's Assam State, on the northeast by China's Yunnan Province, on the east by Laos and Thailand, and on the southwest by the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Yangon (formerly known as Rangoon) is the capital and largest city.

The coastal region is known as Lower Myanmar, while the interior region is known as Upper Myanmar. A horse-shoe-shaped mountain complex and the valley of the Irrawaddy River system are the country's dominant topographical features. Natural resources abound in Myanmar, which is known for its jade and teak wood.

The nation comprises fourteen provinces and the population is about fifty million. More than two-thirds of the people of Myanmar are Burman, ethnically akin to the Tibetans and the Chinese. Several native minorities with their own languages and cultures inhabit the country, including the Karen, Shan, Arakanese (Rakhine), Mon, Chin, and Kachin, as well as numerous other smaller minorities.

In 1948, Myanmar became independent of England and is now ruled by a socialist military regime. It was originally regarded as the "barn of Asia" due to its abundant resources, but after being shut up for thirty years, it is now a poor and underdeveloped country. In recent years, the minority nationalities are seeking independence, which has caused civil war. In addition, the people have begun to demand democracy, which has resulted in political instability. The government is attempting to improve and relax their economic policies and is now encouraging foreign investors.


RELIGION

Buddhists are 89 percent of all the people of Myanmar. Most adhere to the Theravada school of Buddhism, as do Buddhists in neighboring Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

For the majority of Myanmar's population, Buddhism is the center of individual life and the monastery is the center of the community. A rite of passage for every adolescent boy is the shinphyu, in which the boy enters a monastery and briefly lives as a novice monk. Even the king is no exception to this tradition. Women also gladly shave their heads and enter the monastery for a short period of time or for their whole lives.

As fervent Buddhists, most Burmans believe that building and repairing temples is one of the most virtuous deeds. Because of this, temples abound in Myanmar, which is known as "the land of pagodas."

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The City Of God



Henry Gyebi—Ghana, AFRICA

MY FATHER'S FAITH

In the name of Jesus Christ I testify to the glory of God. I was born on January 20, 1975 in Kpando Dzoanti, one of the cities in Ghana where there is a True Jesus Church. My late beloved father, S.O. Larbi, was formerly a Presbyterian catechist, and he became a member of the True Jesus Church in 1988.

Before that time, my father fasted and prayed for forty days and nights, asking God to show him the true church. In one of these prayers, God revealed the true church to him: he saw a big city made of sparkling gold, and it was situated at the top of a tall mountain. It came from the East, drawing closer and closer to him in the way the sun would rise. At the entrance of the city was a large gate guarded by angels, and at the top of the gate was written "True Jesus Church." Behind him, a voice said: "This is the true church that can save mankind."

Later, a member of the True Jesus Church invited my father to one of the church's evangelical services. After the service, my father asked what the name of the church was, and the member answered, "True Jesus Church."

What was most surprising to him was that the preachers used the Bible to answer every question he asked. After my father went home, he didn't sleep the whole night because he was comparing the teachings of the Bible to the answers that the preacher had given to his questions. He saw that every answer was from the Bible. At that moment, he began to recollect his vision when he had fasted for forty days.

One Sunday soon after, he went to his Presbyterian church as usual. He stood at the front with some publications of the True Jesus Church, and he told the

whole congregation that he had found the true church. He said that he was leaving the Presbyterian church, and that whoever wanted to be saved should also go to the True Jesus Church. At that time I was the drummer in the Presbyterian church, and he said to me in front of the congregation, "Starting today, you are no longer going to the Presbyterian church to play their drums. If you want to be saved, you should follow me to the true church." I was very young then, and I obeyed my father's instructions and followed him.

He then offered himself to the ministry, and in 1990 he went home to his father in Abiriw and preached the true gospel of salvation to him. When he reached home, his younger brother was seriously sick and at the point of death. Two pastors from the True Jesus Church came to fast and pray for him, and today, his younger brother is recovered and stronger in the faith than before.

MY OWN FAITH

Through many miraculous signs and wonders, God has really proved to me that I can be saved only in the True Jesus Church. I saw with my own eyes how brothers and sisters had been dead for many hours, but after prayer, they came back to life. God has chosen the True Jesus Church as His dwelling place and where He has put His name, to save anyone who comes to believe in Him.

One day, I heard a sermon on the final resurrection. I doubted that it was possible for someone who had died and rotted and turned to dust to come back to life after so many years. So in our last prayer that night, I prayed to God to help me understand if this message was really true.

That night, I dreamed that we were all standing together in the church pray-

ing. Suddenly a very heavy storm began to blow, and all the louvers came off the windows, but no one was injured. At the same time, there was a very intense earthquake, and every living thing, including all of us, fell dead on the ground for several hours.

I was the first person to rise up and I saw everybody else on the floor dead. Then a voice behind me said, "Go and get a Bible from one of the benches." As I moved and walked, I felt very light, like paper. Eventually everyone in the dream resurrected, including my aunt, who is a member of the True Jesus Church in Abiriw. She woke up and reached out for a Bible and handed it to me. I turned to the book of Psalms, and the dream was over.

That night I couldn't go back to sleep, and the next morning I told the preacher everything. This dream helped to strengthen my faith in the truth of the final resurrection. It also proved to me that God is in the True Jesus Church, and He is always present to speak to us.

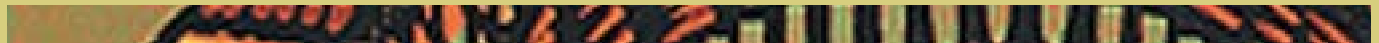
In the True Jesus Church, we are one family in Christ Jesus. I would like to say a big thank you to all the brothers and sisters in the Ghana church and abroad for their loving care. Through their love and by God's grace, I had the opportunity to go to school. I pray that God will give them the ability to help others as well. The future of every home, family, and nation depends on the youth. The church needs to train its youth to become future leaders as well, just as Moses trained Joshua to succeed him.

We hope that the True Jesus Church will continue to provide the materials and support to build up the faith of the young children, so that the church may have a good future. May God richly bless everyone in abundance and every work of the church. Amen. ★

TRUE PEACE OF MIND

Fay Shen—Garden Grove, California, USA





On July 16, 1999, John F. Kennedy, Jr., his wife, and his sister-in-law went crashing headlong into the Atlantic in a small private plane.

News of their tragic death brought to my mind
Ecclesiastes 9:5-6:

*For the living know that they will die;
But the dead know nothing,
And they have no more reward
For the memory of them is forgotten.*

*Also their love, their hatred, and their
envy have now perished;
Nevermore will they have a share
In anything done under the sun.*

Before I accepted Jesus into my heart, I frequently pondered over the meaning of life. What if I encounter a fatal accident tomorrow? Will I be reincarnated? Is there heaven and hell? Was I simply created through the process of evolution? These questions, which I had no answers to, often worried me.

A TURNING POINT

I grew up in an atheist family. As my husband Zion grew up, he and his family were members of the True Jesus Church. After Zion and I married, we attended church only once. Whenever there was an evangelical service, my mother-in-law would always urge us to attend and to seek the truth. Because of our long work hours we were unwilling to give up valuable rest time, so we always declined her offer.

When December 1997 rolled around, again my mother-in-law asked us to attend an evangelical service. At that time we had a fairly long vacation from work, so we decided to give the services a try because there was nothing better to do.

Grace, a close friend of ours, was attending church for the first time. Not wanting her to be surprised by the prayer in tongues, Zion and I explained to her what little we knew about the Holy Spirit.

During the service, I felt as if the Lord opened our hearts and we absorbed the truth with great interest.

DOES GOD REALLY EXIST?

From that point on, we began seeking the truth. Although Zion had grown up attending church every Sabbath with his parents, it really had been a weekly routine, and he had never quite grasped a genuine understanding of the truth.

During the 1998 evangelical services at Baldwin Park church, in his prayer Zion asked the Lord to allow Grace, my

cousin, and I to experience the Holy Spirit if He truly exists. He dared not ask for the gift for himself, because he felt that he wasn't yet worthy and hadn't repented fully.

After the prayer, Zion was surprised to hear the pastor announce that three people had received the Holy Spirit that night. When he learned that the three were Grace, my cousin, and I, he was further amazed. God had answered him exactly as he had requested. He would never again doubt the Lord's presence.

MORE ADDED TO THE FOLD

After understanding the importance of believing in the Lord Jesus for salvation, I began to be concerned for my family. Among my three siblings, I thought that my brother Charlie would have the hardest time accepting Christ. But I noticed that Charlie listened to his wife Rio, so I thought that if Rio accepted Christ, there would be hope for Charlie.

I was also concerned about my grandmother. Not only did she have a hearing problem due to her age, but she also had been a devout Buddhist all her life. It was difficult to convey the gospel to her without using a combination of writing and loud speech. After I finally explained the truth to her, she was hesitant about giving up her Buddhist beliefs because it had been her religion for as long as she could remember.

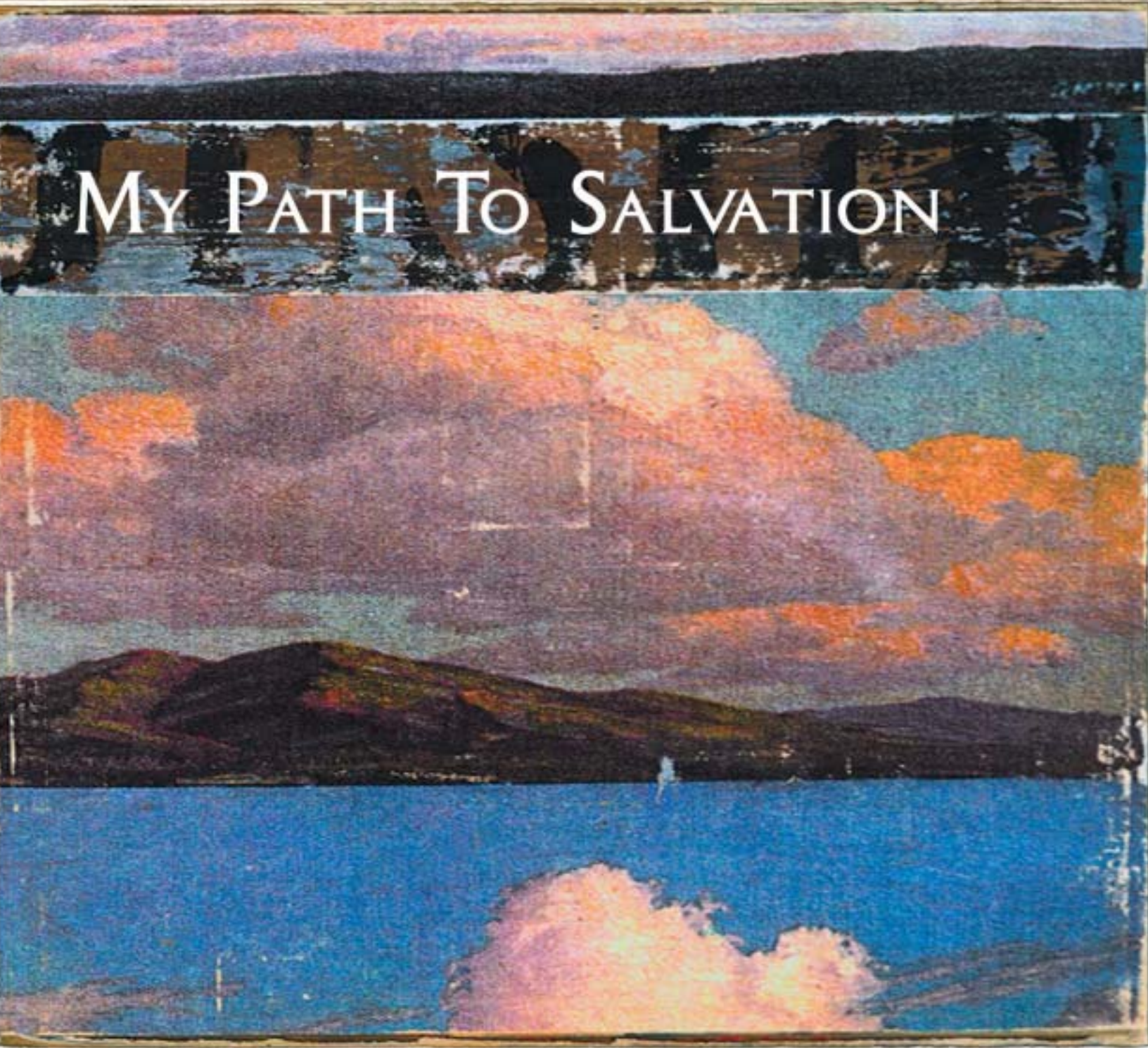
So Grace, Zion, and I all prayed very diligently for my siblings, Rio, and my grandmother. Thanks to the Lord, they all accepted Jesus with a simple heart. Rio received the Holy Spirit shortly after her baptism. My grandmother cleared her house of the idols she used to worship. Later, my sister Jean and my brother John accepted the Lord Jesus and were both baptized in the church after more long prayers asking the Lord to open their hearts.

God listens to our prayers. We must pray persistently and not give up, just like the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8). If you are concerned about your loved ones and others who have not yet accepted Jesus, you must convince them not only through example but through prayer. Our abilities are infinitely minute compared to the almighty Lord. Remember that the Lord hears the desire of the humble and listens to their cries (Psalm 10:17).

No one knows the exact moment when we will leave this world and face the judgment of Christ. John F. Kennedy, Jr. left his house on a happy trip, not knowing that it would be his last. The Lord gave and took away what he had in this world. For this reason, we must remain alert and pray for others, like the five wise virgins who prepared oil and waited for the arrival of the Bridegroom (Mark 25:1-13).

I thank the Lord that I was introduced to the True Jesus Church. After understanding the truth, being baptized, and receiving the Holy Spirit, I have felt true peace of mind. ★





MY PATH TO SALVATION

Lynn Hsieh—Irvine, California, USA

Hallelujah, in the name of Lord Jesus I testify. When I was growing up, I never thought that I would come to believe in Jesus. First, my family background was traditional ancestor and idol worship. Second, I often found Christians irritating because I felt their deeds weren't as good as those of Buddhists. So when Christians tried to preach the gospel to me, I ignored them. In my heart, I felt sorry for them because they actually believed the Bible.

In August 1997, a neighbor who attended a different church of another denomination came and invited me to her church. She was very nice. Since I was suffering a great deal from my marriage, I went to her church. After several visits, I did not feel moved or touched. But I still continued to go for the sole purpose of making friends and socializing.

In October 1997, a sister from the True Jesus Church introduced me to the church. It was hard for me to ignore her persistence. After several invitations, I finally attended a family service. For the first time, I was actually moved by a sermon.

I thought to myself, how come I had never heard such wonderful words, especially in the previous churches I went to? This pastor emphasized that the True Jesus Church has God's abidance. This greatly interested me, for I thought Buddha was god. Is there another God?

ANSWERED PRAYER

One day as I was backing out of my garage, I pressed the remote to shut the garage door, but it didn't work. After many attempts, the door remained open. Suddenly I recalled that the church said there is a God, so I thought, why not ask God for help?

I prayed to God, saying If you truly exist, please close the garage door. I pressed the remote again, and unexpect-

edly, the door closed. I was very surprised, but I thought it was only a coincidence, and then drove away.

The next day, when I was leaving the house, the garage door wouldn't close again. I thought, This time I'll press the remote control more firmly. Something must have gone wrong with the sensor yesterday.

I rolled down my window and pointed the remote at the garage. I tried all kinds of ways to make it work, pressing it firmly and softly, pointing it to the left and to the right. I tried about twenty times, and the garage door remained open. I had no choice but to pray. Like the day before, I pressed the button again and the garage door closed.

On the following day, the same

felt that I had established a genuine faith that God really exists.

JOY IN THE SPIRIT

Later, I continued to come to church to listen to the sermons and seek the truth. But I had great doubts when it came to praying in the Spirit (speaking in tongues).

One evening after attending a family service, I felt this tingling in my hand. I thought to myself, could this be the Holy Spirit? Since I didn't really believe in the Holy Spirit, I just ignored it. About ten minutes later, the sensation grew stronger and stronger, and it seemed like my whole body was vibrating.

I ran to a small room, shut the door, and knelt down saying, In the name of

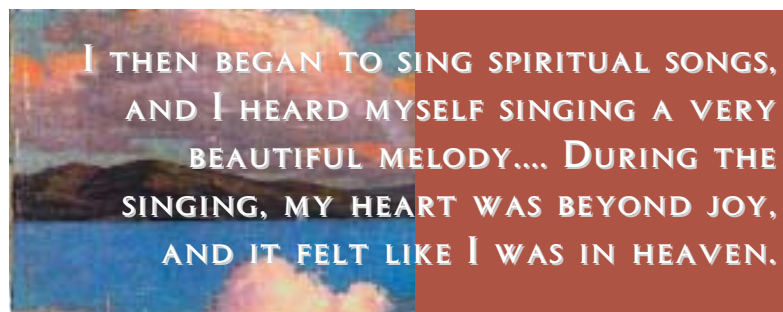
Lord Jesus I pray. Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus. Immediately, my hands and body started to move and I began to speak in tongues. This continued for about fifteen minutes. My hands felt sore but I was unable to stop. Not knowing what to do, I said to God, My hands are sore, and at that very moment the movement stopped.

I then began to sing spiritual songs, and I heard myself singing a very beautiful melody, but it seemed like it wasn't me doing it. During the singing, my heart was beyond joy, and it felt like I was in heaven. It was truly, incomparably wonderful.

Afterwards I realized that I had received the Holy Spirit. I fell prostrate on the floor and kept saying, Thank the Lord! Thank the Lord!

After this personal experience, I finally concluded that what I heard was the truth: the True Jesus Church really has God's abidance, and the Holy Spirit testifies to this. After seeking the truth a few months more, I was baptized into the name of the Lord on July 5, 1999, and became His child.

This is how I was chosen by God. Thank the Lord, and may all the praise, thanks, and glory be unto the true God in heaven forever. ★



thing happened again. This time I tried the buttons twice as many times as the day before and it still didn't work. But miraculously, after a prayer, I pressed the button and the garage door closed. This event happened three days in a row. But since I was the only one who saw it, it didn't really improve my faith.

The next afternoon, after I picked up my children, I opened the garage door from the inside. I gathered my children and stood to one side. I pressed the remote, and as usual the door wouldn't come down. Then my eldest, second, and youngest daughters took turns pressing the remote and it still didn't work.

Then I knelt where I had been standing. After I got up from my prayer, I pressed the button and the door closed.

My three children said, That's wonderful, Mommy! How did you do it? I replied It's not me, it's because of God's help. This time I had three witnesses. I

One Faith



There are thousands of Christian denominations in the world today, each preaching different beliefs regarding God and salvation. Are these teachings just different paths to the same goal, or is there only one absolute gospel of salvation?

This issue's theme looks to the Bible for definitive answers to these as well as other related questions:

- ◆ What did Jesus Christ and the apostles preach regarding salvation?
- ◆ What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the gospel of salvation? Are all spiritual phenomena that Christians experience the work of the Holy Spirit? How can we discern the presence of the Holy Spirit today?
- ◆ What is the relationship between the church, the gospel of salvation, and the Holy Spirit? Are all churches that acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord part of the body of Christ?

As you read the following articles, we pray that you will take this opportunity to reexamine your beliefs in light of the Bible. May the Holy Spirit guide you as you seek a deeper understanding of the truth.



One Faith

(Part 1)

One Faith

A Christian website states, "There are differences within Christian churches that have created various denominations. Although these differences are there, the common denominator with all of these Christian churches is that Jesus Christ is Lord and the means of eternal salvation. (Frankly, that's the most important thing!)"

At first glance, this accommodating attitude seems satisfactory to most Christians. They might feel that even though these denominations have differences regarding their beliefs in God and salvation, it's good that they are working toward the same goal and that they share a common belief in Jesus Christ. So it shouldn't matter which church Christians attend or which version of the gospel they preach, since they are all essentially the same, right?

In fact, this question is not a new one. Long ago, during the apostolic times, Christians probably asked themselves the same thing when variations of the true gospel first began to arise. To those who accepted these differences, Paul replied:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)

Paul was generally very encompassing and sympathetic of people who were different, for he said, to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the

weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you (1 Cor 9:22-23). But when it came to the gospel, Paul left no room for compromise. There can be only one gospel. No other gospels should be tolerated.

Why was Paul so insistent on believing only one gospel? According to him, not all gospels and not all preachings about Jesus are true. Some gospels preach another Jesus, or receive a different spirit or a different gospel (2 Cor 11:3-4). While these other proclamations or spiritual experiences may appear to center on Jesus Christ, they actually lead people away from the true gospel. In fact, any gospel that deviates from the one that the apostles preached can threaten our salvation, since the gospel of truth is intimately tied to our salvation (1 Cor 15:1-2). That is why Paul used such harsh words against all other gospels, even placing a curse on those who preached a different gospel and led others astray. Likewise, the apostle John also warned us not to believe every spir-

it is only one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism. This one faith refers to the one gospel of salvation that the apostles preached, the faith which was once for all delivered to all the saints (Jude 3).

Before the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised that the Father would send us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, which would guide [us] into all truth (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit does not reveal different truths to different individuals, because the Holy Spirit brings unity (Eph 4:3). Therefore, two churches holding different beliefs or preaching different truths cannot both be true: one must be right and the other wrong, or incomplete.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES

How do we know if the gospel we have heard is true? First of all, the true gospel must conform to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Ephesians 2:19-22 tells us:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

These verses tell us that we are being built into a holy temple for the Lord on the foundation of the apostles, the prophets, and the Lord Jesus Christ. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Rock on which we must build in order

Today, many people advocate the idea that differences in the doctrines of salvation are acceptable. Truth has become a matter of personal preference.

it, but instead to test the spirits, whether they are of God. Such was the staunch attitude of the apostles in upholding the one true gospel.

Today, many people advocate the idea that differences in the doctrines of salvation are acceptable. Truth has become a matter of personal preference. What is true for you may not be true for me. But the gospel of Christ is not relative. If it were, the apostles would not have condemned other gospels. Ephesians 4:5 tells us that there

One Faith

for our faith to endure (Lk 6:48).

Therefore, the church that preaches the true gospel today is the one that continues the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The church must not only hold firmly to and proclaim these teachings, but also, as the spiritual temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, she must experience the power of the Holy Spirit as in the days of the apostles. The church must have the testimony of God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit and various signs and miracles (Heb 2:3-4; Mk 16:20). When the church upholds the apostolic faith today, she will also have divine blessings similar to those of the apostolic church.

So what exactly is this one gospel that the apostles and the Lord Jesus preached? Let us explore this question in detail.

SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

The true gospel preaches the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:3-4)

The Lord Jesus received the punishment that our sins deserved, and He opened the way for us to have eternal life with Him. Grace is unmerited favor, or according to Webster's, unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification. In other words, the chance for salvation is a gift; we do not receive it because of our innate goodness or because of any good we have done. Indeed, nothing we can do is deserving of God's salvation. But God came in the form of flesh as the Lord Jesus Christ and

died to save us from our sins. This atoning work of Christ is the central message of the gospel of grace.

Since God's grace is a gift, we cannot possibly earn our salvation. Rather, we can only receive God's grace through faith.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all

Outward confession and acceptance alone will not guarantee our salvation. We must accept the Lord Jesus with true faith by doing the "will of the Father in heaven."

have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed. (Rom 3:21-25)

Through belief in the Lord Jesus, we can be partakers of His grace. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

Today, almost all Christian denominations uphold the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. However, the disagreement comes when we discuss what this grace encompasses and what true faith entails. Most Christians believe that the moment you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and accept Him into your heart, you are saved and have the guarantee of eternal life any act beyond this belief and acceptance has nothing to do with your personal salvation.

But is verbal confession and intellectual acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ all that is necessary to receive God's grace? Do these acts truly guarantee our salvation? The Lord Jesus tells us,

Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will

declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness! (Mt 7:21-23)

According to these verses, outward confession and acceptance alone will not guarantee our salvation.

We must accept the Lord Jesus with true faith by doing the will of the Father in heaven. While every professed Christian may confess the Lord, not everyone is a true believer. False faith does not lead to salvation. Only true faith allows us to receive the grace of eternal life, and the real measure of faith is found in God's word. In order to know God's will, we must examine the Scriptures to see what He commanded in relation to our salvation.

THE COMPLETE CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

In the complete Christian conversion, three phases are integral parts of a person's faith. As believers, we need to reexamine whether we have met the biblical criteria of true faith.

1) Confess Jesus as Lord

Faith in the Lord Jesus begins with believing and acknowledging the grace of our Lord.

if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that

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God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Rom 10:9-10)

We need to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Rom 4:25). By the great mercy of God, we may have eternal life through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is important to understand that confessing the Lord is not just an outward formality or a one-time act. We also need to accept Him into our hearts and let Him be the Lord of our lives. True faith also means repenting of our sins and turning back to God (Acts 2:38, 40; Isa 55:6-7). Accepting Jesus as Christ means dedicating our whole being to the Lord for all of our lives. It is with such lasting faith that we receive the grace of God through Christ.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you unless you believed in vain. (1 Cor 15:1-2)

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col 1:21-23)

Therefore, salvation by grace through faith is not an instantaneous act. Instead, it is a life-long working of God in the lives of believers, and believers must hold firmly to their confession of Jesus Christ throughout their lives.

2) Receive the Life of Christ

The true gospel must conform to the commands of the Lord Jesus with regard to those acts that pertain to salvation, for Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant between God and men.

When the Lord Jesus came, He gave specific commands that signify God's new covenantal relationship with believers (see sidebar on Sacraments, Grace, and Faith). All those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ must enter into this covenantal relationship by accepting these three commands: baptism, footwashing, and Holy Communion (also known as the Lord's Supper).

Sadly, these commands have often been considered as mere symbols with no saving effects (see sidebar, Sacraments, Grace, and Faith). But if we study the New Testament closely, it is clear that in order to become a participant in the new covenant and be saved, a believer in Christ must accept these divine institutions in obedience to the Lord's command.

Salvation by grace through faith is not an instantaneous act. It is a life-long working of God in the lives of believers.

Be Baptized into Christ. In the Lord's commission to the disciples, He commanded: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). He also said, He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mk 16:16).

According to this verse, we must believe and be baptized in order to be saved. Why is baptism necessary? Peter

tells us, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Ananias likewise commanded Paul to be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

Baptism is necessary because, through this sacrament, Christ's blood washes away our sins. Baptism is also the divine act through which our old self is buried and we are given a new life. Whereas we are dead in sin, we receive the life of Christ when we accept His washing by faith.

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. (Col 2:11-12)

Let the Lord Wash Your Feet. During His Last Supper with the disciples, the Lord rose to wash the feet of each disciple. At first, Peter refused to receive the washing, but the Lord told him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me (Jn 13:8). Then He commanded them:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (Jn 13:14-17)

Footwashing is not just a symbolic act of humility or servitude; our Lord Jesus commanded that we perform this sacrament in order to have a part with Him. To have a part with Jesus is to have a part with Him in this life and the life to come.

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Partake of the Lord's Body and Blood. The Lord also instituted the Holy Communion during the Last Supper.

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me. Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. (Lk 22:19-20)

Earlier in his ministry, Lord Jesus explained the necessity of the Holy Communion:

Then Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn 6:53-54)

The spiritual effect of the sacraments is based on the Lord's own words. Through Holy Communion, Christ lives in us and we in Him. With the life of Christ in us, we have eternal life and will resurrect on the last day. Therefore, all believers in Jesus Christ should partake of the Holy Communion.

3) Live by the Spirit

Having been born again, our spiritual lives must be renewed constantly. This is where the promised Holy Spirit comes in. By God's grace, He has given us His Spirit to complete His work of salvation in us.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Tit 3:4-5)

The Holy Spirit is the Counselor who lives in believers to guide them in the truth and sanctify them. The working of the Holy Spirit is God's marvelous provision for the salvation of believers (2 Thess 2:13). Therefore, we must receive this grace of God through faith by walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25). We need to submit to the will of the Spirit and not live according to our own desires. That is the true meaning of being born again by the Spirit.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom 8:12-14)

There is only one gospel of salvation, and it is through faith in this gospel that we may become true children of God.

Our salvation is not complete when we first respond to God's grace; instead, we are just beginning the journey. We must continue in our faith by constantly responding to God's saving work in our lives through His Spirit. In regard to how we as believers should respond to the continual act of God in our lives, Paul said:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Phil 2:12-13)

The doctrine of salvation by grace through faith does not entail just a moment of acceptance or belief. It encompasses the whole of our lives. We

need to work on our salvation throughout our lives, with fear and trembling. But this idea does not suggest that we earn our salvation through works, for it is ultimately God who works in us to accomplish His purpose. While we continue our life of faith, God Himself will sanctify us and keep us blameless until the day that our Lord Jesus Christ returns (1Thess 5:12-24).

IN CONCLUSION

There is only one gospel of salvation, and it is through faith in this gospel that we may become true children of God. Since this issue is crucial to our salvation, it is important that we each examine the gospel we have received to see if it is the complete gospel, the one preached by the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

The Lord Jesus challenged the people of His time, But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say? (Lk 6:46). True believers do not merely confess Jesus name; they also obey the commands of the Lord.

Today, God has established the True Jesus Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit, entrusted her with the preaching of the true gospel, and confirmed this gospel by His Holy Spirit and through signs and miracles.

Once you have found the true gospel, you must act upon God's word and receive the gospel of grace by faith. If you have not yet fully accepted the grace of Jesus Christ according to the way of God, we urge you to accept the true gospel today. ★

SACRAMENTS, GRACE, AND FAITH

What Are the Sacraments?

The sacraments are three New Testament institutions begun by Jesus Christ: baptism, footwashing, and Holy Communion. These divine institutions make use of physical elements or actions—such as water, immersion, washing, bread, juice, eating, and drinking—to effect salvation of the soul. The early church father Tertullian was the first to employ the word *sacramentum*, the Latin version of the New Testament term “mystery” (see Eph 5:32; 1Tim 3:16; Rev 1:20). This term may have been chosen to indicate the “mysterious” spiritual effect of these divine institutions.

Sacraments and Grace

Sacraments mark the entrance to the way of salvation, regeneration, a covenantal relationship with God, and the kingdom of God. The importance of the sacraments cannot be overemphasized. In modern Christendom, the holy sacraments have been reduced to a level of “spiritualism,” in which their actual effects are removed and Christ’s commands become mere symbols. However, the Bible is most definite in regarding the sacraments as necessary for salvation.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17-18). We are united with Christ in the sacraments so that we may be in Christ, as only when we are in Christ can we receive the newness of spiritual life. Intellectual acceptance of Jesus Christ does not make us “in Christ”; it is only the starting point of faith. We must also step into a personal relationship with Christ through the sacraments. During baptism, our sins are cleansed and our spiritual life begins. By accepting footwashing, we have part with Christ. Through the Holy Communion, we partake of the life of Jesus Christ.

The sacraments are fundamental to our covenantal relationship with God. Without them, all subsequent works of faith amount to nothing. Unless a person is baptized in Christ, he still stands condemned because he remains in sin. Unless his feet are washed, he still has no part with Christ. Unless he partakes of the Lord’s body and blood, he does not have life in him. A person may feel that the good works he performs will assure that he is an elect of God, but these good works are no different from the works of the law, because he has not received the righteousness of Christ. However, if we have faith in Christ by accepting the sacraments, the fruits of righteousness in our renewed life are pleasing to God.

Most Christian churches would not go so far as to forbid the performance of the sacraments, since the New Testament places clear emphasis on them. In fact, many churches stress the importance of the sacraments, but they reduce them to symbolic acts. According to this view, the saving effect of Christ takes place at the moment of belief and confession; baptism, footwashing, and Holy Communion are subsequent expressions of faith. They are illustrations to show that we have faith in Christ, but they do not constitute faith itself. They are also thought to carry didactic values, teaching Christians to live a new life, serve with humility, and remember the Lord’s death.

The sacraments certainly serve a signifying and didactic function: they signify the inner workings of God and teach us about Christian living. But sacraments are not simply psychological reminders of our conversion at some point in the past. Rather, the sacraments have a spiritual and saving effect. In baptism, the effect is the remission of sins and regeneration (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Tit 3:5; Col 2:11-12; Rom 6:1-6). In footwashing, the effect is having a part with the Lord (Jn 13:8). And in the Holy Communion, the effect is having the life of Christ (1Cor 10:16; Jn 6:53-56). Because of these saving effects, sacraments are an integral part of God’s saving grace.

Sacraments and Faith

The sacraments are a real test of faith. The spiritual effects that take place during sacraments are beyond our rational comprehension. For example, how could the cleansing of sin occur during immersion in water? Why do we need to immerse ourselves in water when so many churches say that to be forgiven we just need to believe in God’s power?

Those who do not see a logical connection between the physical and the spiritual realms reject the sacraments as merely symbolic, thereby rejecting the word of God. But if Christ has commanded us to be baptized in order to be saved, shouldn’t faith mean accepting Christ’s word and being baptized for salvation? Our inability to rationalize the effects of the sacraments requires faith to fill in the gaps in logic. Faith in Christ entails faith in the necessity of sacraments.

But does the practice of sacraments belong to the work of the law? The Scriptures emphasize salvation apart from works: “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5). Wouldn’t sacraments be “righteous things we had done”? If so, then how could they save us?

First of all, we need to ask, “whose righteous deeds”? We should have no problem accepting that Christ’s righteous deeds do save us. In that sense, sacraments would not be our righteous deeds, but Christ’s. Second, the physical actions that we go through in the sacraments, such as being immersed in water, or letting our feet be washed, or accepting the bread and juice, could hardly qualify as righteous deeds by us. These actions have no ethical value by God’s moral standards; we simply do them in obedience to God’s command.

But isn’t acting out of obedience considered human deeds of righteousness? When an act of obedience is done without faith in the saving work of Christ, it becomes our own efforts. In the sacraments, however, the act does not claim any merit; rather, we direct our faith to Christ and His saving effect through the sacraments. They are acknowledgments of our unworthiness and of the power of Christ. It is the divine act in the use of physical elements or actions, not the elements or the actions themselves, that effects salvation. The actions we perform, if done without faith in Christ’s saving work, cannot save at all, just as faith that is not oriented to Christ cannot save. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ultimately determines whether the participant may receive God’s grace through the sacraments.

One Spirit

(Part 2)



One Spirit

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been subject to widely divergent interpretations. Views vary from one denomination to another on what it means to receive the Holy Spirit, and there are many kinds of spiritual phenomena that people associate with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But this diversity is contrary to the experience of the apostolic church. In the Book of Acts we observe that the disciples shared a common experience when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they used this experience as the necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. Therefore, faced with the diverse claims and spiritual experiences in Christendom today, we must learn to discern the presence of the Holy Spirit based on biblical criteria and the apostolic precedent.

In the apostolic church, believers were baptized into one body and were all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). In other words, the believers who were baptized into the church also received the promise of the Holy Spirit. Together, these believers became the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Today, in order for us to know whether we have received the promised Holy Spirit and whether we have also been made to drink into one Spirit, we need to compare our own experience of receiving the Holy Spirit with that of the apostles.

If the sign that marked the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic church is missing in a congregation today, then that congregation does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be the body of Christ, for if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His (Rom 8:9). Just as a body is dead without the spirit, a congregation without the Holy Spirit does not have the life of Jesus Christ. For believers to share the life of Christ, the Holy Spirit must be

present in the church today just as He was in the apostolic church.

THE APOSTOLIC PRECEDENT The Disciples on the Day of Pentecost

What was the experience of the apostles when they received the Holy Spirit? Let's look at what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out to them:

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

When the disciples received the Holy Spirit, they began to speak with tongues. This marvelous experience marked the

accompanied by such an obvious external sign that even an outside observer can see and hear it.

What is the speaking of tongues? It is speaking in a spiritual language that is not like any earthly language. Unless the tongue is interpreted, no one except God can understand it: For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understand him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries (1 Cor 14:2). The ability to speak in tongues comes from the Holy Spirit, not from imitating others.

Some Christians argue that speaking in tongues does not refer to an unintelligible utterance, but simply means praising God with ordinary language. They contend that if the disciples were speaking an unintelligible language, then the devout Jews would not have understood them.

What happened on the day of Pentecost was an extraordinary event. Even though the devout Jews heard the disciples, they were confused (Acts 2:6), amazed, and perplexed (2:12).

These Jews said, we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God (2:11). Even though the disciples were Galileans (2:17), the people in the multitude heard them speaking in their own individual languages. This was indeed a great miracle.

But were the disciples actually speaking these different earthly languages? Luke, the author of Acts, noted that each person heard the disciples speak in his own language. In other words, they were hearing them in their own languages because God enabled them to understand the spiritual language. The disciples were not actually speaking human languages. If the approximately 120 disciples were indeed speaking these fifteen different languages all at once, the multitude would have heard nothing but noise,

Today, in order for us to know whether we have received the promised Holy Spirit, we need to compare our own experience of receiving the Holy Spirit with that of the apostles.

first pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The experience was so powerful that it drew a multitude, and when these people came together, they were puzzled by the amazing phenomenon they witnessed. Peter stood up with the other apostles and explained to the crowd what had just happened: This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the promised Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear (Acts 2:32-33). Receiving the Holy Spirit is

It is not possible to discover the complete truth of salvation through diligent study alone. Only by the revelation of the Holy Spirit can we know the true gospel.

The Believers in Ephesus

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? So they said to him, We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. And he said to them, Into what then were you baptized? So they said, Into John's baptism. Then Paul said, John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all. (Acts 19:1-7)

This passage indicates that receiving the Holy Spirit is a separate event from both confessing Christ and baptism. If it were true that all believers receive the Holy Spirit upon acceptance of Christ, as many professed Christians claim today, then why did Paul ask these believers if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed? The disciples at Ephesus acknowledged that they had not received the Holy Spirit or even heard that there was a Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit were given upon conversion, then Paul would have corrected them by telling them that they had actually already received the Holy Spirit and were just not aware of it. Instead, Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. The question itself implies that receiving the Holy Spirit is a separate event from accepting Christ.

We also learn from this passage that receiving the Holy Spirit is a separate event from baptism. If a person automatically receives the Holy Spirit at baptism, then Paul would have told the

believers, now that you have been baptized in the name of Jesus, you have also received the Holy Spirit. Instead, he laid hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They began to speak with tongues and prophesy. Once again, the sign of spiritual utterance accompanied the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There was a clear, outward manifestation. Otherwise, how did Luke know that the Holy Spirit came upon these Ephesian believers after Paul laid hands on them? This and the previous incidents all show that the speaking of tongues is a necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

ONE SPIRIT AND ONE GOSPEL OF SALVATION

The presence of the Holy Spirit is a direct testimony of the true gospel. As John 14:17 says, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The Lord Jesus said to the disciples, When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit indeed came as the Lord promised, and He revealed the truth of salvation to the disciples. Just as the apostolic church was founded on the true gospel through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church today can uphold and preach the gospel only by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is not possible to discover the complete truth of salvation through diligent study alone. Only by the revelation of the Holy Spirit can we know the true gospel.

But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through

His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Cor 2:9-10)

Without the revelation of God's Spirit, people will have different interpretations of God's word and the truth. Since the Reformation, Christianity has continued to divide into many denominations because of disagreement on basic doctrines. Whereas interpretation according to human will divides the church, the revelation of the one Spirit unites the church in one faith. Instead of relying on our own efforts, we need to pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal God's truth to us. Only then can we see and know the one way of salvation, which God has prepared for us.

The story of the believers in Ephesus shows that receiving the Holy Spirit is closely tied to understanding the true gospel. Because the promise of the Holy Spirit is given to everyone who repents and is baptized (Acts 2:38-39), the fact that these disciples had not received or heard of the Holy Spirit led Paul to delve into their beliefs. It turned out that they were not aware of the complete gospel. Therefore Paul told them to believe in the Lord Jesus, and he baptized them in His name. After these new converts accepted the complete gospel, they received the Holy Spirit.

In the body of Christ, where the one Spirit dwells, believers share one hope, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. In the True Jesus Church today, believers still receive the Holy Spirit just as the apostles did. Here, in the body of Christ, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, you will hear the full gospel of salvation. When you accept the true gospel and are baptized in the one body of Christ, then, like the believers of the apostolic church, you will also drink into the one Spirit. ★

One Spirit

and it would have been impossible to discern one language from another.

Also, if the disciples were speaking other languages, why did the other observers mock them and say that they were drunk (Acts 2:13)? It would be strange, and even blasphemous, for these observers to accuse the disciples of being drunk if they were simply praising God in another human language unless, of course, the disciples were uttering unintelligible tongues that did not even sound like an earthly language. These ungodly mockers could not understand the tongues of the disciples because God did not open their ears. Hence, the external sign that accompanied the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the speaking of unknown, spiritual tongues.

The Believers in Samaria

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)

The men and women of Samaria had accepted the Lord Jesus at the preaching of Philip and had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. But they did not receive the Holy Spirit immediately. This example refutes the belief popular in Christendom today that all believers receive the Holy Spirit at the moment they accept Jesus Christ into their hearts. It also shows that receiving the Holy Spirit is a separate event from baptism.

When the Holy Spirit came on the believers in Samaria, there was a clear external sign, just as there had been on

the day of Pentecost. There was an obvious before-and-after event, which led Luke to record that the believers received the Holy Spirit at the laying on of hands. Such an event was also witnessed by a former sorcerer by the name of Simon: And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-19). Therefore, receiving the Holy Spirit involves more than a silent, inward experience.

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Cornelius

Later on in Acts, we read that God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to preach the gospel message to him. While Cornelius and his relatives and close friends were together listening to Peter's preaching, the Holy Spirit fell upon them all.

And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, Can anyone forbid water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? (Acts 10:45-47)

The Jewish brethren were astonished because they heard the Gentiles speak with tongues, and they were surprised that God had given the Holy Spirit even to the uncircumcised.

Once again, we see that speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, and it was this evidence that

led Peter to conclude that Cornelius and the others had received the Holy Spirit. Notice Peter's words, received the Holy Spirit just as we have. Peter deemed that these gentile believers had received the Holy Spirit because they spoke in tongues just as the disciples did on the day of Pentecost. Thus, speaking in tongues was the common experience of receiving the Holy Spirit in the apostolic church, and it was the evidence by which the apostles determined whether a person had received the Holy Spirit.

Another lesson we learn from this incident is that righteous conduct does not necessarily indicate that a person has received the Holy Spirit. Many professed Christians in the world live godly lives and dedicate themselves to helping the needy

and serving the Lord. Are they not bearing the fruit of the Spirit? If they are, then how can we say that they have not received the Holy Spirit? There is little doubt that it is the love of Christ that motivates the sincere acts of zeal and self-sacrifice of these Christians. But we must also remember that there are many people in history who did not accept Christ but who lived upright lives and gave everything for the good of humanity. Can we conclude, then, that they also received the Holy Spirit?

Cornelius was a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always (Acts 10:2). But he did not receive the Holy Spirit until the Spirit came upon him during Peter's preaching. That is why Peter did not say, Cornelius must have already received the Holy Spirit, because he is so devout. Who can forbid him from baptism? Instead, it was only after they clearly saw and heard the Gentiles speak in tongues that they knew that the Holy Spirit had come upon them.



One Body

(Part 3)

One Body

It is clear throughout Scripture that there has always been only one community of God's elect. The many biblical prefigurations and characterizations of the church all point to her oneness. God commanded Noah to build only one ark, through which he and his household were saved. There was only one temple and one Holy City, the dwelling place of God's name (2 Chr 6:5-6, 20). God will establish only one mountain for His house, and this mountain shall be exalted above the hills (Isa 2:2-3). The Lord Jesus is the Shepherd over only one flock (Jn 10:16). Christ has only one body (1Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4). There is only one house of God (1Tim 3:15). The Lord knows only one bride (Rev 21:9; Song 6:9).

The concept of the church's oneness is consistently emphasized in the Bible, not only as an ideal but also as a reality. When dealing with the problem of division, Paul posed the rhetorical question, Is Christ divided? (1 Cor 1:13). As much as men tend to divide, Christ is one in reality. It is simply impossible to think of or talk about Christ as divided. Likewise, it is not possible to think of the church as divided.

The current situation in Christendom is far from the biblical view of the church. Thousands of Christian groups and denominations exist today, and Christianity continues to divide. As more and more Christians leave their former churches, new churches are constantly emerging.

Faced with this disturbing phenomenon, which contradicts Scripture, Christians have to answer some very crucial questions: Does Christ acknowledge all Christian entities that call themselves churches? Does the one church in the Bible refer to the invisible spiritual church only, or does it also exist visibly on earth? Most important, how can we be sure that we are in the body of Christ?

THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH

It has become a popular belief among professed Christians that all churches that acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord are part of the spiritual body of Christ. In other words, there are many churches in this world, but there is still only one invisible church. According to this view, regardless of which church a person chooses to join, he is a member of Christ's body. In fact, even if a person does not belong to any church at all, he can still be in the community of the saved if he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' prayer for the disciples, he asked the Father to unite the disciples as one:

Does Christ acknowledge all Christian entities that call themselves "churches"?

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. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (Jn 17:20-23)

According to this passage, the unity of believers does not exist only in the spiritual dimension. It is also visible to the world: that the world may know that You sent Me. This visible unity must continue in the church, for Jesus' prayer was not just for the twelve apostles, but for all who would believe in Christ through their preaching. Therefore, just as the church is spiritual-

ly one, she must also be one in the present reality.

While in a spiritual sense the church has always been one body, the church in this world must also be one, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). The church cannot tolerate divisions within herself.

If the church in the present must also be one, then what are we to make of the plurality among Christian churches today? Many people attempt to reconcile the obvious inconsistency between the oneness of the church in the Bible and the divisions within Christianity today by adopting the view that all churches that confess Jesus Christ as Lord share a common denominator. In this view, the different doctrines that churches preach are simply different expressions of the same faith; so all Christian churches are one in essence, and the denominational differences do not constitute division.

This attempt to downplay the divisions within Christianity by embracing all Christians under a common denominator is mistaken. If confession of Christ's name were all that mattered, then there would not be so many diverse Christian groups today. Christianity divided precisely because doctrinal issues are so important that disagreements over them naturally lead to separation. Attempting to overlook these fundamental differences does not address the obvious divisions within Christianity.

Still, many Christian leaders are earnestly seeking a solution to the problem of division in Christendom. In an effort to bring all Christians together, many denominations and churches today advocate an ecumenical movement that recognizes the need for unity and seeks to combine all Christians in fellowship regardless of their denominational affiliations. While this endeavor to achieve harmony is commendable, it still fails to remove the barriers that divide Christendom. Christians of various denominations may join together for

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One Body

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evangelism and worship, but the separation over doctrinal issues will still exist and cannot be ignored.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR UNITY

Although almost all Christians agree on the necessity of unity, not all Christians agree on the common elements that unite the church. True unity must conform to the biblical model.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph 4:4-6)

The oneness of the church consists of several aspects: one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Most Christians share one hope, one Lord, and one God and Father. However, the other important elements of unity one Spirit, one faith, and one baptism are absent in Christianity in general. Since within Christianity today there are such widely divergent views on these three issues, it cannot qualify as the one body of Christ. We will take a moment to examine these three aspects of church unity.

One Spirit

There is one body and one Spirit (Eph 4:4). It is the Holy Spirit who brings unity to the body of Christ (Eph 4:3). Believers of the true church must receive the same Spirit. They must share the same belief and experience of the Holy Spirit. But today, there are diverse views on the Holy Spirit. Some Christians believe that receiving the Holy Spirit is only a silent, inward experience that occurs at the time of a believer's conversion. Others preach that a believer needs to ask for the Holy Spirit through prayer, with speaking of tongues as a necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

There are also diverse kinds of spir-

itual phenomena. In some churches, people fall to the floor when they pray; they may dance ecstatically or laugh uncontrollably. In other churches, Christians believe that the work of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual renewal without any spiritual experiences.

Are all of these beliefs and experiences the work of the one Spirit? A casual glance at 1 Corinthians 12 may lead us to think that the diverse spiritual phenomena in Christianity confirm the teaching that the Holy Spirit distributes various gifts for the common good of the church. Yet while there are many gifts, there is only one gospel. The one Spirit cannot be the source for the many gospels and doctrines of salvation that exist in Christianity. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who reveals the truth of salvation to believers (Jn 14:16, 26; 1 Cor 2:9-12). The fact that there are so many different teachings about salvation shows that there is a lack of unity in the Spirit.

Therefore, to achieve unity, we must examine the Scriptures again and compare our experience of receiving the Holy Spirit with the apostolic experience. In the true church today, believers should receive the Holy Spirit just as the apostles did (Acts 10:47). Only the church in which believers share this same experience can be the spiritual temple of the Holy Spirit.

One Faith

There is only one gospel of salvation. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). As the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), the church must uphold the one truth of salvation. Thus, the unity of the church must be based on the unity of faith (Eph 4:13).

All believers must share a common faith in terms of salvation (Jude 3). Those who do not accept this only gospel of salvation, or who preach another Jesus or another gospel, are not part of the body of Christ, even if they profess to be

Christians. This is the measure that the apostles used, and they did not hesitate to exclude or even condemn those who did not share the same faith.

At first, the claim that confession of the Lord Jesus Christ should be the only common denominator of Christianity appears to be biblical. Didn't Paul say, For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26)? The problem arises when we study exactly what faith in Christ entails, for this is where Christian groups and denominations differ. Some hold that accepting Jesus Christ into our hearts and openly confessing His name guarantees eternal life, and they deny the necessity of the sacraments for salvation. Others may acknowledge the sacraments but differ in their views on the biblical way to conduct them.

We cannot trivialize such differences, because they have to do with the salvation of believers. The church cannot possibly hold conflicting doctrines of salvation and still maintain her unity. The boundary of church unity must be based on the one gospel of salvation that the apostles preached. Enlarging this boundary is tampering with the gospel truth.

The Lord Jesus commands His followers to enter the narrow gate (Mt 7:13-14). In other words, we must do the will of the Heavenly Father (Mt 7:15-23). Those who do not abide by the one way of salvation cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. This is the way of God it is the common denominator set by Him. We are not in the position to enlarge the narrow gate just because we would like to include people of different faiths. The only path to unity is for all Christians to obey the one gospel and to accept the way of salvation that Christ has provided.

One Baptism

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free and have all

The rise of so many Christian denominations and groups cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit would not establish different churches that maintain different gospels.

been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Believers become members of the one body by means of one baptism. That is why the Scripture speaks of baptism into Christ (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27).

Many churches today consider baptism unnecessary because they do not believe that sins are washed away by Christ's blood during baptism. According to this belief, baptism has value only because it serves as a personal expression and a public declaration of our faith. It does not have any spiritual effect at all.

Even among churches that believe in the necessity of baptism for salvation, there are various views on the mode of baptism. In truth, however, baptism is effective only when the Holy Spirit is present (1 Jn 5:6-9), for it is by the one Spirit that we are baptized into the body of Christ. If the one Spirit is absent, then baptism has no effect.

There are many beliefs on baptism and many ways that baptism is performed in Christianity today, but only one baptism can bring us into the body of Christ. Only one baptism is biblical: the baptism that the Holy Spirit presides over and performs. Therefore, to be united and exist as one body, the church must agree on one baptism.

THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF UNITY

Is it possible for all Christians to unite in one faith and one Spirit? The answer is yes. But the road to unity is not through ecumenism, for when we compare the apostolic church and the ecumenical movement, we notice a great discrepancy between their two approaches to achieving unity.

The apostolic church began as one body. She preached the one gospel message, and all believers received the Holy Spirit in the same way. The Holy Spirit founded only one church, and this church was always a single institution. Believers came into this body through baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12; 10:48; 16:14-15, 31-33; 19:1-5). By one

Spirit they were all baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13). Within this one body there was neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for they were all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Paul told the believers to make every effort to maintain this unity through the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

The church grew as new converts came into this community. In chapter 8 of Acts, we read of an incident in which God reinforced the importance of church unity. The men and women of Samaria believed Philip's message and were baptized into Christ. But they did not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John, who were sent by the church in Jerusalem, came and laid hands on them (Acts 8:4-17).

This event shows that the believers in Samaria did not comprise a separate entity, but instead needed to join with the believers in Jerusalem. In like manner, new converts in other cities also identified themselves with the larger community of believers by submitting to the direction of the apostles in Jerusalem. The church was not a coalition of denominations, and there was no such thing as Christian groups maintaining their distinct identities. Although believers in various locations were addressed as churches, such usage of the plural form always applies to geographic location rather than religious affiliation.

The apostolic church never allowed more than one set of basic doctrines to exist within the church. When controversies arose regarding the necessity of circumcision for salvation, the apostles and elders did not overlook the issue or try to embrace conflicting views. Instead, they convened in Jerusalem to settle the matter. Despite the extensive debate, the church arrived at a conclusion based on the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Then the whole church sent letters to all the churches so that all the believers may abide by the decision (Acts 15:1-35).

Later, as false brothers infiltrated the church, the apostles defended the one faith and condemned all false teachings and ungodly lifestyles. Believers in the church were commanded to drive out the unrepentant and refuse hospitality to anyone who preached a false doctrine. Even when some in the church left the community, the church still maintained her oneness. John wrote to the church regarding those who left: They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us (1 Jn 2:19). The apostles considered those who differed in their beliefs to be outside the community of believers.

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

In light of the apostolic model of unity, the modern ecumenical movement is problematic. It seeks to unite various Christian groups while still allowing them to maintain their distinct identities and beliefs, despite the fact that these groups were not established by the Holy Spirit. The rise of so many Christian denominations and groups cannot be the work of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit would not establish different churches that maintain different gospels. While it is important to promote a spirit of love among all professed Christians and to share our understanding of the truth, the attempt to coalesce all of these institutions into one body is a futile human endeavor. Such an approach does not conform to the biblical model.

Isaiah prophesied concerning the church in the last days:

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,

One Body

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)

In the end time there will be only one church, which will rise as a mountain above all other hills. All nations will stream to this church to receive the word of the Lord.

When speaking of the believers as the flock and Himself as the Shepherd, Lord Jesus said, And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd (Jn 10:16). There is only one flock, not many small flocks. Although there are sheep outside this flock, they will hear the Shepherd's voice and join this flock. In the same manner, true believers will join the body of Christ by accepting the gospel of salvation.

Hence, it is clearly the will of God to have only one church on earth rather than many Christian denominations or groups. The Holy Spirit founded only one church. God recognizes only one church as the mountain of the Lord and the flock of Christ. All believers of Christ who hear the true gospel of this church must forsake their former ties and join the body of believers that the Holy Spirit has established in the end time.

THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

The True Jesus Church, founded in 1917, is the revival of the apostolic church. The Lord first poured out the Holy Spirit on a few Christians and revealed to them the perfect gospel of salvation according to the Scriptures. These Christians, having been entrusted with the commission to proclaim the full gospel, went out and preached the message of salvation. The Lord was with them and confirmed the gospel by pouring out the Holy Spirit on those who believed and by revealing

great signs and miracles.

Like the church in the apostolic period, the True Jesus Church has received one Spirit and upholds one faith. She is not a denomination among denominations, but the one body of Christ, the continuation of the one church that the Lord established in this world. Believers in this church receive the promised Holy Spirit and experience the power of God. Since she preaches the true gospel and is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, she is the body of Christ.

Any congregation that preaches another gospel cannot also be part of Christ's body. All who accept the truth of salvation that she preaches and are baptized by the Holy Spirit into this body come to the Heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22-24). They have believed the gospel of salvation (Eph 1:13), and their lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). They join the timeless community of the saved.

The True Jesus Church's claim that she is the body of Christ has offended many Christians. They say that to claim to be the one true church is a sign of pride and arrogance because it excludes other Christian groups. Yet these same Christians would readily agree that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, a claim that members of other religions would likewise dismiss as arrogant because it excludes them.

Therefore, just as all religions cannot be included in God's salvation, all gospels that claim to be Christian cannot be included in the body of Christ, for the apostolic church did not hesitate to exclude individuals or groups that preached a different gospel or received a different spirit. The real issue, then, is not accusations of pride or arrogance, but respect for the truth that God has established.

The name True Jesus Church is not just the name of an institution; it also identifies the gospel she preaches and differentiates it from other gospels. Thus,

There is only one flock, not many small flocks. Although there are sheep outside this flock, they will hear the Shepherd's voice and join this flock.

the claim that the True Jesus Church is the body of Christ is in essence stating that she preaches the true gospel. When we preach that every believer ought to accept the gospel of the True Jesus Church, we are not proclaiming ourselves, but rather the true gospel. The True Jesus Church is the body of Christ not because of the people who attend this church, but because of the gospel and the Holy Spirit that God has given to her. As long as the True Jesus Church preaches this gospel, with God's presence through the Holy Spirit, she will remain the true church.

In this light, we urge you to compare the basic beliefs of the True Jesus Church with the apostolic faith. Consider the work of the Holy Spirit in this church as a sign of God's presence. The experience of receiving the Holy Spirit comes from God, not from the preachers of the True Jesus Church. Believers testify that the True Jesus Church is the body of Christ because they have experienced the Holy Spirit in her. This blessing is a testimony to the work of God, who has graciously revealed His truth and poured out His Holy Spirit in this church.

In this end time, the Lord has raised up His church on earth. He is calling believers everywhere into His body, where they receive the word of Christ and are baptized into Him. In His church, believers receive the promised Holy Spirit and are united as one body. Rather than simply rejecting the church based on her claim, Christians must evaluate the True Jesus Church based on biblical criteria. Again, we urge you to study the basic beliefs of the True Jesus Church carefully and to ask the Lord to guide you with His Spirit. If God moves you to believe that the gospel of salvation and the Holy Spirit are truly present in this church, then we invite you to accept the truth with a humble heart and to join the community of God's elect. ★

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Eng Guan Tay—SINGAPORE



The nature of God is one.

God's framework of salvation through the ages is one.

Although God changes His framework for salvation as His plan is carried out, He consistently maintains the oneness of this framework because of His very nature. This unity can be seen in the one family in the garden of Eden, in the selection of Seth's lineage over Cain's, and in the selection of Noah and Abraham. It is also revealed in the selection of Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Israel over other nations, and Christians over Jews, as well as in the unification of Gentiles and Jews through the body of Christ, and finally in the one true church who will be His one bride. This oneness is even seen in the choice of planet earth over the rest of the physical universe—"In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth."

When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the church faced a threat far more

dangerous than persecution by the Romans. The early church was at risk of breaking into two parts, one part Jewish and the other part Gentile.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul addresses this problem by stressing, in three ways, the unity of the body of Christ—in the formation of the one church from the Jews and the Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22); in God's one framework of salvation, which is true to His one nature (Eph 4:1-6); and in the profound mystery that the church is the one bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33). These points are instructive to Christians who find it difficult to accept that there is the only one true church.

**RECONCILIATION OF
JEWES AND GENTILES IN
CHRIST (Eph 2:11-22)**

And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. (Eph 2:16)

Paul states unequivocally in Ephesians 2:11-12 that Gentiles "at one time" were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." It was clear that Gentiles were not descendants of Abraham, and so they were outside of the covenants that God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. This single framework of salvation in the time before Christ relegated those outside of it to hopelessness and godlessness. There was no human way to God, and at that time God did not provide another way, as this would be against His nature of oneness.

Then Christ came into this world to save mankind. Ephesians 2:13-16 describes how He accomplished this task while maintaining a single framework of salvation. First, He abolished in His flesh, by His death, the ordinances that separated Jews from Gentiles (Eph 2:14-15). Then, when these two disparate peoples become members of the one body of Christ (see also Eph 2:17-18; and 1 Cor 10:16-17), they are reconciled to God (Eph 2:16; Mt 27:51; Ex 26:33). In all this, God maintained a unitary approach to Him. He expanded the scope of salvation to include Gentiles by introducing a new way that superseded the old way, rather than by requiring two different approaches to Him by two different groups of people.

Worship with Other Christians

Today there are some in the church who worship with Christians from other churches. They advocate that we in the True Jesus Church should “love our brothers and sisters” in the other churches and be comfortable worshiping alongside them, either in our church or in their churches. They amicably avoid issues of salvation such as baptism, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and, certainly, the doctrine of the one true church. Or they may have decided to take an “everybody may be right” approach to controversial topics. Let us examine these attitudes in the light of Scripture.

We begin by comparing the relationship of the True Jesus Church today and the much larger Christian society with that of the apostolic church and the much larger Jewish society of the first century. There are cogent similarities. The True Jesus Church, like the apostolic church, is considered a minor and new sect within the larger community (see Acts 24:14). Just as the Christian community now consists of many denominations, the Jews then also consisted of different sects, for example the Pharisees, the Sadducees (Acts 23:6), and the Essenes.

The early Christians at first worshiped with the Jews in the temple (Acts 2:46-47), and Paul made it a point that at each town he visited, he would first worship and preach the gospel at the Jewish synagogue or community there (Acts

13:14-15; 14:1; 16:3). However, the early Christians were ultimately forced out of the temple or Jewish community for preaching the true doctrine of Christ (Acts 4:1-4; 18-21; 13:42-48; 14:1-2).

In the same way, Christians of the true church may worship with Christians from other churches on the condition that they boldly preach the complete and saving gospel of Christ to them. The result of doing so, however, is that those who preach the truth will probably no longer be welcomed by the religious authorities of the other churches (though some of those members who really love the Lord and His truth may be saved). We would also expect persecution from the other churches, which is what happened to the early True Jesus Church in China.

True Brotherhood

When does a person become a brother or sister in Christ? Paul agonized over his physical kinsmen, the Jews, because he knew that they would not be saved unless they believed in Jesus (Rom 9:2-3; 10:1; Acts 4:12). It is not for us to choose who we want to be our spiritual brethren. The teaching is clear—we are brethren in Christ if we are together in Christ. For in Christ Jesus we are all sons of God, through faith (Gal 3:26). And faith puts us in Christ through baptism (Gal 3:27).

Ephesians 2:13 tells us: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ.” So baptism into the one body of Christ, the one church, makes us brethren in Christ. We do an injustice to our friends if we call them brethren and thus misleadingly assure them of their place in Jesus, when actually their sins have not been forgiven in the one baptism with the Spirit, the water, and the blood as witnesses (1 Jn 5:8) and they have not obtained a part in Jesus through footwashing (Jn 13:8).

In Ephesians 2:19-22, Paul draws this picture of the united church:

Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The church of God is one; she is founded on the truth, and the Holy Spirit dwells in her. A jumble of Christians with different beliefs worshiping together, each in their own way, does not fit this picture of the one true church.

MAINTAINING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH (Eph 4:1-6)


There is one body and one Spirit ... (Eph 4:4)

From the outside, the fledgling church in all aspects appeared as one. The events in Acts 10-11, which culminated in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, established that the Gentiles could truly be saved within the body of Christ, the church. However, certain issues from within the church continued to threaten unity. Chief among these issues were the remnants of the immoral lifestyles and philosophies that the Gentiles brought with them into the church, and the ever-present danger of reverting to Jewish legalism. In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul urges unity and discusses how to maintain it in the body of Christ.

The key to maintaining unity is a firm determination to lead a new life that is based on truly understanding God's one framework of salvation. Of course, it is not possible for unity to be maintained if believers have irreverent lifestyles. Undoubtedly, if a leader is unholy, he will bend the principles of Christ to justify what he is doing. This can be seen in

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When we truly understand that God is one, and how important it is to Him that the church He established is one, then we shall certainly strive for the unity that He desires.

the antics of a number of religious leaders today. Also, in an increasingly democratic church, members who are unspiritual will seek to impose their will on the church, and such actions often render her incapable of preaching and following the straight and narrow way. Ephesians 4:1 beseeches us to “have a walk worthy of the calling with which [we] were called.”

When one walks worthy of the calling, certain virtues develop that allow “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2-3) to be achieved. Lowliness, meekness, patience, and forbearing for one another in love are all passive actions toward others, which absorb contention and dissension till they disappear. For instance, Gideon’s gentle answer preserved the unity of Israel (Judg 8:1-3). Eagerness to maintain unity is active, as in the teaching of Jesus on the Mount regarding making peace with one’s brother before offering a gift to God (Mt 5:23-24).

One Framework of Salvation

There are many “ones” in Ephesians 4:4-6, and this passage reads almost like a poetical recitation. These “ones” affirm God’s one framework of salvation. When we truly understand that God is one (Deut 6:4), and how important it is to Him that the church He established is one (Jn 17:11, 20-23), then we shall certainly strive for the unity that He desires.

Let us contemplate the list of “ones” before us and seek to maintain the focus that God teaches us:

- ◆ One body—The one church (Eph 1:22-23). Christ has only one church, and it is important for followers of Christ to be in that one church. (See also Mt 24:24 and Jn 10:14-15.)
- ◆ One Spirit—One Holy Spirit. Be careful of false spirits (1 Jn 4:1-6). The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 16:7-10).
- ◆ One hope—The hope of being God’s

people in the kingdom of heaven. Do not believe in Jesus for things hoped for on earth alone (1 Cor 15:19).

- ◆ One Lord—Our Lord Jesus Christ. No one else should be called master other than Christ Himself (Mt 23:8-10; 1 Cor 1:12-13).
- ◆ One faith—One core collection of truths that we believe in faith (Tit 1:4), which was delivered to the saints through Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets (Eph 2:20; Jude 3).
- ◆ One baptism—One mode of baptism, one receiving of baptism (Rom 6:3; Heb 10:26-29).
- ◆ One God and Father of us all—Serve no other. The false alternatives—mammon (Mt 6:24) and Satan (Jn 8:44).

The doctrine of the one true church is a “hard” teaching (Jn 6:60). Yet if we understand that this teaching is truly consistent with the one nature of God, we will humbly accept it and strive to maintain the unity of the church. There is poetical beauty in the list of “ones” in Ephesians 4. This reflects the beauty of true unity.

And there is something still more profoundly beautiful in this doctrine.



THE CHURCH—THE BRIDE OF CHRIST (Eph 5:22-33)

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Eph 5:32)

Of all the metaphors concerning God’s relationship with His chosen, that of husband and wife evokes the strongest sense of sacrificial love and fidelity. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph 5:25)—this verse shows the sacrificial love of the Lord. We have no doubt of the Lord’s faithfulness (2 Tim 2:13), but He also requires this

fidelity of His bride: “Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24). The unity of the church can be seen as necessary from the fact that Christ preached monogamy (Mt 19:3-9).

To elicit the fundamental principle of marriage, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 5:31 and refers it to the mystery of Christ and the church. We catch a glimpse of spiritual reality through this beautiful metaphor. Christ left His Father in heaven (Phil 2:6-8) to save His bride, the church. She prepares to meet her Lord (Eph 5:26-27; Rev 21:2, 9-10), and the two shall become one when Jesus dwells in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22, 22:3-5). How much Jesus loves His one church!

The tide of ecumenism laps at the door of the church. Some have been seduced into embracing it, thinking that this gain in the number of people regarded as brethren is pleasing in the sight of God. But Jesus has one body. Jesus has one bride. He makes it clear that He desires unity in His body, but according to His will. The epistle to the Ephesians tells us what the one church of God looks like and how unity is to be maintained.

To leave the doctrine of Christ is to leave the one body of Christ (1 Jn 9, 10). To accept members into the one body when they have not entered through the one door (Christ) in the proper manner (baptism) is not grafting branches onto the olive tree (Rom 11:17-23). Instead, it is hiding leaven in the meal (Mt 13:32), and this is not good (1 Cor 5:6-8).

The oneness principle in many fundamental concepts of God and the church is not an invention of the True Jesus Church but is a result of the nature of God Himself and is clearly written in the Bible. The church treasures its unique status as the bride of Christ and humbly realizes that this is the grace of God. Our unique status is not exclusive but seeks to include all those who are to be saved. We strive to achieve this task within the one way that God has

SEEKING GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR STUDIES— AND ULTIMATELY YOUR LIFE

Angel Marie Solgot—Seattle, Washington, USA

devoted to loving our Lord Jesus Christ and loving and serving those around us.

Set a Goal for Your Life. In order to become successful, we have to set goals for our lives, and these goals must include the Lord. They must acknowledge Him and must be developed through the word of God. Proverbs 15:21 tells us, “Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course” (NIV). How do we keep that straight course? It all depends on whom we turn to as our guide.

What does God want you to be? What special talents and abilities has He given you that you can use to benefit others? Do you have the ability to provide emotional comfort to others? Do you have special writing talents? Are you an eloquent speaker? Do you have a heart to teach and lead children? Do you have any other special talents that can spiritually or emotionally benefit others? If so, then use your talents as best you can.

If there is a career out there that will make the most of your God-given talents, then consider working toward that career. You will find that the positive emotional and spiritual returns from a career based on helping other people will vastly outperform the positive financial returns offered by most business-minded careers.

But whether you choose a career based on helping others or one based in the business world, you are called to seek God’s kingdom first in your life. Keep in mind Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:27-30:

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings,

helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Not every Christian is called to become a teacher, a minister, or a social worker. Many Christians are very talented and successful business professionals who have found a way to bring Christ into the business world. And many Christian business professionals have made Christian service a first priority in their lives, finding ways to serve God both inside and outside the workplace. These individuals are able to bring their personal offerings into the church through their gifts of administration, financial management, public-speaking talents, and so much more.

Christians who spend their lives utilizing their God-given talents for the benefit of others understand that they were created to contribute to the loving plan of God. They know that they are here on this earth to tell others about the God who loves them and longs to bring

around you. This may mean listening to the advice of your parents, the brothers and sisters in church, or maybe the pastor serving your church. While they may not know exactly what career you should choose, they will probably be able to provide you with some guidance through their own experiences in and knowledge of the various careers out there today. More important, they know you and your talents, and they really love and care for you.

Proverbs 15:22 tells us, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed” (NIV). So when making decisions, remember to listen to the advice of the godly people in your life. After searching your heart and God’s word, as well as listening to those caring and spiritual people in your life, you are very likely to find yourself on a path directed by God.

Walk Onward with Him

So at this point you’ve put your trust in God, and you’ve searched His will. The next step is simply to walk onward with God. This is where you let our Lord make the path straight for you. Remember Proverbs 3:6: “And He will make your paths straight.” Notice that this verse doesn’t say, “And He will take you to the right paths.” Instead, it says that regardless of what path you’ve chosen in life, as long as you’ve put God

first and you’ve chosen with a humble and trusting heart, He will straighten out the path for you.

This idea reminds me of a contemporary Christian song, performed by a group called “The Martins.” The key phrase of this song is that God’s will can never lead you where His grace can’t keep you. That’s something we always have to remember as we make important decisions in life, and that’s exactly why we don’t need to worry.



God’s will can never lead you where His grace can’t keep you. That’s something we always have to remember as we make important decisions in life, and that’s exactly why we don’t need to worry.

them home. This should be the goal of your life as well. So whether you choose a life of public service or a life of business, just keep in mind the lesson that King Solomon learned and wants us to learn: “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Prov 16:3, NIV).

Acknowledge God’s Will through Those around You. Part of seeking God’s help in making decisions in life involves listening to the spiritual people

SERVING GOD REGARDLESS OF WHERE YOU ARE IN LIFE

The most important thing to remember is that we must serve God no matter where we are in our careers. God has given all of us various gifts and talents that we need to use to lead others to Jesus Christ.

For example in my own teaching career I can easily use my God-given abilities to benefit others—public service and outreach is simply the nature of teaching. For as long as I can remember, I was called to this career. My grandfather served God through the private kindergarten he built, and my mother always told me stories about the students she taught at his school.

Although I knew that I would probably not make a lot of money as a teacher, I knew that I could not resist this calling. So now, after nearly ten years of teaching elementary-aged children, I can truly say that I have received so much from God through all that I've been able to do and learn in my career. And I've never really struggled financially—things just kind of fall into place. Maybe that's because God has worked to straighten my path a little for me.

Still, public-service careers aren't the only avenues to serving God, so don't think that you absolutely have to lay aside all hopes of succeeding in the business or technological sectors. The world needs a careful balance of careers in order to sustain itself, so understand that almost all careers have some merit. I'll give you an example of two guys I know named Steve, who have each found ways to serve God in their careers.

The first Steve is a very talented individual who seems to be able to learn from and adjust to almost anything. Having joined a hugely respected nationwide company, he has his share of

difficulties to face at work. But he faces these difficulties with his eyes on his heavenly prize. He knows what matters most in life, and he tries his best to put God above his career in business. He teaches, he writes, he encourages, and he laughs—all for the glory of God.

The second Steve is my older brother. I never truly realized what a loving and tender heart he had until I was able to witness him working in the wholesale business that my family once owned. I watched him go out of his way to try to help out some of our financially struggling clients, who were local business owners. I saw the expressions on his face as he listened to their stories of hardship, and I saw the true compassion he had for them. There was one time when I saw my brother leave the room crying after he had interviewed a potential employee whose appearance was

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upsetingly disfigured and whose life was full of tremendous emotional and financial struggles. Although this person had very little work experience and was not a very socially well-adjusted individual, my brother and my parents hired him on the spot.

My brother used his position in business to help out a needy person, and my parents used this opportunity to witness the love of God to this person. These two stories illustrate what God wants most from us, as told in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" In whatever you do in life, remember these words of goodness, mercy, and humility through Christ.

GOD IS ALL YOU NEED

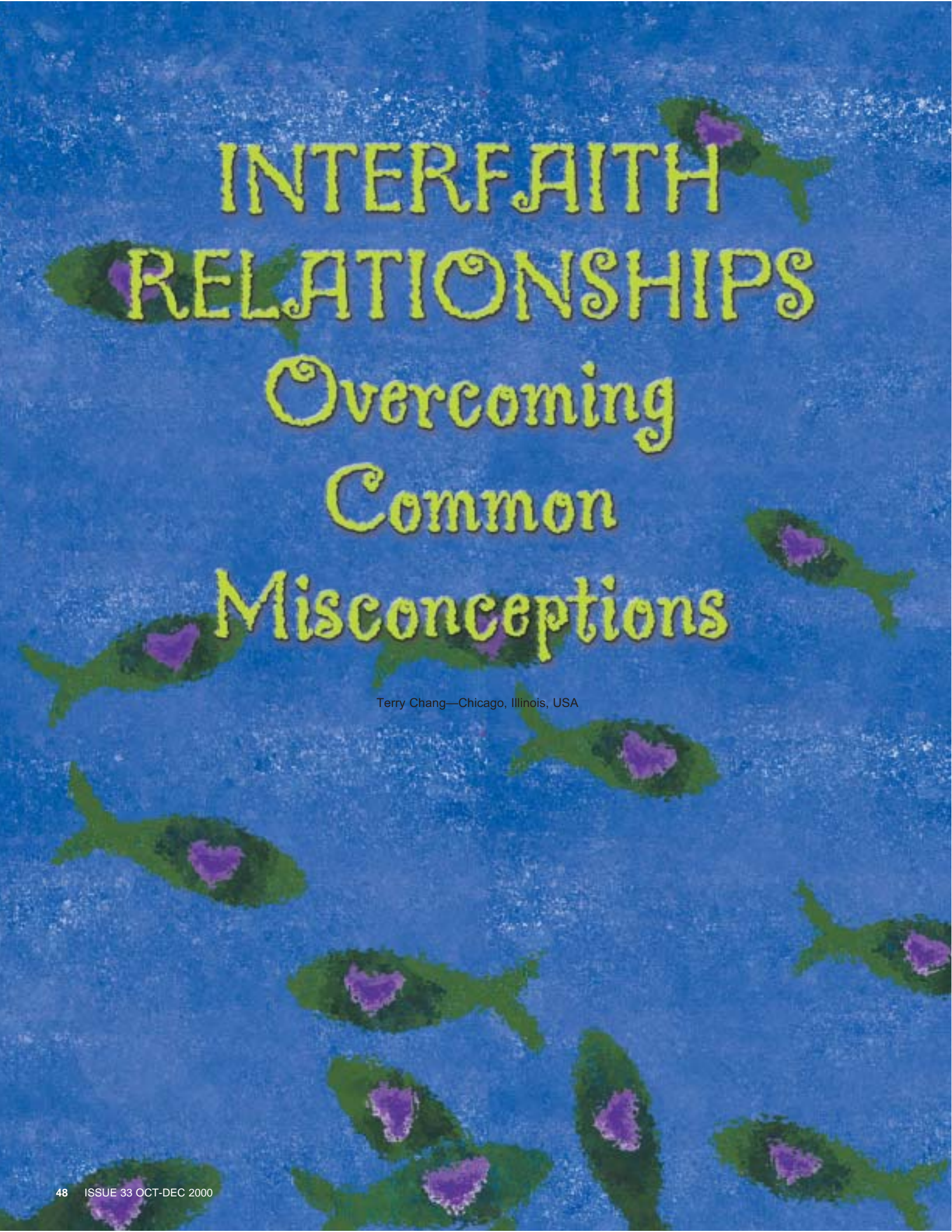
So now you know that to find the road to success you need to follow God. Once you place the things of God first and foremost in your life, you won't need to worry about what career you choose. He will provide you with success throughout your lifetime. Genesis 39:21-23 affirms this by reminding us:

But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

The Lord was with Joseph, and that was all he needed to be successful. Our Lord Jesus Christ is all you need as well, so walk onward with complete trust and obedience to Him.

Enjoy your studies, and use your time in college to glorify God in all that you do. Learn, laugh, teach, pray, listen, love others, and follow God. Cherish the wisdom that you'll gain through your years in school, and more important, cherish the wisdom that you'll gain with your eyes set on Christ. "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it" (Ecc 7:11-12). ★

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INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS Overcoming Common Misconceptions

Terry Chang—Chicago, Illinois, USA

“Is it okay to be romantically involved with an unbeliever?” Ask a passionate, believing adolescent who has fallen victim to Cupid’s religiously indiscriminate arrow, and you will get a different answer than if you ask an ascetic pastor of thirty years.

Or ask the believing wife of an unbelieving husband, and you will receive a different response than if you ask someone whose wife converted to Christ before marriage. Even our own reply to this question may change over the years.

There was a time when I thought it would be a cruel and unusual punishment if we could not exercise our free will to date anyone we chose. But over the years, I began to see that our true misfortune would be to have an unbelieving partner and have to live with such fundamental differences with our loved one.

Despite the variety of our responses, the Bible is quite clear about this issue. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord commanded His chosen people not to intermarry with foreigners “because they will surely turn your hearts to their gods” (1 Kg 11:2). After Jesus Christ opened the door of salvation to all people, the Scriptures continued to instruct believers to keep holy and be separate from unbelievers:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? (2 Cor 6: 14-16)

God commands against intermarriage with unbelievers out of love for His chosen people. He wants His children to

marry within the same faith so that a husband and wife will provide spiritual companionship, not hindrance, to each other on the lifelong journey toward the heavenly kingdom. Yet even though God’s stance against the union of a believer and an unbeliever is definite, we often struggle with this command. What challenges do we face and how can we deal with them?

The Singles: “Not Enough Fish in the Water”

Many single believers claim with despair that “there is no suitable match for me in church,” and use this complaint as a rationale to look for someone outside of church. If we inquire further, however, we quickly learn that while such believers will usually agree that there are available brothers and sisters in Christ, they feel that the available ones seem to fall short of their individual “ideal.” It may be that they are not good-looking enough, their education is not high enough, or they are not wealthy enough. Perhaps their personality is not compati-

tionship mainly on what man sees on the outside, then even an ocean-full of fish would not be enough.

In the story of the prophet Samuel anointing David as King of Israel, God instructed Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and anoint the one whom God had chosen. God did not tell Samuel ahead of time who that chosen one would be, and when Samuel arrived, even he, a prophet, initially mistook David’s brother Eliab as the chosen one because of his height and appearance. What was God’s response? “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). In our search for our other half some of us make the same mistake that Samuel did: we base our choice on appearance and secular qualities, failing to recognize the match God has chosen for us.

The story continues: “Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, ‘the Lord has not chosen these’” (1 Sam 16:10). Imagine the growing disappointment that Samuel felt as each son passed by and he did not see the right one. After the seventh one, there were no others in sight. Yet Samuel believed in God’s words, so he asked Jesse if he had any other sons, and then waited for the least likely one to arrive, whom even his own father had overlooked. Samuel did not wait in vain

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ble enough, or they are not eloquent, fashionable, or humorous enough. The list goes on.

Is it true that among believers there are not enough fish in the water? Certainly, if we aim to build our rela-

because the one that came to him last was indeed God’s chosen one, David.

This story shows us that we need to have enough patience and faith to wait for God’s plan for our marriage to be realized. Sometimes we may begin to



lose hope and faith in God after a couple of disappointments with potential matches. If only we could be like Samuel, who despite at first making the mistake of looking only at the appearance of Jesse's sons, was then able to sustain his faith and wait for God's will to come to fruition. Samuel did not face just one or two disappointments; he was disappointed seven times, yet he kept his faith because he knew that God does not lie. There are plenty of fish in the water, if only we recognize their true qualities and can wait patiently for the right one in God's time.

The Romantically Attached: "I could convert my unbelieving partner"

Those who are romantically involved with a nonbeliever have their own struggles. Many church members feel that there is nothing wrong with dating or marrying a nonbeliever because they may eventually "convert" their partner. They may even think that it is God's will for them to date an unbeliever as a way to bring one more person to the Lord. To support this view, these believers often cite successful examples of unbelieving partners converting to Christ before marrying a believer. As encouraging and heartwarming as these testimonies are, many people fail to recognize the special qualities of these examples.

For one thing, the believers in these testimonies hold fast to seeking God's will first. They do not pursue a relationship based on chemistry or personal preferences alone. First and foremost, they uphold God's commandment not to intermarry, and they resolve not to begin a relationship with anyone who does not show an interest or a potential to believe. When they sense that God is leading them to get to know a nonbeliever who is interested in seeking after

the truth, they proceed with caution. They guard their hearts so that they will not fall in love first and then need to beg God to convert their significant other in order to prevent heartbreak. With each step they take, these believers always seek God's will and guidance before acting on their own desires.

Also underlying their actions is a tremendous amount of humility. These believers understand that they cannot convert their partners with charm or persuasive eloquence alone. They know that only God can move or change a person's heart. Consider King Solomon, who despite his immense wisdom, wealth, and power, could not convert his foreign wives to worship his one true God. Instead, these wives turned the heart of a great king to become unfaithful to the Lord (1 Kg 11:1-13). If a king could not convert his unbelieving spouses to the Lord and, worse yet, failed to maintain his faith because of intermarriage with them, how much more likely

we should not progress further with the relationship. Even if the person does show an interest in knowing God, we still need to follow God's will before our own. That may mean resolving to wait until our partner is baptized and has established his or her own faith before we get married.

The Intermarried: "A different breed"

Believers who are married to nonbelievers have some of the toughest struggles. Some may feel guilt-ridden and regret the choice they have made. Many suffer great agony from standing at odds with their loved ones regarding fundamental beliefs. Often, a spiritual battleground replaces the warmth and intimacy that we all desire at home. Explosive disagreements may rage over beliefs and values, or a pervasive sense of difference may bring a chilling estrangement among family members. Day in and day out, these believers are weighed down

If a king could not convert his unbelieving spouses to the Lord and, worse yet, failed to maintain his faith because of intermarriage with them, how much more likely are we to falter spiritually if we are yoked with an unbeliever!

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Certainly, there are times when God may work through our love relationship to bring our partner to Christ. But God's choice—not ours—is the key in determining who the unbeliever is. Following the footsteps of those in the "successful examples," we need to make it our goal always to seek God's will first and to let God show us the person we should date and marry. That means that if someone we are interested in or are dating is not taking positive steps to seek God, then

by a kind of cross that most brothers and sisters do not share. Consequently, many of these believers see themselves as "different," perhaps even as "second-class believers" in the church. What hope is there in this despairing state?

Apostle Paul encouraged those believers who intermarried with nonbelievers to stay with their spouses, "for the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they

As much as the believing spouses need to take up the cross to pray for their own faith and for their unbelieving partner, the church also needs to take up the cross of prayer for these brethren.

are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14).

Paul’s teaching is both uplifting and important. He did not instruct the believers to coerce their unbelieving spouse to seek God, nor did he encourage them to wallow in self-pity over their situation. Instead, he enlightened the believers about the sanctification of their spouses through them. In other words, he exhorted the believers to take heart and strive forward in their Christian walk and, through their Christ-like behavior, to inspire their unbelieving spouses to seek and come to know God, and therefore to become sanctified.

This is by no means an easy process. Years ago, it took my mother three consecutive years of morning fasting and prayer everyday, as well as several major events that bore witness to God’s abidance, to bring my unbelieving father into the Christian fold. True to the words of the apostle Paul, through my mother’s faith and resolve to put God’s teachings into action, my father was able to see and experience God, and began the process of sanctification through baptism into Christ.

Believers who have intermarried with unbelievers often face another problem—without realizing it, many of us in church regard these believers as somehow different from us. At best we see them as weak in faith, while at worst we imprint a scarlet letter on their foreheads and consider them as fallen believers to the grave sin of intermarriage. With such attitudes, we often behave in ways that alienate these believers and their spouses from us. Out of prejudice or discomfort, we may fail to interact with them with genuine

warmth and respect, or we may keep an uncaring distance from them. Rarely do we take the time to get to know them truly, to learn about the journeys they have taken, or to listen to their struggles. Not surprisingly, we often end up treating these believers and their loved ones as outsiders in the “family of Christ.”

When a stirred-up crowd sought to condemn an adulterous woman, Jesus told them that whoever is without sin may cast the first stone. One by one the people left, until only Jesus and the woman remained (Jn 8:3-11). Often we behave just like the people in this crowd, ever so ready to see other people’s faults. Yes, intermarriage is against God’s teachings, but do we not all have sins and shortcomings, great and small? We lie, anger easily, and are unrighteous in countless ways before God. None of us is without sin, so who among us has the right to condemn those who are in an interfaith relationship? To those who would judge others, Jesus gave a stern warning: “Do not judge or you too will be judged . . . ‘why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brothers’ eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?’” (Mt 7:1-3).

Besides, judging our fellow brethren will only drive them away from church at a time when they most need the support and love of brothers and sisters to strengthen their beliefs. We should rejoice that God has kept them within the fold, giving us the opportunity to support them in their struggle and to pour out our love to them through prayers of intercession. As much as the believing spouses need to take up the cross to pray for their own faith and for

their unbelieving partner, the church also needs to take up the cross of prayer for these brethren. It is this kind of loving act that will strengthen and sustain the faith of the believing partners and move God to extend His mercy and grace upon those who struggle with interfaith relationships.

Whether we are single, romantically involved with someone outside of church, or intermarried with a nonbeliever—or even if we are not actively struggling with this matter—the issue of interfaith relationships touches us all. Although we all know that interfaith relationships are against God’s will, each of us must struggle with this command in our own way. Some battle against their misconceptions related to this teaching, while others live in despair from a choice they made years ago. Even those who appear not to have direct involvement with this issue may stumble by passing judgment on those who have intermarried. We may not have the same struggles, but weaknesses and imperfections are our common lot. With compassion, love, and prayers of intercession, we should strive to help each other overcome the various temptations and misconceptions that ensnarl us regarding the delicate matters of the heart. ★

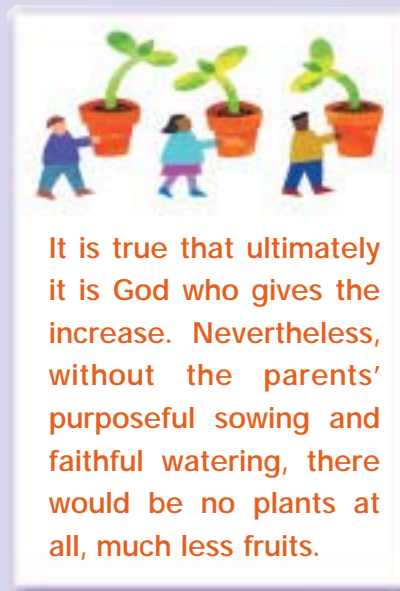
“Love & Marriage” seeks to address and provide biblical advice on a wide range of questions and issues related to dating, singlehood, and marriage. If you have any comments or suggestions for this column, please write to love.marriage@tjc.org.





PLANTING SEEDS OF FAITH IN PRESCHOOLERS

Alice Jung—El Monte, California, USA



After I had my second child, older mothers (sometimes complete strangers) often came up to me and volunteered their advice, as if I somehow had a sign on my forehead that read: "Help! I don't know what I'm doing!" They would tell me how to keep the baby's legs straight, what to do about rashes, where to live to get into the best school district, and so on. Thankfully, I often gained useful information and sometimes even profound insight from these interactions.

Most parents are very concerned about the physical, educational, and emotional aspects of their children's lives. But as I become more comfortable with meeting these needs for my young children, I am becoming more concerned about the nonphysical aspects of their development: in particular, their spiritual well-being. It is important that parents of young children, particularly preschool children, do all they can to help with their children's spiritual lives.

An acquaintance who is the father of two teenagers deeply impressed me with his conviction to raise God-fearing children. He said that he would feel that he had done his job as a parent if his children remained faithful to the Lord all of their lives.

When I think about the role of the parents in a child's spiritual development, I like the analogy of planting a fruit tree from a seedling. The germination period (the period before the seed sprouts) is a critical stage for growing good plants.

Similarly, a child's spiritual life before formal schooling sets the stage for future development. It is true that ultimately it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:7). Nevertheless, without the parents' purposeful sowing and faithful watering, there would be no plants at all, much less fruits. Therefore, let's take this opportunity to examine the things that parents can do to plant seeds of faith in preschoolers.

First, let's take a look at what the Bible says about the role of parents in

their children's life of faith. From the beginning, God chose Abraham to propagate the earth with godly people (Gen 17:7-8).

God had commanded His people, the Israelites, to teach His laws to their children so that they would seek God and prosper (Deut 6:7-8, 20-25). In addition, we can attribute the success of a number of biblical characters to their unwavering faith, even in their youth.

Godly men like Joseph, Daniel, Samuel, and Timothy all showed faithfulness at an early age. Even though the Bible does not specifically tell us what the parents did when their children were young, it appears that at least the mothers of Samuel and Timothy took active roles in their sons' spiritual lives (1 Sam 1:28; 2 Tim 1:5, 3:15).

God has given us the natural instinct to love our children, and we want to give them the best things in life. And there is nothing better than having God Himself as one's personal Friend, Protector, and Savior (Jn 15:15; Ps 71:6, 84:11; Acts 4:12).

PLANTING THE SEEDS

With what I have gathered from various sources, I would like to suggest some principles that I believe are helpful in building seeds of faith in preschoolers ages five and under. While I will recommend some practices as reference, please keep in mind that individuals respond differently to the same event, so flexibility and creativity are necessary for this important task.

Prenatal

In addition to prenatal care and vitamins, I consider prayer to be the most essential element for an unborn child. Every adult is the product of both nature and nurture. Normally, parents are responsible for nurturing their children and providing them with the best environment possible. However, parents have absolutely no control over the nature of their children—temperament, intelligence, health, or physical characteristics. Therefore, in order to increase the probability of a "good seed," it is wise for parents-to-be to pray to the Creator of all life (Neh 9:6; Ps 100:3, 139:15; Jer 1:5).

During both of my pregnancies, my husband and I prayed that God would grant us faithful children who would obey Him with all their hearts, and we prayed that if He so willed, He would give them the necessary gifts to help with the Lord's work. We would rather have an "average" child who had the heart to please God than a child who excelled in every aspect but was far away from Him.

We believe that as long as God is with our children, everything else will be so much easier to handle. After all, our children are God's property who are under our temporary care (Ps 127:3; 1 Pet 4:10). It is helpful for us to have this understanding even before the arrival of our children.

Infants (Birth to One Year)

Although babies appear to do little, they can actually absorb much information at this stage. While at home, include your infant in as many daily activities as possible so that they will learn that God is in every part of our lives. For example, say a short prayer before each feeding, sing easy Bible songs throughout the day, and pray as a family before bedtime. All of these physical activities may mean nothing to your infant for a while, but before long, they will inherit the good habits that you have established for them.

Babies cannot actively participate in spiritual activities because of their limited abilities. Nevertheless, parents are



Nevertheless, parents are responsible for bringing them before the presence of God, even though babies do not know how to worship God yet.

responsible for bringing them before the presence of God, even though babies do not know how to worship God yet. You may find it rather cumbersome to bring your infant to church or family services because of all the baby gear and the hassle of feeding, changing, and sleeping routines. But take heart, because going to church or family services will get easier as you and the baby get more used to the routine.

First, give yourself plenty of time (at least an hour and a half) to get ready. Be prepared for that unexpected diaper change or spill just when you are about to step out the door (which seems to happen about eighty percent of the time).

Second, bring more stuff than you need, especially you are attending Sabbath services for the entire day and you live some distance away from the church. Bring extra clothing, blankets, diapers, wipes, pacifiers, formula, toys—extra everything. You may want to pack your baby's essentials the day before so that you won't forget anything. I still remember the trauma of forgetting to bring a pacifier to church and frantically trying to quiet a tired and fussy newborn. I ended up running to the nearest market and buying another pacifier, while I already had four new ones at home.

Third, once at church, try to be as much a part of the congregation as possible without being too much of a distraction. In the best circumstances, the church will either have a separate room adjacent to the chapel where you can sit, or at least a very understanding congregation that will tolerate all the noise that babies make.

Through extended exposure to religious services, babies will soon learn to be quiet in the service area, because their parents speak in soft voices and everyone else is quiet. They will also be more comfortable with group prayer if it has been a regular experience for them. Just last week, I brought my three-month-old to a family service, and for most of the time I stayed by the stairway so that he would not disturb the meeting if he became

fussy. When it was time to pray, I debated whether or not I should take my baby to a room upstairs so the loud sound of prayer would not excite him. But I decided to pray with everyone else, and much to my relief and surprise, he fell right asleep during the prayer!

Toddlers (One to Two Years)

This may be a trying period for parents and a confusing period for toddlers, as they are no longer babies, but not yet children. With increased mobility and ability to communicate, toddlers begin to take on a much more active role in their daily lives. Parents may battle between wanting to shelter their new walkers from the many hazards out there, and wanting to let them test their wings.

At church. Parents seem to need some extra patience, endurance, and perhaps an extra pair of arms and legs during this period. You may have child-proofed your home, but the church may have places that pose potential hazards to your curious toddler. Therefore, you may find yourself always running behind your toddler during services.

Try to bring lots of distractions to keep the little busybody occupied during the service. If your church does not have a separate room for parents and their young children, be sure to bring soft toys and books so that there will not be a mini percussion concert in the back while the speaker is preaching.

Invite your toddler to join in with the hymn singing and prayer, even if your

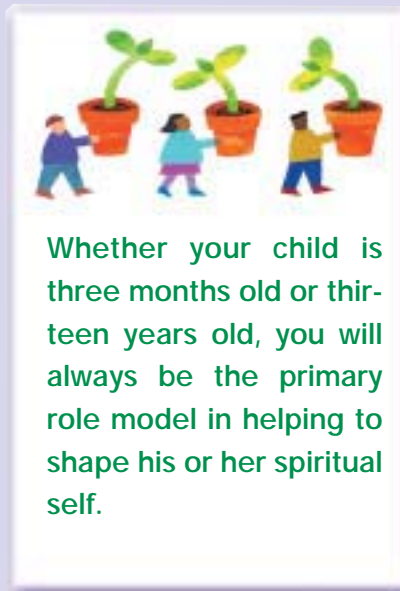
child does it for only ten seconds. Never force a toddler to kneel next to you if he does not want to, because forcing only makes the toddler more defiant, and prayer then becomes a negative experience. Instead, I used to just hold my daughter while she sat on my lap as I prayed in a sitting/kneeling position. This way I made sure that my toddler was with me and not getting into trouble (such as laying her hand on people's heads during prayer, as she saw the ministers doing).

At this age, toddlers are better at imitating many of the religious activities of the adults, though they still do not understand what any of the actions mean. At times, they will simply refuse to comply with you for no reason. I remember that before my daughter turned two, she went through a period refusing to bow her head to pray before meals. Then, when she was over that stage, she became the "prayer police"—ordering everyone around her to pray if she found them not praying when she wanted to.

At home. Continue all the practices you were doing when your child was younger, but slowly let your toddler become a part of them. For example, you may begin by letting your child say "amen" each time you say grace. Make a "standard conclusion" for your short prayer so that your toddler learns to say "amen" when he hears the cue word. (I always conclude my prayers with "kam-samida"—"thank God" in Korean—so that my daughter knows that immediately after this phrase she can say "amen.") Then, gradually, you can ask your toddler to repeat simple prayers after you.

Read Bible stories from a children's picture Bible. As your toddler acquires more vocabulary, invite him or her to point to the pictures and name the items in the children's Bible. Play children's Bible songs at home and during car rides while you sing along (or dance along, as my daughter likes to do sometimes).

Let your toddler have a tiny taste of what family altar is like by setting aside a time when the entire family prays together. Every night, we go through our "fam-



ily ritual” at bedtime. Daddy says a prayer thanking God for the day and asking Him for a good night’s sleep. Then he asks God to bless and take care of all the family members, including the grandparents and uncles and aunts (plus Tess and Sydney, my mother’s two dogs—my daughter will remind Daddy if he forgets them). Then we sing the “I Love You” song from “Barney” before her bedtime story.

Preschoolers (Two and a Half to Five Years)

As your toddler slowly emerges into childhood, you will find him or her more cooperative and eager to please, in addition to having better-controlled large and small motor skills. This is the age that many parents begin to send their children to preschool.

Your child now has a wider vocabulary, and you should expect your preschooler to understand as you explain some of the biblical principles. You can now use Bible stories to apply to daily life. For example, after telling the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, you can say, “This is why we want to obey God—because He gives us what is best. And when good kids obey and do what their parents tell them, their parents give them what is best.” Although God may still be a vague concept to preschoolers, they are able to relate to Jesus. They may be intrigued by the miraculous powers He possesses—that is why children at this age are crazy about super-heroes. (My three-year-old is currently under the spell of the Power Rangers.)

Most of our churches begin religious education classes with preschoolers; however, the classes may only be in the afternoons. If your church does not have some kind of class or daycare for your preschooler during morning service, you will have to continue to find ways for your child to be entertained quietly while you attend the services. In one church, the parents of all preschool children got together and organized an activities class

on Sabbath mornings, since the church had regular religious education (RE) classes for preschoolers only in the afternoons. This way, the parents could take turns attending the services without distractions from their children. At the same time, the kids got to do something constructive with their peers without disturbing the services.

If your church does provide daycare or RE classes in the morning, you may feel that you can at last enjoy the Sabbath worship now that your preschool child is old enough to join the class. However, remember that the church is not responsible for your child’s spirituality (or manners). Some parents have the misconception that it is the job of the church (or the RE teachers) to make their children “good.” Ultimately, however, the responsibility of the child’s faith and spirituality lies with the parents. Some may also expect the church to provide full-service daycare once they step into the church, but teachers find their jobs much more pleasant when parents cooperate and look for ways to help them. Talk to your child’s RE teacher to learn how your preschooler is doing. Find out what your child is learning and reinforce the lessons at home.

SET THE EXAMPLE

Whether your child is three months old or thirteen years old, you will always be the primary role model in helping to shape his or her spiritual self. Knowing that your child is your mirror should

serve as an excellent incentive to constantly examine yourself and to seek God’s help to better yourself.

Children learn about God from the Bible stories you tell them, but they learn even more from observing your own relationship with your Lord and Savior. Because the relationship between your children and you is a reflection of the relationship between you and your Heavenly Father, you should be careful to build an intimate and trusting bond with your children.

In keeping your ties with your Father, do your best to keep your daily devotions, namely Bible reading and prayers, no matter how crazy things may get. When you take time to refocus on God, you will be surprised at the refreshing sense of energy and peace of mind you feel, even amidst a household of chaos. However, you may need a bit of creativity and sacrifice to achieve your goal. When you feel you just can’t squeeze another fifteen minutes out of the day to read your Bible, try listening to the Bible on tape while preparing your family meal, folding the laundry, or taking a car ride. In order to find the time to pray, you may have to get up before the kids or stay up after they are in bed. Or, you might try praying while holding or wearing your baby. (Both of my babies think the sound of prayer is the best lullaby.)

Finally, have patience. Your desire to worship God uninterrupted may have to take a back seat for a while, possibly until your child learns to be independent from you for an extended period (around three years of age). But know for certain that those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy (Ps 126:5-6)!

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“Family Altar” is dedicated to providing practical, biblical insight for parents who face the challenge of raising a family in today’s fast-paced and variant society. Please direct comments on this article or questions about parenting to family.altar@tjc.org.

THE SIX HABITS OF REALLY EFFECTIVE CHRISTIANS

Steve Liu—Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA



(Part Three)

We're almost halfway through the six habits for really effective Christians, a collection of tips that my dad gave me for success in the workplace. This is tip #3: Work is important, of course. Try your best at everything you do. Even if it's something you don't like to do.

I must admit that while I understood this rule in theory, I didn't really understand it completely until I experienced it.

One thing that became abundantly obvious to me at my workplace was that people love the limelight. When projects came around, people flocked to the high-profile ones. And the people on high-profile projects did all they could to maintain that profile. They would send out "status" e-mails with their names peppered throughout, sending copies not only to their project teams but also to every executive short of the CEO. They sat at the head of the table at project meetings, listening to status from the teams. Sometimes it seemed that their only purpose in life was to get reports from these project teams, compile them in an e-mail, and slap their name on it. When they were assigned action items of their own, they were too "important" to spend their time doing them.

In the meantime, the members of the project teams were the ones who did the real work. Some worked all hours of the day and night to get their jobs done. They did some brilliant work, all behind the scenes. They knew full well that they weren't necessarily being recognized for their efforts and their accomplishments, but they did them anyway. They knew that while their work was tedious and difficult, even the smallest tasks they did were critical for the successful completion of the project.

And a funny thing happened. As tends to occur regularly in my company, the downsizing axe came down hard. Ironically, the people who'd attempted to attach their names to the high-profile

projects were the first ones to be asked to leave. When they scrambled to find new positions, they couldn't find them inside the company because of their reputations, nor could they land jobs externally because of their lack of hands-on experience. On the other hand, many of those who had quietly done the work were asked to stay. But because they now had valuable experience, many instead chose to take much better opportunities outside the company.

HUMILITY AND HARD WORK

The situation made me think of a passage in the Bible:

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk 14: 7-11)

Once again, humility is the key. But the word "humility" is anathema to most people in today's corporate world. Success comes from being aggressive,

from crushing your competition inside and outside your company, and from making sure that your name is included in as many meetings and e-mails as possible.

But look a little closer at reality. Look at the most successful managers in your company, the ones who are respected and admired by their employees and their peers, and you'll find people who manage work successfully, but at the same time aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and help out with the work themselves once in a while. Look at the managers of your company who are the subjects of the most derision, and chances are you'll find that these are folks who cling to their titles and lord it over their employees.

Talk to most successful CEOs in the world, and you'll often find that they have a story about how they started in the mailroom, or as a lowly salesperson, or as a dropout from school. You'll find that the most successful ones are people who haven't forgotten their humble origins, and hold on to some piece of it to this day.

If you can't find examples in your own company, look to some figures in the Bible who ruled over nations, and you'll see how their work during their humble pasts led to their success as leaders. Look at a certain prime minister of Egypt, who at one point in his life was in jail on a false charge, and yet served his captors and his fellow prisoners to the best of his ability. Look at a certain future king of Israel, who had garnered enough experience as a lowly shepherd killing lions and bears on behalf of his

sheep that, when the call came to kill the champion of the Philistines on behalf of his nation, he was ready.

Jesus said it well in the parable of the talents. To those who proved themselves faithful in the little things came larger responsibilities and greater glory. On the other hand, the one who proved

Of course, the seedlings had to mature. They had to grow strong roots, grow leaves, bud into flowers, grow little green tomatoes, and finally yield the crop. In the process, they had to withstand the rains and winds, the Japanese beetles and grubs, the burning sun, and the choking weeds. Likewise, in our

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. (1 Pet 2:18-19)

Here, Paul and Peter were talking to a decidedly secular audience about decidedly secular work. As thankless and tedious as your job is, it's probably not as thankless and tedious as the job of being a Roman slave in Paul's time. As bureaucratic and political as your company is, it's probably not as bureaucratic and political as the Roman Empire of Peter's day. And yet both apostles instructed these early Christians to do their secular work, whatever that work may be, with all their heart.

Likewise, we as Christians today are called to serve our earthly masters to the best of our abilities in all that we do, no matter how unpleasant the task or the masters. We do so with full faith and knowledge that it is the Lord we serve, whose glory we ultimately seek and whose judgment we ultimately trust. The result? A happy and successful career here on earth, and a reward in heaven. That's something they don't teach you in business school. ★

inept in the little things was called "wicked" and "lazy" by the master, and was not to be entrusted with anything.

The truths in this parable apply to our secular work as much as they apply to our spiritual work. Anyone who wishes to grow in his or her career and accomplish great things must do not only the things that are pleasant, but the grunt work as well.

BIG REWARDS FOR SMALL TASKS

A preacher once told a story of a young boy who planted some tomato seeds in his garden. Every day he went out to check how much his plants had grown. After several days, the seeds sprouted and seedlings emerged. The seedlings were growing much too slowly for the boy's liking, so he thought he could speed things up. He went out and pulled on all the seedlings. One by one, they stretched and snapped in half.

jobs, we want to take the high-profile work, but we need to realize that to truly grow, we also need to do the low-profile, tedious, and thankless work.

In doing so, the reward is not only in the greater responsibilities and recognition that will inevitably come; more important for Christians, the reward is also a heavenly one. Consider the words of the two most prominent apostles in the New Testament:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Col 3:23)

"In the Workforce" is a recurring column in Manna dedicated to survival tips and advice on how to shine the light as a Christian at work. If you have some advice or anecdotes from your own work experience that you feel may be edifying to the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, please send it to workforce@tjc.org.



A stylized illustration of a mailbox overflowing with red roses and white envelopes, set against a background of a winding road and a small house. The mailbox is yellow with a black flag and is overflowing with red roses and white envelopes. The background features a winding orange road, green hills, and a small house in the distance. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century graphic design.

Now, it must be said that the Israelites, as a whole, prided themselves on the knowledge that they, out of all the people on the face of the earth, were the chosen people of God. This knowledge was handed down from one generation to the next since as far back as the time of Moses, a man whom God had used to liberate their ancestors from slavery in Egypt (Deut 7:6).

This is especially true now that personal computers are here to stay. In this age of the internet, with the click of a “mouse” you’re “online” and connected to anyone or anywhere on the “world wide web,” at any time of day or night. The advantages are many. When you need to research a topic for school or work, all you have to do is type a keyword into the computer. In a matter of seconds, you’re searching the archives of a magnificent library. This wonderful technology also brings new meanings to old phrases like “pop in to say hello” and “a balancing act,” so that even as you’re scrutinizing facts and figures,

you're also very naturally making conversation with your friends by way of those "instant messages."

Unfortunately, being online is like being out in an open field where anybody can take a shot at you. Along with the harmless junk mail that fills up your online mailbox, there's the ever-present threat of "viruses" that are out to infect your computer and affect your ability to make good use of this powerful technology. But from what I have seen and heard, there are more harmful threats that can infect your heart and mind and affect your ability to care for your soul. Just as with those dangers you face in an open field, you may not always know who is trying to take a shot at you or where the shot is coming from. Sometimes, too, the danger just happens to be out there in the field, and you only stumble upon it accidentally.

So should you stay away from computers and the internet? Would this protect you from people, information, and ideas that turn your heart and mind away from the one true God? The answer is no, for as you already know, danger is not only present when you venture out into the open field; sometimes, danger lies close to home.

Having said all of this, however, I know there is one thing that sets you and your peers apart from those Israelites who stood on Mount Carmel that day—you need no convincing that the Lord alone is God. By His grace, our Lord Jesus has introduced Himself to you and given you the opportunity to get to know Him on a personal level. I see evidence of this relationship reflected in the way that, over the years, you have learned little by little to search the Scriptures to fathom God's will and include Him in your everyday lives.

Still, you are living in the real world, where the fabric of society is a patchwork of many thoughts and beliefs. There's no

escaping this reality. All you have to do is wake up in the morning and turn on the radio or television. You'll read all about it when you pick up the newspaper. It's there when you step out into the street, when you're in school, at work, or at the marketplace. Even when you think you've escaped into a movie theater to relax after a hard day's work, it's staring right back at you. Perhaps the only time you don't have to deal with it is when you are fast asleep. This is the landscape of our times. Though not a carbon copy of the Israelites' times, it is reminiscent of theirs.

What's that? We know better than to go down that road?

That's easier said than done. I know. I've been there. I have, in the breath it took me to assure friends that God will answer their prayers, also asked them to keep their fingers crossed. I have devoured articles about the applications of feng shui in the home. I have scanned horoscopes in the morning newspapers...

Nevertheless, I am confident that you and your peers will aim for higher ground where you won't get bogged down or swept away. You will do so not because you know better than the Israelites, but because the Lord Himself will bless you and keep you. Only fix your eyes on Jesus and stand firmly planted in His Word.

Love,
Mom

Written as a mother would her child, "Letters from Mom" addresses the struggles of our young people as they step toward the threshold of adulthood. This column hopes to encourage, comfort, and urge the youth to continue living as children of God. Please send comments or questions to this.mom@tjc.org.

LETTERS FROM MOM . LETTERS FROM MOM

Manna would like to hear from you!

Please give us your feedback so *Manna* can better suit your needs. You can fill out the online form at <http://www.tjc.org/chrliving/manna/survey.asp> or send an email to manna@tjc.org with your responses to the questions below.

Name (optional):

Age:

Location (city, state/province, country):

Church:

I am reviewing *Manna* issue # _____. I read _____% of the magazine.

- 1) Which articles were the most edifying to you? Why?
- 2) Which articles were the least edifying to you? Why? How do you think they could have been improved?
- 3) What other topics would you like to see addressed in *Manna*?
- 4) Do you feel the theme articles adequately addressed the issue?
- 5) How was the overall mix of articles? Do you feel the number of "lighter" and "heavier" articles were proportionate?
- 6) How do you like the design of *Manna*? What do you like about it? What can be improved?
- 7) Other comments:

Think, by the hour this world is revolving,
Amidst seas of origin and destination, here I am;
Don't know when I first began thinking,
But I think, therefore I am.

Think, on the restless tides, we are helpless and desperate.
We are but machines made of flesh and blood;
Bonded inside is the real self we call spirit.
Tear down this machine, and what is left?
No flesh, no blood; where shall our spirit be destined to sit?

Think, are there questions not answerable?
Our curiosities often rise yet crumble.
This world we hew with the chisel of knowledge,
Soiled with the dust and lust of our hearts and hands.
Proud masters we are of our work and progress;
Sad slaves we become to our pride and success.

Think, why are our eyes so bright, yet so blind?
The blind walk and stumble not in the dark,
But the bright-eyed stagger, stumble, and duck,
For in darkness they are blinder than those without sight.
What a pity, that the bright-eyed can walk, but only in light,
While the blind walk in both, but with no sight!
Are we the bright-eyed, who think and get the next step right?

Think, about love and hatred, friends and foes.
Love shines like a smile sparkling in broad daylight,
Hatred looms in dark corners of gloomy night.
Daylight and night are not known to blend,
Yet God made the sun and moon to be our friends,
Be it day or night, shining on friend or foe in need.
To love and to die for foe is divine indeed;
To hate is to murder; to love is to shine in night of need.

Think, about believing things worth believing in.
Believing in anything is deceit to which we can easily give in.
Believing in everything about God allows wisdom to begin.
Believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ--a fable?
Believing that any terminal disease He can heal--impossible?
Believing the Truth, that God is true--too good to be true?
Believing Christ Jesus to be your only Savior--worth the try?
Believing the Scriptures, the Word of God--wish to know why?
Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit guides you and tells you why.

Think, of the way, the Way you should follow.
From then till now, the ending, do you still wrestle with which way to follow?
Have you followed as you will, but are shipwrecked, in the midst of no return?
Is the end at hand, have you reached the port, wretched and scorned?
Hallelujah, there is a compass; Jesus will lead you to see and return.
For He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, whom you can follow
To the Kingdom of Heaven, your home and destination,
Where darkness, hunger, sickness, and death are not present.
A place surely for you, if in the Book of Life your name is written.
Thus the True Church, the body of Jesus Christ, must you seek to follow.

Think

Philemon Tsen—Calgary, Alberta, CANADA